

## Dr. James H. Thompson Awarded "Order of the Palmetto"

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Lights that twinkled gently among fragrant greens adorning the historic Gassaway Mansion seemed to celebrate with those gathered to witness as the Order of the Palmetto was conferred. The Gassaway was the setting for Dr. James Henry Thompson, affectionately known by many as Jimmy, to receive the award on Sunday afternoon, December 6, 2009. The Order of the Palmetto is the state's highest civilian honor awarded for extraordinary lifetime achievement and service to the state and nation. In nominating Dr. Thompson, Jim Barbare noted Dr. Thompson's status as a pioneer of Christian broadcasting and as a humanitarian to the community and to the world. He stated, "We note that Jimmy Thompson went about doing good during the time in his life when he was physically able. He LIVED philanthropy in every facet of his life rather than concentrate on just one major effort. His life's mission was to reach out to the downtrodden, the needy, and the grief-stricken. He used his personal funds and influence to accomplish his mission."

People from different arenas of life contributed their support in letter form to the nomination. Contributors included such people as North Greenville University president, James Epting, and Holmes Bible College administrators, to political figures like Senator David Thomas and Senator Ralph Anderson, to bishops in the Pentecostal Holiness International Church, to community members and friends, as well as immigrants and the poor who had been helped by Dr. Thompson. Steve Crain, longtime friend and former parishioner, remembers the time when he was growing up in the church Jimmy founded, Faith Temple. "During Faith Temple's early days, Dr. Thompson - 'Jimmy' - often took his church's young people to a park in Greer to play softball and he organized yearly 2-day trips to Camp Arrowhead (for boys) near Tuxedo, NC. Most of us who attended that camp were mill workers' sons who had never seen a real camp. Dr. Thompson played ball and swam and ate with us. He cared about us rag-tag boys." Jimmy's caring extended long past the time the boys were no longer boys, but men. Grain also remembers, "Pastor Jimmy was there to offer a prayer and an embrace when I said "so long" to my wife and boarded a plane for one year of U.S. army service in Vietnam." Indian immigrant, Phillip Achenkunya, related how Jimmy befriended him when he was alone and grieving for his wife and child left behind in India while he completed his studies here in the United States. Jimmy often took him to dinner, wrote to U.S. senator Strom Thurmond on his behalf, and became his friend and mentor.

During the award ceremony on December 6, Dr. Buddy Witherspoon, spoke of Jimmy Thompson's many positive influences in the state and around the nation. He also recognized the contributions and support of Joanne Thompson, Jimmy's wife. Jimmy and his wife, through the efforts of many such as Townie Sloan, mission director of Dove Broadcasting, have reached around the world with humanitarian aid. Yearly, through work with Parson of the Hills, they have collected thousands of new toys for the children of Appalachia who otherwise have nothing for Christmas. Hundreds of volunteers packed, transported, and distributed those gifts. Humanitarian aid has gone even beyond our nation in reaching out to the children of Romania in funding aid to orphanages in war-ravaged Romania. Dr. Witherspoon read a letter from Governor Mark Sanford recognizing Dr. Thompson's efforts to make life better for many. Representative Roland Smith, governor Mark Sanford's representative at the ceremony, presented the Order of the Palmetto. Representative Roland Smith himself had contributed to Dr. Thompson's nomination by writing, "Dr. Thompson's

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ministry not only encouraged people to become better South Carolinians, but encouraged them to care for others; the ministry set them on a journey of success encouraging others across the state and nation to change their lives to become honorable, outstanding and productive individuals."

As the ceremony came to a close, attendees were encouraged to write their own memories of Dr. Thompson and how he had personally touched their lives. It was clear from the outpouring of thanks on that December Sunday afternoon that "Jimmy" is truly a citizen deserving of the high recognition and award the Order of the Palmetto confers and that he is the epitome of a "life well lived."