Lena D. Bennett

Lena D. Bennett, although a humble woman reluctant to talk about your own accomplishments, you have quietly amassed an extraordinary record of service through religious groups and community organizations that has won you the respect and admiration of people throughout this community and beyond.

A native of Little Rock, Arkansas, you were raised by your grandparents, who operated the Lena Jordan Hospital, a private general hospital for African Americans. From your grandparents you learned compassion and the worthiness of each person. You earned degrees in Business Administration and Sociology from Clark College in Atlanta, Georgia. In 1953, you moved to Tulsa with three children and two college degrees.

As an effective organizer, you were instrumental in establishing the Margaret Hudson Program for teenage parents and their families. Through your efforts it has become one of the five leading programs of that nature in the United States.

Earning a Master’s Degree in Family Relations and Child Development from Oklahoma State University, you were especially interested in the care of the elderly and as a result you became an active member of Tulsa Senior Services. Because you also have a passion for those who are incarcerated, you became the first African American woman to serve on the Oklahoma Crime Commission. After learning that male and female prisoners were being kept in the same facilities, you volunteered to go to prison incognito to gain first-hand experience of life for an incarcerated woman. As a result of your report, the Oklahoma Department of Corrections opened the Mabel Bassett Correctional Facility to house female inmates.

Your wide-ranging interests have also led you to become the first African American to be elected to the Board of Education for the Tulsa Technology Center, which serves junior and senior students from 14 public schools in Metropolitan Tulsa as well as private, parochial, and home-schooled students.

You also have been an active member of Prince of Peace Lutheran Church in Tulsa for over 50 years, winning the admiration of your pastor and the members of that congregation. Although retired, you still find time and energy to work toward ecumenical and interfaith cooperation through Tulsa Metropolitan Ministry. You have served in various leadership roles at TMM and were among those who brought to Tulsa The Plowshares Project that was first developed in South Africa and emphasizes peaceable conflict resolution. You have been honored by the Jewish Federation of Tulsa with its coveted Bernstein Distinguished Leadership Award and in 2006 you received their Aaronson Lifetime Achievement Award.

In recognition of your tireless efforts to care for the elderly, the young, the incarcerated, and those marginalized by society, as well as your leadership to bring harmony among various cultures, races, and religious beliefs, Phillips Theological Seminary is honored today, May 12, 2007, to confer on you the honorary degree of Doctor of Humane Letters.