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Renowned Reverend and U.S. Senator Raphael Warnock to Keynote UVI's 2021 Online Commencement Ceremony; Wilma Lewis, Alex Moorhead to Receive Honorary Degrees

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Reverend and United States Senator Dr. Raphael Warnock. By. THE UNIVERSITY OF THE VIRGIN ISLANDS

Renowned Reverend and United States Senator Dr. Raphael Warnock will be the keynote speaker at the University of the Virgin Islands 2021 online Commencement Ceremony at 1 p.m. on Friday, May 14, the institution of higher learning has announced. UVI said the ceremony will celebrate the achievements of students from the Albert A. Sheen Campus on St. Croix; the Orville E. Kean Campus on St. Thomas and the University of St. Martin. The decision to convene another Online

Commencement Ceremony was made as the university continues to take necessary precautions to mitigate the spread of the Coronavirus.

“The University is excited to produce yet another virtual commencement ceremony as we understand the significance of commencement ceremonies to our students and their families and we remain committed to giving our students the best experience to recognize their hard work and achievements,” said UVI President David Hall. “The Class of 2021 deserves high recognition for having persevered through a pandemic that forced them to suddenly adapt to new learning methods and having successfully completed this important chapter in their lives.”

“We have selected a keynote speaker who epitomizes overall excellence,” Dr. Hall said. “Reverend Raphael Warnock is not only a highly recognized pastor, but he is also known beyond the doors of his church for his social and political influence in defending the voting rights of those in his state. I think that as a product of a HBCU, Reverend Warnock’s recent ascension to being Georgia’s first Black senator and the first Black Democrat to represent a southern state in the United States Senate will also serve to inspire our students as they prepare for their careers.”

Keynote Speaker

The Rev. Dr. Raphael Warnock has served, since 2005, as the senior pastor of the historic Ebenezer Baptist Church, spiritual home of The Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

According to the release, under Pastor Warnock’s leadership, more than 5,000 new members have joined Ebenezer, enhancing the Church’s legacy of social activism with both spiritual and numerical growth. Additionally, he has led Ebenezer in a successful fundraising campaign to build the \$8.5 million Martin Luther King, Sr. Community Resources Complex which houses the Church’s administrative offices, the fellowship hall, classrooms, meeting rooms and a MLK Collaborative of several nonprofit partners, including Casey Family Programs and The Center for Working Families. All initiatives engaged together in helping individuals and families to improve their own life outcomes and live healthier and more prosperous lives.

As a pastor, Rev. Dr. Warnock sees the whole community as his parish. Accordingly, he has defended voting rights in his own state of Georgia, UVI said. In 2006, the State of Louisiana failed to protect the voting rights of recent Hurricane Katrina evacuees, he intervened and led a “Freedom Caravan” of citizens back to New Orleans to vote. Dr. Warnock has taken on the contradictions in our criminal justice system, public education, health care, HIV/AIDS and has defended the downtrodden and disenfranchised through his preaching and his fierce public advocacy, according to the release.

The Rev. Dr. Warnock graduated from Morehouse College cum laude in 1991, receiving the Bachelor of Arts Degree in Psychology. He also holds a Master of Divinity Degree from Union Theological Seminary, New York City, from which he graduated with honors and distinctions. Seeing his pastoral work as tied to the ministry of scholarship and the life of the mind, Rev. Warnock continued his graduate studies at Union, receiving a Master of Philosophy degree and a Doctor of Philosophy (Ph.D.) degree in the field of systematic theology.

Warnock is known for his first book, which is entitled, “The Divided Mind of the Black Church; Theology, Piety & Public Witness.” He is a member of Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity, Inc., the 100 Black Men of Atlanta, Inc. and a Lifetime Member of the NAACP.

In January 2021, Dr. Warnock became Georgia's first Black senator and the first Black Democrat to represent a southern state in the United States Senate.

Honorary Degree Recipients

Honorable Wilma A. Lewis



Wilma A. Lewis, Chief Judge of the District Court of the Virgin Islands (Credit: UVI)

UVI will bestow an honorary degree upon Chief Judge of the District Court of the Virgin Islands, the Honorable Wilma A. Lewis. The appointment of the Honorable Wilma A. Lewis to the District Court of the Virgin Islands in July 2011 was a milestone in Virgin Islands history, as she is the first woman to serve as a federal judge in the United States Virgin Islands, including as Chief Judge for the District Court from August 2013 through April 2021. Judge Lewis' appointment to the federal bench was her fourth Presidential appointment with Senate confirmation, having previously served as Assistant Secretary for Land and Minerals Management at the United States Department of the Interior, United States Attorney for the District of Columbia, and Inspector General for the Department of the Interior.

As Assistant Secretary from 2009 to 2011, Judge Lewis led the Office charged with establishing policies for, and providing oversight to, the Bureau of Land Management, the Bureau of Ocean Energy Management, Regulation and Enforcement, and the Office of Surface Mining Reclamation

and Enforcement at the Department of the Interior. As United States Attorney from 1998 to 2001—the first woman to hold that position in the District of Columbia — Judge Lewis managed and supervised the largest U.S. Attorney’s Office in the country, with over 350 attorneys, an equal number of support staff personnel, and the unique responsibility of serving as both federal and local prosecutor. As Inspector General from 1995 to 1998, Judge Lewis managed and supervised a staff of 300 in 12 offices throughout the United States and its territories charged with conducting investigations and audits designed to prevent and detect fraud, waste and abuse, and to promote economy and efficiency in Department of the Interior programs and operations.

Judge Lewis began her professional career in 1981 as an associate with the Washington, D.C. law firm of Steptoe & Johnson LLP. In 1986, she joined the United States Attorney’s Office in the District of Columbia as an Assistant United States Attorney, where she led two counsels for the United States in a variety of civil cases in federal trial and appellate courts and rose through the ranks to the position of Deputy Chief of the Civil Division. Judge Lewis joined the Department of the Interior in 1993, where she led the General Law Division as the Associate Solicitor until 1995. Following her service as Inspector General and United States Attorney, Judge Lewis joined the law firm of Crowell & Moring LLP as a Partner, where she specialized, from 2001 to 2007, in complex civil litigation and internal investigations. She also served as Managing Associate General Counsel for Litigation at Freddie Mac from 2007 to 2008.

Judge Lewis has served as an adjunct faculty member in trial advocacy at The George Washington University Law School, and on various boards and commissions. She graduated valedictorian and with high honors from All Saints Cathedral School in St. Thomas in 1974. She earned a Bachelor of Arts Degree in Political Science, with distinction, from Swarthmore College in 1978, where she was elected to Phi Beta Kappa, and a Juris Doctor degree from Harvard Law School in 1981. Judge Lewis is the daughter of the late Walter and Juta Lewis of St. Thomas, Virgin Islands.

Board Chair Emeritus Alexander Moorhead



UVI will also bestow an honorary degree upon Board Chair Emeritus Alexander Moorhead of the UVI Board of Trustees. Born on St. Croix, Moorhead was elected to three terms in the Legislature of the Virgin Islands, from 1971-1976, where he served as a Senate Minority Leader.

Moorhead was employed by the V.I. Water and Power Authority from 1977-1979, first as Director of Management Services and later as Deputy Executive Director, the number two position in that public utility. After securing his master's degree in 1980, Moorhead was hired by the Hess Oil (later HOVENSA) refinery on St. Croix, and served as HOVENSA's Vice President, Government Affairs, Community Relations and Secretary until his retirement in June, 2010.

He was appointed and confirmed to the Board of Trustees of the University of the Virgin Islands in March 1996 and served continuously until May 2020, during which time, Moorhead was reelected every five years to serve as a member of the Board for five terms. He served with distinction for 24 years, during the administration of three presidents of the University, and participated in and supported numerous key initiatives and projects of the University.

During his distinguished service on the Board, Moorhead served as chairman of the Board for five years and as vice chairman of the Board for 16 Years. He served on the Audit Committee, Building and Grounds Committee, Finance and Budget Committee, Governance Committee, as well as two Presidential Search Committees. By virtue of his position as the chair of a Committee, he served on the Executive Committee of the Board for 24 years. He provided those committees and the Board the benefit of his experience gained during his service in the private sector and public sector and his knowledge of higher education. In recognition of, and gratitude for his outstanding and superb service as a member of the Board of Trustees, Moorhead was granted the Status of Board Chair Emeritus with all the rights, privileges, and responsibilities pertaining thereto.

Within the UVI community, Moorhead was also a member of the Foundation for the University Board, Reichhold Center Board and the UVI Research and Technology Park Board (RTPark). It was under his leadership of the Board of Trustees and the membership with RTPark Board that the RTPark building on St. Croix and the West Hall residence on St. Thomas were completed. "He was the most meticulous Board member who everyone relied upon to make sure documents were excellent and that all Board rules were followed," said Dr. Hall. "He was an exemplary Board Chair and contributed greatly to the growth and development of UVI."

Within the Virgin Islands community, Moorhead was a member of the Board of the V.I. Chapter of the American Red Cross.

The University of the Virgin Islands awards honorary doctoral degrees to individuals who have demonstrated outstanding accomplishments. Honorary doctoral degree nominees can be nominated by any member of the University administration, faculty, student body, staff, alumni, or Board of Trustees.