

Biographical Description for The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Reverend Dr. Joseph L. Roberts

PERSON

Roberts, Joseph L. (Joseph Lawrence)

Alternative Names: Reverend Dr. Joseph L. Roberts; Joseph L. Roberts ;

Life Dates: February 17, 1935-February 15, 2015

Place of Birth: Chicago, Illinois, USA

Residence: Fayetteville, GA

Work: Atlanta, GA

Occupations: Pastor

Biographical Note

Reverend Joseph L. Roberts was born on February 17, 1935 in Chicago, Illinois. Roberts attended Chicago Public Schools throughout his childhood and graduated cum laude from Knoxville College in Knoxville, Tennessee, in 1956. In the 1960s, Roberts attended the Union Theological Seminary in New York City and obtained his Masters of Divinity (M.Div.) degree; he subsequently attended Princeton Theological Seminary, where he earned his Masters of Theology degree.

During the early part of the 1970s, Roberts became senior pastor of the historic Ebenezer Baptist Church in Atlanta, Georgia; handed picked by Reverend Martin Luther King, Sr. Roberts served as the senior pastor for a total of thirty years and was recognized for being an energetic orator and an accomplished musician. During the thirty years that Roberts presided as pastor, as many as 2,000 new members were added to the church's congregation. Under Roberts's leadership, Ebenezer Baptist Church's congregation's financial giving also increased 300 percent. When Roberts took the helm at Ebenezer Baptist Church, he launched an extensive community outreach program that included the Teenage Mother's Ministry; tutoring and counseling programs; a food co-op; and an older adult daycare center. Roberts also envisioned starting a parochial school that would concentrate on providing a good education and clear role models for young males. Roberts was an accomplished administrator who successfully negotiated bank financing for Ebenezer's new Horizon Sanctuary; the sanctuary, dedicated on March 21, 1999, was an eight-million-dollar edifice which encompassed the early roots of Christianity as well as symbols of African American heritage.

In 2004, Roberts was a recipient of distinguished alumni awards from Union Theological Seminary and Princeton Theological Seminary. In 2006 Roberts published *Sideswiped by Eternity: Sermons from Ebenezer Baptist Church*; this collection of sermons demonstrates Roberts's commitment to the legacy of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., the lives of his parishioners, and the message of Jesus Christ.

Roberts was interviewed by The HistoryMakers in 2007.

Roberts passed away on February 15, 2015. He is survived by his wife, Esther Wortham Roberts, one son, two daughters and six grandchildren.

Related Entries

Edmund Burke Elementary School [STUDENTOF]
[from ? to ?]

Austin O. Sexton Elementary School [STUDENTOF]
[from ? to ?]

Englewood High School [STUDENTOF]
[from ? to ?]

Knoxville College [STUDENTOF]
[from ? to ?]

Union Theological Seminary [STUDENTOF]
[from ? to ?]

Princeton University [STUDENTOF]
[from ? to ?]

Weequahic Presbyterian Church [EMPLOYEEOF]
[from 1959 to 1962]

Pastor

Elmwood United Presbyterian Church [EMPLOYEEOF]
[from 1962 to 1970]

Pastor

Division of Corporate and Social Mission [EMPLOYEEOF]
[from 1970 to 1975]

Director

Ebenezer Baptist Church [EMPLOYEEOF]
[from 1975 to 2004]

Pastor

Amnesty International USA [MEMBEROF]
[from ? to ?]

Member