

Samuel Rodriguez First Hispanic to Offer Keynote at MLK Memorial

The Rev. Samuel Rodriguez will be the first Latino leader to serve as the keynote speaker for for the Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Annual Commemorative Service.

The special event which serves to observes the civil rights movement leader's birthday, will be held on Monday. King Center CEO Bernice A. King called Rodriguez an "electrifying orator and "one of the most dynamic and inspiring proponents of the social gospel in the spirit of Martin Luther King, Jr."

Rodriguez, president of the National Hispanic Christian Leadership Conference (NHCLC), turned down a request to participate in President Obama's inaugural services in order to speak at the event, which is the nation's 'flagship' ecumenical religious observance on the MLK holiday.

"I am honored by the gracious invitation to be the first Latino Keynote speaker," Rodriguez said. "I believe in the dream of Dr. King. I believe there is still work to be done. I celebrate the life and legacy of Dr. King, who inspired me and inspired this nation.

"We stand at the edge of a new civil rights movement in America—a movement committed to righteousness and justice; one that is neither blue or red but the Lamb's Agenda; a movement where our communities will come together reconciling the vertical and horizontal planes of the Christian message via Billy Graham's message of salvation through Christ and the dream of this great leader, Dr. Martin Luther King, and his march for justice."

The 2013 observance of King's birthday begins a yearlong

celebration of the 50th anniversary of his monumental “I Have a Dream” speech. “Remember! Celebrate! Act! King’s Dream for Our World” is the theme for the birthday commemoration program, which begins Friday and continues through the MLK holiday on Monday, Jan. 21.