



CITY OF NEW YORK
MANHATTAN COMMUNITY BOARD 10
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MANHATTAN COMMUNITY BOARD 10
RESOLUTION
Bishop James P Roberts, Sr. Street Co-Naming

RESOLUTION: To support the street co-naming of West 122nd Street between Malcolm X Boulevard and Mount Morris Park West as "Bishop James P. Roberts, Sr. Way"

WHEREAS: James P. Roberts Sr. was born on the island of Antigua on December 21, 1901. During James's early years, his father migrated to Panama to work on the construction of the Panama Canal, like many British West Indian migrant workers at the time and never returned to his homeland of Antigua. Margaret Roberts, James' mother, raised him and his sister as a single parent, instilling in them a commitment to serving.

WHEREAS: Young James Roberts immigrated to the United States and settled in Harlem, New York, where he worked as an elevator operator in a commercial building. He became a member of the Holy Cross Cathedral Orthodox Church and at night pursued a degree in theological studies. He later became a postulant in the Endich Theological Seminary under the tutelage of his Eminence Georg Alexander McGuire. Upon completion of his theological training, he was admitted to the Holy Orders as a Bishop.

WHEREAS: The early twentieth century was a turning point for Black politics. New York City and Harlem became the center of movement. The Black community started to mobilize politically lobbying for change to anti-lynching laws, better housing, as well as, education and immigration reform. Bishop Roberts was drawn to organizations that advocated for black self-determination and racial equality and joined the Jamaican-born Marcus Garvey's Universal Negro Improvement Association (UNIA). The first branch of the UNIA in the U.S. was founded in New York in 1917 with the aims of repatriation, promoting racial pride, and the need to develop more independent African states.

WHEREAS: Bishop Roberts was committed to the spiritual well-being of his Harlem community which included Caribbean immigrants and African- American migrants from the southern states. Inspired to establish a community-based church, St. Thomas Liberal Catholic Church was established on December 21, 1926 in the village of Harlem. Under his leadership, the church grew quickly and had to be relocated several times to accommodate its growth. Ultimately, a permanent structure was purchased at 147 West 144th Street in Harlem. Bishop Roberts was truly a spiritual pioneer in Harlem. Today, his son James P Roberts Jr., serves as the church's bishop.

WHEREAS: On August 22, 1934, Bishop Roberts, Sr. and a group of 22 Antiguans living in Harlem, during the "Great Depression", the worst economic crisis that hit the United States, many were homeless, and found themselves on the bread line. The Antigua Progressive Society was established to provide charitable assistance to his beloved Harlem community and the island of Antigua. The objective was to "foster friendship, promote and cultivate social, economic, and intellectual intercourse among its members, along with supporters to render aid in time of need, sickness, or death." The Society was incorporated in 1935 in New York State with an overarching mission to be "a beacon of light to all".

WHEREAS: The Antigua Progressive Society later merged with another organization and renamed

themselves the Antigua and Barbuda Progressive Society (ABPS). In 1964, the ABPS purchased a building located at 12 West 122nd Street in the village of Harlem which became its headquarters. That building is fondly referred to as the "Antigua and Barbuda House". ABPS continues to operate from this building eighty-five years after its founding in one of Harlem's Historical districts at 122nd Street and Lenox Avenue. Today, the Antigua and Barbuda Progressive Society, Inc. is a 501(c) (3) organization exclusively supporting charitable, religious and educational purposes.

WHEREAS: In 2012, the society donated the first 50 years of its records to the Manuscripts, Archives, and Rare Books Division at the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture. The following year, a public exhibit at the Schomburg Center titled "A Lighthouse in New York," showcased the records and accomplishments of ABPS.

WHEREAS: The ABPS continues the legacy of Bishop James P, Roberts, Sr., by actively engaging in the Harlem community. Among the activities, ABPS has adopted the Drew Family Day Care Center in Harlem where our annual "Holiday Toy Drive" brings joy to the children and the families of the center. ABPS also supported the Shades of Truth Theater. We have partnered with the local churches such as: Ephesus Seventh-Day Adventist Church, Greater Calvary Baptist Church and the Beulah Wesleyan Methodist Church. We also support women's homeless shelter, organize local book drives for children to promote literacy, serve Thanksgiving Dinner, as well as provide "take out" dinners at our headquarters. In our homeland of Antigua & Barbuda, we host an annual blood drive at Mount Saint John Medical Centre in Antigua.

WHEREAS: The APBS has a strong connection with the local Harlem community and actively helps to foster transnational connections with communities back in Antigua. More importantly, the society has been able to successfully engage younger members and encourage their participation within the society, which has ultimately led to the growth of its membership.

WHEREAS: The APBS continues to hold relevance to not only Caribbean immigrants in New York, but West Indians in the Caribbean as well, as is witnessed by the society hosting Antiguan dignitaries, such as the Governor General of Antigua and Barbuda, Sir Rodney Williams, at their meetings and working in conjunction with the New York Consulate General of Antigua and Barbuda. In April 2015, the Consulate announced that it would begin to provide mobile services at the Antigua and Barbuda House in Harlem, every third Saturday of the month, offering "easier accessibility to consular services such as passport processing, precinct letters, emergency travel documents and, advice on national services."

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that Manhattan Community Board 10 wishes to remember Bishop James P. Roberts, Sr. by formally requesting that the New York City Council and the Mayor of New York City enact legislation to support the co-naming of West 122nd Street between Malcolm X Boulevard and Mount Morris Park West to "Bishop James P. Roberts, Sr. Way" on March 4, 2020 by a vote of 24 YES 0 NO, 0 ABSTENTIONS, and 0 recusals.