

JITSUO MORIKAWA

Mr. President, I have the honor to present as a candidate for an honorary degree, the Reverend Doctor JITSUO MORIKAWA, Minister of Jesus Christ, prophet, administrator, gad-fly, neighbor.

Educated at UCLA and Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, he was ministering in Los Angeles when the war with Japan broke out and he was swept up in the hysteria which evacuated and incarcerated into concentration camps 110,000 people of Japanese ancestry. He and his wife Hazel were carried off to Arizona where, for a year and a half, he ministered in the Poston Relocation Center to the other detainees. Released through the efforts of the American Baptists, he was relocated in Chicago where he so impressed the members of the First Baptist Church (near the University of Chicago) that they asked him to become minister to their white congregation, as well as to his Japanese congregation. This soon led to opening wide the doors to the neighboring black Americans as well, giving nation-wide encouragement to interracial church ventures. The vigor of his ministry also attracted faculty and students from the University. Thirteen years later, the denominational Board of National Ministries asked him to join them, first as Director of Evangelism for the American Baptist Churches, a post he held for ten years, then as Director of the Office of Planning for six more, and finally as Associate Executive Secretary. During these years, he provided new vision and strong leadership to reorganize and expand the strategies of evangelism, led in developing ecumenical coordination of evangelism, and created and directed the Metropolitan Associates of Philadelphia, an experiment in institutional change through lay urban ministry.

After twenty years with the American Baptist Board of National Ministries, Dr. Morikawa was called to serve as Interim Senior Minister of the great Riverside Church in New York City until that church called William Sloane Coffin. For the last four years he has served as the Minister of the First Baptist Church of Ann Arbor. However, retirement does not seem possible for such a dedicated person. He is just starting a two-year stint as Vice President of the American Baptist Churches, U.S.A., as well as continuing his role as gad-fly to the University of Michigan, where he has been instrumental in bringing the teaching and influence of Hans Kung as a member of that faculty.

Dr. Morikawa, unique among contemporary servants of the Church, has participated in and forged a leadership role in respect to the greatest issues of our time. He has felt personally and responded creatively to the racial oppressions of our culture; he has a deeply evangelical passion which has broken new ground in creating ways of reaching people and institutions in the modern world with the claims of Christ; he has uniquely bridged the gap in religious outlook between the very conservative commitments and the liberal concerns, and encouraged all sorts and conditions of men to meet on that bridge; he has provided organizational skills and personal winsome courage needed to highlight effectively the inadequacies and dangers of a radically secular approach to human life and values. Wherever he has had the opportunity he has fused together the religious and the intellectual insights with a passion for the Kingdom of God, and where he has not had the opportunity he has created it. He exemplifies the humble courage which serves the Truth wherever it leads, without claiming it as his own. It is eminently fitting that Kalamazoo College should honor its own highest aims in honoring him.

Therefore, on behalf of the faculty of Kalamazoo College, I recommend that upon JITSUO MORIKAWA be conferred the honorary degree, Doctor of Divinity.