



Dr. DeForest Blake Soaries, Jr.

Dr. DeForest B. Soaries, Jr. is the Senior Pastor of the First Baptist Church of Lincoln Gardens in Somerset, New Jersey. His pastoral ministry focuses on spiritual growth, educational excellence and economic empowerment. A pioneer of faith-based community development, Dr. Soaries has led First Baptist in the construction of a new \$20 million church complex and the formation of many not-for-profit entities to serve the community surrounding the church.

Highlights of Dr. Soaries' ministry include recruiting 298 families to become foster parents to 531 children; helping 195 children find adoptive parents; constructing 124 new homes for low and moderate income residents to own; redeveloping 150,000 square feet of commercial real estate; operating the Central New Jersey STRIVE program for job readiness; serving hundreds of youth in an after school center and homework club; forming a youth entrepreneurship program; redeveloping commercial real estate; organizing a community development credit union; and creating a foreclosure prevention strategy that helps homeowners avoid losing their homes.

In addition to his pastoral duties Dr. Soaries is a popular speaker at colleges, universities, conferences and churches around the world. He recently addressed religious and government leaders in Belgium at the request of the United States Department of State. He was also the keynote speaker at the Official Year 2000 National Commemorative of the National Martin Luther King, Jr. Holiday in Atlanta, Georgia. Dr. Soaries also serves as a director of the Federal Home Loan Bank of New York.

Dr. Soaries is a frequent advisor to major corporations in the areas of diversity, philanthropy and community relations.

Dr. Soaries has been an active agent for change ever since his youth. As a college student, he led a campaign against drug use on campus that resulted in his being kidnapped at gunpoint from his dormitory room by drug dealers. He later worked on civil rights issues for the Urban League as a community organizer and Operation PUSH as the national coordinator. After finishing college, Dr. Soaries began his ministry in Montclair, New Jersey and has served churches in Harlem, New York, Kingston, Jamaica and Trenton, New Jersey.

In the 1980's Dr. Soaries contributed significantly to the establishment of the urban contemporary gospel music industry, having managed the professional careers of award winning artists including Bebe and Cece Winans, Tramaine Hawkins, Commissioned, Paradise and Fred Hammond.

Dr. Soaries has also held historic and noteworthy government positions. From January 12, 1999 to January 15, 2002, Dr. Soaries served as New Jersey's 30th Secretary of State making him the first African American male to serve as a Constitutional officer of the State. Appointed

by former Governor Christine Todd Whitman, he managed one of the premier departments of state government and served as a senior advisor to the governor on issues that transcended traditional departmental lines.

Dr Soaries is also the former chairman of the United States Election Assistance Commission. This Commission was established by Congress to implement the "Help America Vote Act" of 2002. Dr. Soaries was appointed by the President of the United States December 15, 2003 after being confirmed by the United States Senate. He was elected chairman of the Commission on January 5, 2004 at the first meeting of the four member, bi-partisan Commission. In November 2004 this Commission was the first federal agency to oversee a Presidential election. He resigned from the Commission in April 2005.

Dr. Soaries earned a Bachelor of Arts Degree from Fordham University; a Master of Divinity Degree from Princeton Theological Seminary; and a Doctor of Ministry Degree from United Theological Seminary. He has also received six honorary Doctorate degrees from institutions of higher learning. Additionally, Dr. Soaries has taught courses at Princeton Theological Seminary, Drew University Theological School, Kean University, and Mercer County College.

Dr. Soaries has received numerous awards for his leadership and community service. He was recently recognized by the both houses of the New Jersey Legislature for his religious and community leadership. His work has been featured in several media including the New York Times, Christianity Today, Black Enterprise, Ebony Magazine, People Magazine and Government Executive Magazine.

Born in New York and raised in New Jersey, Dr. Soaries resides in Central New Jersey with his wife, Donna and twin sons, Malcolm and Martin.