Spiritual Journey

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Kirk Franklin will headline community and campus events honoring Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s legacy Jan. 21-22.

Franklin will keynote the annual Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Annual Holiday Celebration and Presidential Banquet at 6:30 p.m., Monday, Jan. 21, at the Dayton Convention Center. His appearance is a collaboration between the Dayton Chapter of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference and the University of Dayton's Diversity Lecture Series. Tickets are $60. Call 937-268-0051 for more information.

He will headline UD's annual Martin Luther King Jr. prayer breakfast at 7:30 a.m. on Tuesday, Jan. 22, in the Thomas J. Frericks Convocation Center at the University of Dayton. Franklin will talk about "The Role of Media in a Global Society" and perform two pieces with UD's Ebony Heritage Singers, a choir dedicated to African American sacred music. The University of Dayton Jazz Ensemble will accompany "He Reigns" and "Brighter Day." The event, which will draw 800 faculty, staff and students, is sold out.

Franklin, the biggest selling contemporary gospel artist in Soundscan history with more than 12 million albums sold, has changed the landscape of contemporary gospel music. His latest album, "The Fight of My Life," released in December, tops the Billboard Gospel Albums Charts for the second consecutive week. His previous album, "Hero," won two 2007 Grammy Awards. Since his 1993 debut, he has won five Grammys, 34 Stellars, 11 Doves, four NAACP Image Awards, two Black Entertainment Television awards and a 2006 American Music Award. He has just received two 2008 NAACP Image Awards nominations.

Franklin's music blends gospel, hip hop and R&B. He has collaborated with some of the biggest names in gospel music as well as mainstream artists, including Bono and Mary J. Blige. In addition to his singing career, he founded Fo Yo Soul Entertainment, Inc., which includes a youth-outreach initiative, ad agency and production company.

This month, he will host the 2008 Stellar Awards. Lionsgate Films, an independent film studio, is planning a film about his life called "Church Boy." He will write and produce the soundtrack as well as portray himself in the film.

Franklin has been described as "a voice and a musical balm for his generation." In a December interview with the Associated Press, he talked about his faith journey. "I have a sincere desire...to really want to be that Jesus dude, not just to do the music but to sincerely, sincerely and passionately live every lyric and to be as close to God privately as I try to portray publicly," he said. "That is my greatest desire in life, to be a very honest, sincere and for real person about my faith."

Franklin is part of an all-star line-up of acclaimed artists and journalists, including filmmaker Spike Lee, tackling "The Responsibility of Media in a Global Society" during the University of Dayton's 2007-2008 Diversity Lecture Series.

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 and the Dayton community for success in a global society. Past speakers have included Andrew Young, Coretta Scott King, Clarence Page, Nikki Giovanni, Azar Nafisi, Johnnetta B. Cole and Juan Williams.

The Diversity Lecture Series is co-sponsored by the offices of the president and provost, with the 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; Victoria Theatre Association; Markey's Audio Visual; Ross Buick-GMC-Hummer; Dayton Daily News; WDTN-TV; and WDAO-1210 AM.