

# CIVILIANS

The Magazine For The Department by The Department

Vol. 61 Issue 5

1998

BY R.A. CHERYL ACOSTA

When Reverend Dr. Suzan D. Johnson Cook was named the NYPD's first-ever female chaplain in 1990, it was a most historic designation. At the time of her appointment she was the senior pastor at Mariners' Temple Baptist Church, the city's oldest American Baptist Church, which is located on Henry Street on the fringes of Chinatown. She was elected to that position in 1983, making her the first African-American woman to be elected to an American Baptist Church anywhere in the country in its 200-year history. She developed the popular Wednesday lunch-hour church services, which has been attended by many employees of One Police Plaza, and are still being held today.

"Being a department chaplain has been a blessing and a rewarding experience," said Rev. Dr. Johnson Cook. "As a spiritual arm of the NYPD, chaplains provide spiritual counseling to all members of the department and are a pastoral presence for their family members as well."

As a department chaplain she is often summoned to the scene of critical incidents, and is on call for emergencies 24-hours-a-day. Faced with the multitudes of emotions of other, as well as her own emotions during these times of crisis, is a perpetual test of strength and endurance. "I find it a real challenge to translate a spiritual message into a practical one," she said. The reverend also performs the invocations and benedictions at NYPD ceremonies, and is sought after to participate in many of the joyous events earmarking the lives of department employees and their families.

While continuing as both an NYPD chaplain and senior pastor at Mariners' Temple Baptist Church, Rev. Dr. Johnson Cook was selected as a White House Fellow for the 1993-94 class. The Fellows are a select group of men and women who spend a year serving as paid executives to the President, Vice-President, or cabinet-level officials. She took a leave of absence from the department and relocated to Washington, D.C., where she wrote speeches and focused on domestic policy issues such as homelessness, violence, and community empowerment.

Two years ago the reverend resigned from Mariners' Temple Baptist Church after 13 years to pursue her lifelong dream of creating a church in the Bronx neighborhood where she was raised. She is the founder and senior pastor of the Bronx Christian Fellowship Church near Yankee Stadium, where she leads a congregation of 300 members. In 1997, she was a one-year appointee to President Clinton's National Advisory Board on Race. That appointment was another first, as she was the only faith leader and New Yorker on the board.

The busy reverend is also the editor and co-author of five books, including the acclaimed, "Sister to Sister: Devotions For and From Women." Her most recent book, "Too Blessed to be Stressed: Words of Wisdom For Women on the Move," could easily be excerpted from the pages of her own life.

Reverend Dr. Johnson Cook was ordained in 1982 at the Union Baptist Church in Harlem. She obtained her master's of divinity degree from Union Theological Seminary, and her doctorate of ministry from the United Theological Seminary in Dayton, Ohio. She also graduated cum laude from Emerson College with a bachelor's of science degree, and received her master's of arts degree in educational media from Columbia University. Reverend Dr. Johnson Cook devotes most of her free time to the Bronx Christian Fellowship Church, expanding and developing new programs that are aimed at directing youths towards a positive path. Because of her enormously popular life-changing messages, she is also a most sought after national motivational speaker. Along with her husband of seven years, Ronald, and their two children, Samuel David and Christopher Daniel, the reverend resides in the Bronx.