

INTERVIEW WITH MARY ANN SHUPENKO EHINGER

June 2, 2006 and October 23, 2006

Ingham Regional Hospital

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You earned your MSW degree and until recently were in private practice. What is your present responsibility?

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Introduction of Dr. Preston Williams on the occasion of his speaking on January 14, 2001, in the Pasante Theater on "King's Unfinished Dream-- Economic Justice for All." His lecture was part of the ceremonies launching the Closing the Digital Gap Program.

Good evening! I have a personal story to tell before I introduce our speaker this evening. This story ties together the legacy of Dr. King in his deep concern for economic justice for all, the launching of the "Closing of the Gap" program, and our celebration of the life and work of Dr. King.

I came to this campus in 1962 as the Presbyterian University Pastor. Soon after arriving I met the Reverend Truman Morrison and became involved with him and many others in the struggle to get the City of East Lansing to assure equal access to housing for all students and faculty. We wanted the City to pass and enforce an open occupancy ordinance. It was through this involvement that I became acquainted with Dr. Robert L. Green of the College of Education. I want to put a very strong emphasis on the word "acquainted." I knew who he was, admired his forthrightness, and was glad he was serving on the East Lansing Human Relations Commissions.

Then, in October 1964 I received a phone call from Bob Green, "Reverend Duley, this is Bob Green. I just got a call from a student of mine who dropped out of school to work in the Movement in Canton, Mississippi. She wants me to come down and participate in a voter registration rally with James Farmer of CORE. You get the money and we will go." End of conversation. I didn't even have the presence of mind to say, "Let me talk it over with my wife." It wouldn't have done any good anyway.

The former student is in the audience tonight. Would Mary Ann Shupenko Ehinger please stand? Thank you. She doesn't know it but that phone call changed my life. To make a long story short, I got the money and we went. While we were on this trip Bob kept saying, "MSU ought to make an educational contribution to the Movement." We asked a lot of people on that trip which Black colleges were in deep trouble because their faculty and students were involved in the struggle for Civil Rights. The answer that kept coming back was, "Rust College in Holly Springs, Mississippi."

When we got back to MSU Bob and I went to the leadership of student government, got their endorsement for what later became the MSU-Rust College Student Tutorial Education Project. STEP over the four years of 1965-68 recruited 15 or more MSU faculty to teach Summer School at Rust and thus assured its continued accreditation. During those four years over 50 undergraduates from MSU provided the entire Freshman Class with 6 weeks of solid academic preparation. As a part of this project Frank Beeman, MSU's Director of Intramural Athletics and his wife Pat provided an arts and recreation program for the entire four years.

After we got the support of Student Government, Bob Green said, "Let's invite Dr. King to come to MSU and launch STEP." He also said, "You are the preacher, you write him." Which I did. I always do what Bob tells me to do.

Dr. King came to the campus on February 11, 1965 from the midst of the struggle in Selma, Alabama for voter registration. The lives of a number of us have never been the same since. This "Closing the Gap" program is a continuation of his legacy and his impact on MSU students, the faculty, and the community at large.

Tonight to help us celebrate the life and work of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., and continue his legacy of economic justice for all, we are privileged to have Dr. Preston Williams as our speaker. Dr. Williams is well Qualified to accomplish the two tasks we have set for him. He is the Houghton Professor of Contemporary Theology and Social Change of the Harvard University Divinity School. He is on the Board of the W. E. B. Dubois Institute at Harvard and served as its Acting Director for three years. He has served as the Chairman of the Department of Ethics of the Divinity School. He has been a guest lecturer at numerous colleges, universities, and seminaries in this country and in South Korea and in various colleges and universities in India. He is a contemporary and friend of U. S. Representative John Lewis, and a mentor to Cornell West. It is my pleasure to introduce to you Dr. Preston Williams. Please welcome him.

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