



On Sunday, January 18, families, friends, and community leaders gathered at the Waynesboro Area YMCA to celebrate the creativity and voices of local youth during the annual Waynesboro Martin Luther King Poster Contest. The celebration brought together the winning poster artists and their families alongside Pastor Mark Ruzicka, Pastor Franklin Gordon, and Kathy Bostic from the Waynesboro Area YMCA, all united by a shared commitment to honoring the legacy of the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.

Hosted by the Waynesboro Area Fellowship of Churches, the contest was created to encourage children and youth to look beyond familiar excerpts of King's iconic "I Have a Dream" speech and instead reflect more deeply on themes of justice, equality, leadership, and faith. This year's theme was inspired by King's powerful words: *"Now is the time to make justice a reality for all of God's children."*

Participants highlight other influential Black history figures such as Rosa Parks, Harriet Tubman, and Jackie Robinson. The contest helped young people understand that Black history is American history—and that the call to leadership and community engagement remains just as relevant today.

The Waynesboro MLK Poster Contest was open to children and youth throughout the Waynesboro area. Winning posters will be displayed on YMCA bulletin boards throughout February in observance of Black History Month. This year's winners received cash prizes and awards:

Second grade and under

- 1st place: Zia Bennett
- 2nd place: Gaven Campbell
- 3rd place: Maddi Ward

Grades 3–6

- 1st place: Natalie Von Drach
- 2nd place: Gabe Ward
- 3rd place: Lillian Briegel

Grades 7–12

- 1st place: Sarah Bedell

The Rev. Mark Ruzicka, one of the event's organizers, shared that his involvement was shaped by a recent self-guided Civil Rights pilgrimage. He noted that standing behind the pulpit at Dexter Avenue Baptist Church in Montgomery, Alabama—where King once preached—deepened his appreciation for the importance of connecting with historical places and stories. The Rev. Franklin Gordon reflected on his own childhood experiences growing up in segregated communities, reminding those gathered that Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. did not work alone. He emphasized that meaningful change has always required many people working together—and encouraged everyone, especially the young artists, to see themselves as helpers and leaders in carrying that legacy forward.

Organizers emphasized that Dr. King is honored not only as a civil rights leader, but also as a pastor whose faith informed his message and actions. Through art, reflection, and community celebration, the Waynesboro MLK Poster Contest continues to inspire the next generation to engage thoughtfully with history and to envision a more just future for all.