

Biographical Description for The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Reverend Joseph Metz Rollins

PERSON

Rollins, J. Metz (Joseph Metz), 1926-

Alternative Names: Reverend Joseph Metz Rollins;

Life Dates: September 8, 1926-

Place of Birth: Newport News, Virginia, USA

Residence: White Plains, NY

Occupations: Civil Rights Activist; Pastor

Biographical Note

Civil rights activist and pastor Rev. Joseph Metz Rollins, Jr. was born on September 8, 1926 in Newport News, Virginia to Reverend Joseph Metz Rollins, Sr. and Alice C. Rollins, as the first of two children. Rollins' father was the pastor of the Carver Memorial Presbyterian Church for forty-four years, beginning just one year before Rollins' birth. In 1970, his church had become one of the largest in the Southern Virginia Presbytery when Rollins retired.

In 1954, at the age of twenty-seven, the presbytery sent Rollins from Newport News to become the first pastor at Trinity Presbyterian Church in Tallahassee, Florida. There, Rollins was active in the Tallahassee Bus Boycott, which was coordinated by the Inter-Civic Council. Rollins served as treasurer for the group, working with civil rights activist Reverend C.K. Steele. During the boycott, many in the group's leadership were threatened with violence. Rollins, in particular, received death threats. Despite this, he became known for his outspoken nature and unwillingness to compromise on important issues. Rollins' activism had consequences on his career. The Florida Presbytery fired him and abandoned Trinity Presbyterian Church, which forced Rollins to take a job as a hospital orderly. His congregation, in the meantime, purchased new land and joined the "Northern Presbyterian Church," becoming Trinity United Presbyterian. Steadfast in service to civil rights, in 1961, Rollins was arrested in Jackson, Mississippi for his participation in the Freedom Rides. He was struck in the head by a rock in 1963 protesting in Nashville, Tennessee. Rollins served as Vice President of the Nashville Christian Leadership Council, a branch of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.'s Southern Christian Leadership Conference and acted as the field director for United Presbyterian's Board of Education.

In 1964, Rollins moved to New York to work as a staff member for the United

Presbyterian Church; also, he continued his work in the Civil Rights Movement. Rollins became the first Executive Director of the National Committee of Black Churchmen in 1967, an organization dedicated to advocating for racial awareness within churches. The following year, Rollins lost a race for the White Plains, New York school board. As leader of the National Committee of Black Churchmen, Rollins was involved in numerous controversies in the late 1960s and early 1970s, including the debate over James Forman's "Black Manifesto," which demanded reparations from white churches, and the National Committee of Black Churchmen coordinated "Black Referendum" on the Vietnam War. By 1972, the National Committee of Black Churchmen had 800 members, and Rollins had relocated to become Pastor at St. Augustine Presbyterian Church in the Bronx, New York. Rollins remained the pastor until 2005, when, at the age of seventy-eight, he became Pastor Emeritus.

Reverend Joseph Metz Rollins, Jr. was interviewed by The HistoryMakers on September 14, 2007.

Related Entries

Marshall Elementary School [STUDENTOF]
[from ? to ?]

Hampton University [STUDENTOF]
[from ? to ?]

Johnson C. Smith University [STUDENTOF]
[from ? to ?]

Collis P. Huntington High School [STUDENTOF]
[from ? to ?]

Nashville Christian Leadership Council [EMPLOYEEOF]
[from ? to ?]

Vice President

United Presbyterian's Board of Education [EMPLOYEEOF]
[from ? to ?]

Field Director

Johnson C. Smith University [EMPLOYEEOF]
[from 1950 to 1953]

Teacher

Trinity Presbyterian Church [EMPLOYEEOF]
[from 1954 to ?]

Pastor

National Committee of Black Churchmen [EMPLOYEEOF]
[from 1967 to ?]

Executive Director

St. Augustine Presbyterian Church [EMPLOYEE**Of**]
[from 1972 to 2005]

Pastor Emeritus

National Committee of Black Churchmen [MEMBER**Of**]
[from ? to ?]

Member

Nashville Christian Leadership Council [MEMBER**Of**]
[from ? to ?]