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Warren, Lowery to deliver inauguration blessings

Adelle M. Banks Religion News Service | Dec. 18, 2008

Megachurch pastor Rick Warren and civil rights leader Rev. Joseph Lowery will deliver the invocation and benediction, respectively, at President-elect Barack Obama?s inauguration next month (Jan 20).

The roles of Warren, a best-selling author and leader of Saddleback Church in Lake Forest, Calif., and Lowery, who co-founded the Southern Christian Leadership Conference with the late Rev. Martin Luther King Jr., were announced Wednesday (Dec. 17) by the Joint Congressional Committee on Inaugural Ceremonies.

In addition to the swearing-in of Obama by Supreme Court Chief Justice John Roberts and the inaugural address, the Jan. 20 ceremony will include a range of musical performers. Aretha Franklin, widely known as the "Queen of Soul," will sing, and violinist Itzhak Perlman and cellist Yo-Yo Ma will be members of a quartet performing selection composed by John Williams.

Yale University professor Elizabeth Alexander will read a poem and Sen. Dianne Feinstein, chairman of the inaugural committee, will give welcoming remarks.

"The inauguration of President-elect Barack Obama will be an event of historic proportion," said Feinstein, D-Calif. "It is appropriate that the program will include some of the world's most gifted artists from a wide range of backgrounds and genres.

Some groups were crtical of Obama?s choosing Warren, because the Califorina pastor backed legislation outlawing gay marriage and he is ardently anti-abortion.

"(It's) shrewd politics, but if anyone is under any illusion that Obama is interested in advancing gay equality, they should probably sober up now," Andrew Sullivan wrote on the Atlantic Web site Wednesday.

Joe Solmonese, president of the **Human Rights Campaign** [1], which lobbies for lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender equal rights, said he felt a "deep level of disrespect" over Warren's selection and called upon Obama to reconsider.

"By inviting Rick Warren to your inauguration, you have tarnished the view that gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender Americans have a place at your table," Solmonese said in a letter to Obama that was made public by his organization.

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