

Rev. Dr. W. Franklyn Richardson to Receive Honorary Doctorate and Present Posthumous Degree to Nigeria's First President

Faith leader and Virginia Union University Chairman will address the University of Nigeria's Class of 2026, connecting US HBCUs and African institutions.

NSUKKA, ENUGU, NIGERIA, July 24, 2026 /EINPresswire.com/ -- In a historic moment of cultural and academic reconnection between the African Diaspora and the African continent, Rev. Dr. W. Franklyn Richardson will travel to Nsukka, Nigeria, to receive an Honorary Doctorate of Social Work from the University of Nigeria during its convocation ceremony on Saturday, July 25, 2026.

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*Rev. Dr. W. Franklyn
Richardson*

During the ceremony, Dr. Richardson will also act in his capacity as Chairman of the Board of Trustees for Virginia Union University (VUU) to present a posthumous Doctor of Laws degree, *honoris causa*, to the late Dr. Nnamdi

Azikiwe, Nigeria's first president and the visionary founder of the University of Nigeria. Dr. Azikiwe began his American academic journey in the 1920s at Storer College, a historic institution that later merged with and became a foundational pillar of Virginia Union University.

“This visit is not simply about receiving an honor; it is about recognizing that the descendants of Africa and the continent of Africa share an unbroken legacy,” said Dr. Richardson. “It is a profound privilege to return to the university founded by Dr. Azikiwe and to honor his legacy by forging new, dynamic partnerships between African institutions and Historically Black Colleges and Universities in the United States. We share the same roots, and we must build a shared future.”

The University of Nigeria is honoring Dr. Richardson for his 50 years of transformative leadership as Senior Pastor of Grace Baptist Church in Mount Vernon, New York, where he has spearheaded expansive community development initiatives, including the construction of 800 units of affordable housing.

In addition to his local impact, Dr. Richardson serves as Chairman of the Conference of National Black Churches (CNBC) and Chairman of the Board of the National Action Network (NAN), where he has spent decades advancing civil rights, social justice, and corporate diversity.

In his commencement address to the Class of 2026, Dr. Richardson will expand on the themes of his best-selling book, [Never Lost](#): The Black Church as God's Ark of the Covenant. Moving beyond the traditional view of the Black Church as a strictly American institution, Dr. Richardson frames it as a global African story, the sacred vessel that preserved African identity, leadership, resilience, and culture through the horrors of the Middle Passage until the descendants of Africa could reconnect with their ancestral home.

The University of Nigeria, founded in 1960 as the nation's first indigenous university, is rooted in the mission to "restore dignity through excellence in scholarship, innovation, and service." Dr. Richardson's visit represents a powerful step forward in uniting the intellectual, spiritual, and cultural resources of the global African community.

Rev. Dr. W. Franklyn Richardson



Note to Media: The full text of Dr. Richardson's commencement address, "Returning Home: The Ark of Our Shared Heritage," is under strict embargo until delivery. It will be available to read and download following the ceremony, at www.NeverLostBook.com. A live stream of the commencement ceremony is available on [YouTube](#).

Melissa K. Wharton

Wharton Curtis Press, An Imprint of The Church Online, LLC

+1 412-349-0049

[email us here](#)

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