

JOSEPH LAWRENCE ROBERTS, JR.

Mr. President, I have the honor to present as a candidate for an Honorary Degree, the Reverend Joseph Lawrence Roberts, Jr., Senior Minister of Atlanta's Ebenezer Baptist Church, son of a distinguished clergyman, a devoted husband and father, and an ardent supporter of the civil rights of all Americans.

Born in Chicago, Illinois, the Reverend Mr. Roberts is a graduate of Chicago's prestigious and historically significant Englewood High School, a cum laude graduate of Knoxville College, and a graduate of Union and Princeton Theological Seminaries where he earned the degrees Master of Divinity and Master of Theology. He was ordained a minister in the Presbyterian Church of the United States and served as senior minister to the Weequahich and Elmwood United Presbyterian Churches in New Jersey. His ministry at these congregations was significant, with the financial status of each being improved. During the eight years of his pastorate at the Elmwood Church, the congregation grew from 300 to 1000 parishioners and was recognized as being the third strongest Black Presbyterian Church in the nation.

The hierarchy of the Presbyterian Church recognized the Reverend Mr. Roberts as being an unusually talented man, and he was approached to serve as director of Corporate and Social Ministries of the Board of National Ministries of the Presbyterian Church in the United States. This was the highest position ever held by a Black man in the Presbyterian Church.

In 1975 he was asked by the officers of the Ebenezer Baptist Church in Atlanta, Georgia, to succeed the Reverend Martin Luther "Daddy" King, Sr., as a senior minister of that prestigious congregation. He accepted the pastorate, and since his ascendancy over 1800 new members have been added. Additionally, he initiated a senior citizen day care center, a food cooperative, as well as a community counseling service.

A number of organizations have recognized the talent of this renaissance man. The United Negro College Fund honored him as being the alumnus of the year, the Frontier International Organization honored him as their man of the year, he is listed in Who's Who in America, and was chosen as one of six preachers by the National Council of Churches and British Council of Churches to preach abroad. He has preached in sub-Saharan Africa, the whole of Great Britain, Europe, and the Caribbean. He is in great demand to serve as a speaker for conventions, at colleges, and to a multiplicity of boards and organizations throughout the United States. He has been awarded honorary degrees from the Johnson C. Smith University, the Interdenominational Theological Center, Morehouse College, and Franklin College in Franklin, Indiana.

Therefore, on behalf of the faculty of Kalamazoo College, I recommend that the Reverend Joseph Lawrence Roberts, Jr., be awarded the Honorary Degree, Doctor of Divinity.