

## France Davis



The Reverend France Davis is a well known and beloved pastor and community voice in Salt Lake and the Intermountain West. In 1972 he came to teach at the University of Utah and temporarily to shepherd Salt Lake City's Calvary Baptist Church. Most fortunately for Utah he has remained. The Rev. Davis came to Utah at a time when the legal battle for civil rights had been won, yet on a daily basis there continued to be many inequalities. He was denied housing when he arrived in Salt Lake City. In addition to housing discrimination, religious, racial, and economic injustices were common. France says, "In the high schools, counselors were advising people of African heritage not to even consider going to institutions of higher learning." One of the recent indicators of the evolution of cultural change in Utah is the 2008 appointment of the Rev. Davis to Utah's Higher Education Board of Regents, yet many continuing injustices keep him and other Utah civil rights activists busy.

The Rev. Davis has degrees from University of California at Berkeley, Merritt, Westminster, and University of Utah. These degrees include Religion, Afro-American studies, and Mass Communication. Raised in the starkly segregated Burke County, Georgia, his parents "provided an unwavering moral Christian background." They taught him to value education, hard work, and service. A veteran of the war in Southeast Asia and the American Civil Rights Movement, France's experiences and rich heritage shaped his life into a commitment for nonviolence and justice. He has engaged with Utah citizens to lessen the racial, religious and economic disparities of opportunity and civil rights.

The Rev. Davis was a board member of NAACP for many years. He led the successful efforts to create Utah's Martin Luther King holiday. He advocated for equal opportunities and equities in higher education, Boy Scouts, in the treatment of diverse churches, has worked to halt racial profiling, and has helped to establish Utah's first homeless shelter for veterans. He gives workshops on Gandhi and nonviolence. He has served on many state and community boards, including his recent appointment to the Board of Regents. France's voice of conscience is often sought and heard in Utah. The Rev. Davis has received many state and local awards, and has been an invited speaker at many conferences and events. He is the author of two books, *Light in the Midst of Zion: A History of Black Baptists in Utah 1892-1996*, and the autobiographical *France Davis: An American Story Told*. He helped create and produce a series of three documentary films that record an oral history of African Americans in Utah.

France Davis's keynote address on January 15 at 11:30 AM (Ragan Theater) is titled *Mission Possible, Holding Fast to the Dream*. On the same day at 1:00 PM (Library Lecture Hall, Li120) he and Dr. Ronald Coleman will present and discuss *Wisdom of the Years*, excerpts from their Utah African American documentaries.

France Davis is a participant in UVU's Oral History of Utah Peace Activists project, the source of the brief quotes above. His entire interview will soon be available at the UVU Oral History Archives and the Utah History Archives. His books and films are available in the UVU Library collection.

France Davis will receive UVU's Martin Luther King, Jr. Award of Excellence, presented each year to a civil rights activist who exemplifies the continuance of King's work for racial equality, economic, justice and nonviolence. This year, as UVU commemorates the Martin Luther King, Jr. legacy by focusing on Utah civil rights, it is an honor to have the Rev. France Davis on our campus and in our community.