

Alum to gauge GC's work against race discrimination

by Penn Miller

Dorothy Word, retired elementary school teacher and one-time GC student, will bring a unique perspective on GC's past to campus Friday when she speaks in convocation. She is the first speaker sponsored by the Alumni Scholar Forum program this year.

Now living in Kokomo, Ind., Word attended GC as an African-American student from 1956-59, before the Civil Rights movement changed America and its college campuses. She was one of the few black students on campus.

Word's college experience was very different from that of students today, said her longtime friend Grace Sommers Whitehead ('61). Although students did not often leave the campus in those days, Word was especially restricted due to fierce discrimination in Goshen.

Word's choices regarding off-campus activity "were made with great caution," said Whitehead. "She knew that depending on where she went, she could run into trouble." In a recent *Kokomo Tribune* column, Word wrote that the town of Goshen was "off-limits" to her as an African-American student.

Even the boundaries of the GC campus did not protect Word from the prejudicial attitudes of the day. In her column she wrote of some GC administrators, staff and faculty who deemed the racism she encountered to be "for [her] own good."

Indeed, feeling rejection from teachers and adminis-

trators was part of the reason Word transferred from GC in 1959, to earn her B.A. at Marion College (now Indiana Wesleyan University, Marion, Ind.) and her M.A. from Indiana University at Bloomington in 1967.

Of her departure from GC, Whitehead said, "It was just a feeling of 'maybe you should go somewhere else.'"

In her *Kokomo Tribune* column, Word wrote, "When I left the Goshen campus, I vowed never to return."

However, upon Whitehead's invitation, Word returned to GC for the Ethnic Fair in the fall of 1997.

Due to that visit, Whitehead said, Word "defi-

nitely carries a more positive image of GC than she used to." She added, "Seeing a vibrant international presence on campus and talking with African-American students has changed Word's impression."

In fact, in the aforementioned column, titled "The face of Goshen College has changed in 42 years," Word praises GC for its about-face regarding diversity. "Undeniably, the town and the college have come a long way ... from my freshman days to this summer of 1998."

In her column Word mentions the work of Zenebe Abebe, vice president for multicultural education, the ethnic fair, and the June 1998 *GC Bulletin*, whose theme is "Working At Racism," as positive signs for the college and the town.

Senior Emily Whitehead, daughter of Grace Sommers see *Word's words*, pg. 12



Dorothy Word

from *Word's Word*, pg. 1

Whitehead, said Word's speech will be valuable.

"She has a lot of insight into how the college was and that is helpful to us as we look to the future," she said.

Although retired, Word is still active in her community.

She is a freelance writer for several newspapers and also volunteers with many social service agencies. Wood works at an abused women's shelter, tutors children and serves on the Racial Justice Committee for the United Methodist Women of the Kokomo District.