Politics, Faith, Songs of Justice

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Soledad O'Brien and Bishop Vashti Murphy McKenzie, first female bishop of the African Methodist Episcopal Church, will headline the University of Dayton's 2008-2009 Diversity Lecture Series.

O'Brien kicks off the series at 7:30 p.m. on Wednesday, Sept. 10, in the Kennedy Union Ballroom. She covers the presidential race and serves as an anchor and special correspondent for CNN: Special Investigations Unit. Most recently, she reported for "CNN Presents: Black in America," a special report revealing the state of black America 40 years after the assassination of Martin Luther King Jr. The talk is free and open to the public.

Gideon Yago, MTV News correspondent, and Reza Aslan, author of No god but God: The Origins, Evolution and Future of Islam, tour college campuses to explore the intersection of faith, politics and society in the Middle East. Their free talk is slated for 7:30 p.m. on Nov. 11 in the Kennedy Union Ballroom on campus.

Bishop Vashti Murphy McKenzie, who made history as the first female bishop of the African Methodist Episcopal Church, will come to Dayton Jan. 19-20 to keynote two Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. events as a collaboration between the University of Dayton and the Dayton Chapter of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference. Author of Not Without a Struggle: Leadership Development for African American Women in Ministry, she will speak at the annual Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Annual Holiday Celebration and Presidential Banquet at 6:30 p.m. on Jan. 19 at the Dayton Convention Center. Call 937-268-0051 for ticket information. She also will headline the University of Dayton's annual Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Prayer Breakfast at 7:30 a.m. on Jan. 20 in the Kennedy Union Ballroom on campus. The prayer breakfast is sold out.

The soulful Sweet Honey in the Rock, a Grammy Award-winning internationally renowned a cappella ensemble, rounds out the series at 7:30 p.m. on Feb. 23 at the Benjamin and Marian Schuster Performing Arts Center. Described as "unrelenting troubadours for peace and social justice," the all-female vocal group raises their voices in "hope, love, justice, peace and resistance" through a wide range of music — from traditional gospel hymns to hip hop. Tickets for the general public start at $15. Call 937-228-3630 or 937-229-2545 for ticket information. Sweet Honey in the Rock is presented by the University of Dayton and Victoria Theatre Association.

The University of Dayton's Diversity Lecture Series is part of a larger strategic plan to increase inclusion and diversity on campus and prepare students, faculty, staff and the Dayton community for success in a global society. Past speakers have included Andrew Young, Coretta Scott King, Spike Lee, Kirk Franklin, Clarence Page, Nikki Giovanni, Azar Nafisi and Johnnetta B. Cole.

The University of Dayton's commitment to diversity is founded in its Catholic heritage of social justice and the Marianist tradition of equality and being inclusive of people from all segments of society.

"It's a diverse world," said Daniel J. Curran, president. "We are creating an educational environment that parallels the world the students will depart to once they graduate. At the University of Dayton, they will learn to see the world through different eyes."

The Diversity Lecture Series is co-sponsored by the offices of the president and provost, with the generous support of such community partners as The National Conference for Community and Justice (NCCJ); Dayton Chapter of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference; United Way of the Greater Dayton Area; YWCA Dayton; Victoria Theatre Association; Markey's Audio Visual; Ross Buick-GMC-Hummer; RTA; Dayton Daily News; WDTN-TV; and WDAO-1210 AM.

Lynnette Heard, executive director of the office of the president, at 937-229-4122.