

Dr. DeForest B. Soaries, Jr. is the Senior Pastor of First Baptist Church of Lincoln Gardens in Somerset, New Jersey. Since assuming the leadership of First Baptist in November 1990, the church membership has grown from 1,500 to 6,000 members.

A pioneer of faith-based community development, Dr. Soaries has led First Baptist in the construction on a new \$17 million church complex and the formation many not-for-profit entities to serve the community surrounding the church. Highlights of his work include recruiting families to become foster parents to 300 abandoned babies; helping 45 children find adoptive parents; constructing 96 new homes for low and moderate income residents to own; creating the first faith based Cisco Technology Academy in the country; 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.

Prior to serving at First Baptist, Dr. Soaries was the Assistant Pastor of the Shiloh Baptist Church in Trenton, New Jersey. Active in community life since his youth, Dr. Soaries worked for the Urban League and Operation PUSH while he was a college student.

From January 12, 1999 to January 15, 2002 Dr. Soaries served as New Jersey's 30th Secretary of 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.

An ardent believer in the power and importance of education, 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 was recently appointed by President George W. Bush to serve as a public director of the Federal Home Loan Bank.

Dr. Soaries has received numerous awards for his leadership and community service. He was recently recognized by the Claremont School of Theology in Claremont, California with the Kilgore Award for Creative Ministry. This award is presented annually for outstanding and innovative ministry.

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