



NEWS RELEASE

Berkeley School of Theology Announces the J. Alfred Smith, Sr. Endowed Chair of Theology in the Public Square

BERKELEY, CA (April 8, 2022). In recognizing the amazing life and legacy of Rev. Dr. J. Alfred Smith Sr., the Board of Trustees of Berkeley School of Theology (BST) unanimously approved the creation of the J. Alfred Smith, Sr. Endowed Chair of Theology in the Public Square.

This endowed chair is part of the establishment of a new Center for Truth, Racial Healing and Restorative Justice made possible through the largest lead gift ever given to BST from the good people of First Baptist Church of Palo Alto and other donors of nearly \$3 million, so far. BST's president, Rev. Dr. James E. Brenneman, noted with deep gratitude, "the spiritual legacy imprinted upon BST and countless students, faculty, and graduates by Dr. J. Alfred Smith, Sr. will live on in perpetuity because of these generous life-changing gifts."

Rev. Dr. J. Alfred Smith, Sr., born May 19, 1931, is both a BST graduate ('72) and served for some thirty-five years as distinguished professor, acting dean, and now emeritus professor of Christian Ministry and Preaching at BST. He served 38 years as Senior Pastor, now emeritus, of the historic Allen Temple Baptist Church in Oakland, CA overseeing a congregation of thousands serving the community in housing, AIDS ministries, social services, job and food programs and adult and youth education, mentoring hundreds into Christian ministry.

Dr. Smith holds a B.S. ('52), a B.D. ('59), Th. M. ('66), Th.M. ('72), D.Min. ('75), and several honorary doctorates and was the state and national president of the Progressive Baptist Convention and the president of the American Baptist Churches of the West. He was a national leader in the Civil Rights movement with a lifetime of doing theology in the public square, public advocacy at city hall, author of 16 books, lecturing at Harvard, Yale, Duke, Morehouse, and Howard, and other esteemed institutions, testifying against apartheid before the United Nations, preaching to thousands from Seoul Korea to Sierra Leone (Africa) to China and beyond.

Rev. Dr. Smith Sr. has been called by some, "the prophet of International Blvd" (Oakland), by others "the black pope," by Dr. Cornell West, "a towering prophetic figure whose profound vision, courageous witness and deep love are legendary in our time." Smith baptized and buried Huey P. Newton, co-founder of the Black Panther Party. Current BST Board member and U.S. Representative, the honorable Barbara Lee, hails him as, "my counselor and spiritual, pastoral advisor ... the first person I think of when I have extremely difficult decisions to make."

About Berkeley School of Theology (BST)

BST is one of the most culturally diverse seminaries in the country. BST was established in 1871 during the Reconstruction period in U.S. history, along with the historic Black colleges of Spelman, Morehouse, and Virginia Union by the American Baptist Home Mission Society. An early president of BST was one of the presiding ministers in Abraham Lincoln's funeral. Now celebrating its 150th Anniversary, BST still cherishes those early core values of soul freedom, service leadership, social justice, public witness, religious liberty and free interpretation of Scripture.

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