

CITATION FOR HONORARY DEGREE PRESENTATION:

Olive Camp Johnson is strong and sensitive, plain-speaking and gracious. Her personality and her life reflect an unusual sense of balance and proportion, an admirable concern for people and causes of wide-ranging diversity. Those who know her best describe her as “one of the most caring and thoughtful people in the world.” And it is this particular characteristic, among so many others that might be mentioned, that has brought us to this moment and to this ceremony today.

Giving of herself and her substance in support of worthy individuals and causes has come so naturally to Olive throughout the years that she would be the last to think of what she does as anything out of the ordinary. But it is; and that is why we honor her. The Doctor of Humane Letters degree is awarded to those who have embodied in themselves, and most importantly have demonstrated through their actions, the spirit and ideals that characterize the humanities as understood in their broadest sense. The words humane, humanism and humanist are closely related; they simply emphasize different aspects of the same worthy concept – or in this instance, the same worthy person.

The spirit of the humanities is seen in what we would call the humane traits of kindness and compassion. This is the spirit that compels a person to focus on and reach out to fellow human beings, right here and right now, in an effort to help. This is the spirit that prompts a person to engage with the life of one's community, to champion causes, to speak out, to take a stand. Among other things, humanism is understood as the movement from the abstract contemplation of the value of helping, to concrete action in the world whereby a life is in some way and to some measure made better than it would otherwise have been – or a problem, even if not perfectly resolved, becomes just a little less serious. And while there are many and lengthy definitions of the word “humanist,” there is one that applies especially well to Olive Johnson. A humanist is one who is concerned with the welfare of human beings – and as someone who knows her well has said about Olive, “Her life is all about others.”

A dear friend describes her as “compassionate, gentle, tender, charitable, kind and sympathetic.” She has done more than we will ever know. But what we do know is that she has worked with Meals on Wheels for twenty-eight years. She has been taking lunch to workers building Habitat houses since the organization's inception in her community. She has been on the State Board of

the North Carolina Nature Conservancy, and the Boards of the Moore County Symphony and Bethany House – a substance abuse halfway house for female adolescents. She has worked with the Moore County Charitable Foundation and supported Page Memorial Library in Aberdeen. And we are fortunate to be able to say that she has been a member of the St. Andrews Presbyterian College Board of Trustees since 1989, sharing herself and her resources with typical generosity.

For all these reasons, and for so many more, and because she embodies in her person and in her life the essence and spirit of the humanities, the Board of Trustees, upon the recommendation of the Faculty, has approved and does present Olive Camp Johnson to receive the degree Doctor of Humane Letters, *honoris causa* on this third day of May 2008.