

# Black Minister To Tie Nuptial Knot For Ray

KNOXVILLE (UPI) — A black minister who was a close associate of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. will perform the ceremony when James Earl Ray marries a freelance artist in a Tennessee prison, probably Friday.

Anna Sandhu, Ray's 32-year-old fiancée, said Tuesday the couple chose Rev. James Lawson of Los Angeles to perform the ceremony because he had grown close to the Ray case over the years and had expressed doubt about Ray's guilt.

She said the ceremony would probably be held Friday at the heavily guarded Brushy Mountain Penitentiary near Petros where Ray is serving a 99-year sentence for the 1968 sniper slaying of King in Memphis.

Lawson was a close friend of King and was often credited with bringing King to Memphis during the 1968 sanitation workers' strike. Lawson first came to Memphis in 1962 as pastor of Centenary United Methodist Church. He left 12 years later, but not before becoming actively involved in numerous black struggles.

His efforts in Memphis included participation in such activities as school desegregation, protests against police brutality, the hospital strike and the sanitation workers' strike.

He was honored by the Memphis Catholic Council on Human Relations "for his work in promoting understanding among all people" and by the West Tennessee American Civil Liberties Union as the man who had done the most for civil liberties in Memphis.

Before coming to Memphis, Lawson was involved in the 1957 desegregation of Little Rock schools, sit-in demonstrations in Nashville while a student at Vanderbilt and as an organizer of the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee.

Asked if he thought it ironic that he, a King associate, would perform the wedding ceremony for the man who confessed 10 years ago that he shot King, Lawson told UPI:

"If you'll remember, Jesus Christ said on the cross, 'Father, forgive them for they know not what they do.' There's no doubt in my mind that my marrying this couple would be in the spirit of forgiveness that Martin Luther King always strived for.

"Even if James Earl Ray were the killer beyond a shadow of a doubt, and Dr. King could return to perform the marriage, he would do it," said Lawson, now pastor of the Holman United Methodist Church in Los Angeles.

"We expect to have all the papers in



Rev. James Lawson

order Thursday so we can get married Friday," said Miss Sandhu.

She first met Ray, 50, when she sketched him for a television station at a court hearing last summer.

"It's really been a strain this past week, just waiting to see when it would be," she said. "The suspense has been killing me."

Brushy Mountain Warden Stonney Lane said reporters would be barred from the ceremony in the prison's visitors' center. He said only six people close to Ray and Miss Sandhu would be permitted to attend the wedding.

"They'll be allowed a short visit with each other following the wedding, but they'll be in a room with three or four guards," Lane said. "After that, James will have to return to his cell."

"I won't have any time alone with him," said Miss Sandhu, who was divorced five years ago. "I don't feel good about it at all, but there's nothing I can do about it."

"I love James, and nothing else really seems to matter."

Lane said the couple would not be allowed conjugal visits.

"I think I can cope with not seeing James alone until he is released from prison, which I think is inevitable if there is any justice left in this country," Miss Sandhu said.