

# Speaker Bio

## The Rev. Dr. James Alexander Forbes, Jr.

The Rev. Dr. James Alexander Forbes, Jr. is Senior Minister Emeritus of The Riverside Church and President of the Healing of the Nations Foundation. The Riverside Church is an interdenominational, interracial, and international church built by John D. Rockefeller Jr. in 1927. The 2,400-member church is affiliated with the American Baptist Churches and the United Church of Christ. Forbes, who was installed as the fifth Senior Minister of Riverside on June 1, 1989, and retired on June 1, 2007, was the first African-American to serve as Senior Minister of this multicultural congregation. He is an ordained minister in the American Baptist Churches and the Original United Holy Church of America. Before being called to Riverside's pulpit, Dr. Forbes served from 1976-1985 as the Brown and Sockman Associate Professor of Preaching at Union Theological Seminary in New York City.

**Dr. Forbes' songs have been published in the Silver Burdett Songbooks for schools: "We Shall Overcome" and "Our Families Together." Dr. Forbes has performed the narration for several large musical productions, including Mendelssohn's Elijah with the Riverside choir.**

From 1985-1989 he was Union's first Joe R. Engle Professor of Preaching. Union named him the first Harry Emerson Fosdick Adjunct Professor of Preaching in 1989, when he accepted the pastorate at Riverside. Dr. Forbes also serves on the Core Teaching Staff at Auburn Theological Seminary in New York. In national and international religious circles, Dr. Forbes is known as the preacher's preacher because of his extensive preaching career and his charismatic style. In their March 4, 1996 issue, Newsweek magazine recognized Forbes as one of the 12 "most effective preachers" in the English-speaking world. This Pastor, Educator, Administrator, Community Activist and Interfaith Leader was designated as one of America's greatest Black preachers by Ebony magazine in 1984 and 1993. He won the Alumni Charter Day Award of Howard University for Distinguished Post Graduate Achievement In Ministry. In 1995 he emerged in the Baylor University Survey as one of twelve remarkable and most effective preachers in the English-speaking world. Dr. Forbes learned to preach and pastor in the parish. He has held pastorates at St. John's United Holy Church of America in Richmond, VA, from 1965-1973; Holy Trinity Church in Wilmington, NC, from 1960-1965; and at St. Paul's Holy Church in Roxboro, NC, from 1960-1969. He also worked as campus minister for Virginia Union University in Richmond, VA, from 1968 until 1970. Dr. Forbes has earned three degrees and has been awarded 13 honorary degrees. He earned a Doctor of Ministry Degree from Colgate-Rochester Divinity School in Rochester, NY, in 1975; a Master of Divinity Degree from Union Theological Seminary in New York City, NY in 1962; and a Bachelor of Science in Chemistry from Howard University in Washington, D.C., in 1957. He earned his Clinical Pastoral Education Certificate from the Medical College of Virginia in Richmond, VA, in 1968. His honorary degrees are: Doctor of Divinity, Princeton University, Princeton, NJ 2002; Doctor of Humane Letters, Central University, North Carolina, 1998; Doctor of Humane Letters, Manhattanville College, Purchase, NY, 1996; Doctor of Humane Letters, Keuka College, Keuka Park, NY, 1993; Doctor

of Divinity, Franklin College of Indiana, Franklin, IN, 1992; Doctor of Divinity, Lehigh University, Bethlehem, PA, 1991; Doctor of Divinity, Trinity College, Hartford, CT, 1991; Doctor of Humane Letters, DePauw University, Greencastle, IN, 1990; Doctor of Laws, Fairleigh Dickenson University, Rutherford, NJ, 1990; Doctor of Divinity, Colgate University, Hamilton, NY, 1989; Doctor of Divinity, University of Richmond, Richmond, VA, 1987; Doctor of Divinity, Protestant Episcopal Theological Seminary, Alexandria, VA, 1986; Doctor of Sacred Theology, Dickinson College, Carlisle, PA, 1983. A well-known preacher and lecturer in the United States and abroad, in 1986 Dr. Forbes gave the Lyman Beecher Lecture at Yale University. The lectures in this series have been published by Abingdon Press as *The Holy Spirit and Preaching*, 1989. In 1993 he gave the Sixth Annual Leslie R. Smith Lectures in Preaching, entitled "Spiritual Revitalization of the Nation through Preaching" and in 1995 his "Healing the Spirit of America" was edited from The Davison Lectures at Warren Wilson College. He has participated in the Charles Finney Colloquium at Colgate-Rochester Divinity School and the World Pentecostal Fellowship in Nairobi, Kenya. In 1998 he completed a semester as the inaugural Luce Lecturer at the Harvard Divinity School, devoting his lectures to the theme of urban ministry. Also in 1998, in addition to participating in the Department of Justice Round Table on Youth Violence at the White House, Dr. Forbes delivered the keynote address at the President's Initiative on Race meeting in New Orleans, Louisiana. As Visiting Professor of Homiletics at Yale Divinity School in 2004, Dr. Forbes taught a course entitled "Preaching and the Next Great Awakening." From 1992 to the present, Dr. Forbes has been co-chair of A Partnership of Faith, an interfaith organization of clergy among New York's Protestant, Catholic, Jewish, and Muslim communities. He is on the board of Manhattanville College, the Interfaith Alliance, Harlem Congregations for Community Improvement, and the United Way. He is a consultant to the Congress of National Black Churches and past President of The Martin Luther King Fellows. In October 2000, he received the prestigious Earle B. Pleasant Clergy of the Year Award from Religion in American Life and delivered the Raymond J. Peterson Lecture. In 2000, Dr. Forbes also accepted board appointments to: The Values Institute of America, The Bertram M. Beck Institute on Religion and Poverty at Fordham University, and The Mailman School of Public Health at Columbia University. In April 2001, Union Theological Seminary presented Dr. Forbes with the Unitas Distinguished Alumnus Award, and in May 2003, Teachers College awarded him their Distinguished Service Medal. The Interfaith Alliance awarded him the Cronkite Faith and Freedom Award in 2004. Forbes has led numerous workshops, retreats, and conferences for the National Council of Churches of Christ USA, the National Association of Campus Ministry, the American Baptist Churches, the United Church of Christ, the African Methodist Episcopal Church, the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), the Episcopal Church, the Roman Catholic Church, the United Methodist Church, and the Presbyterian Church (USA). On December 26, 2003, Dr. Forbes was featured on Bill Moyers' "Speaking to Power" where he shared his prophetic principles, which have become part of the Mobilization 2004 initiative at The Riverside Church. Also in 2004, Dr. Forbes keynoted most of the "Let Justice Roll" tour sponsored by the National Council of Churches of Christ which promoted the prophetic principles in 15-20 cities across the nation. In August 2004, Dr. Forbes addressed the Democratic National Convention. Two of Dr. Forbes' songs have been published in the Silver

Burdett Songbooks for schools: "We Shall Overcome" and "Our Families Together." Dr. Forbes has performed the narration for several large musical productions, including Mendelssohn's Elijah with the Riverside choir. Born in 1935 in Burgaw, North Carolina, Dr. Forbes is married to Bettye Franks Forbes, formerly of San Antonio, TX. They are the proud parents of one son, James A. Forbes III. Peace and Joy to you in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. The State of your Council is strong. Your Council is strong because of the extraordinary leadership. Your Council is strong because you have a very gifted and committed staff, I have been truly blessed to be associated with and work side by side with the more that 200 persons you employ. I am sorry that time does not allow me to recognize each one by name. There are two that I want to lift up Roxanna and Dennis Williams. Their support, long hours and counsel has been a blessing in the life of the Council.