

Cover  
Story

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# Rev. Suzan Johnson Cook

## Mega dreams coming true in the Bronx

By Jean Wells

They came out of their corporate offices in droves, forgoing expense account lunches and bargain-hunting at Century 21 to spend an hour every Wednesday with a Baptist preacher. No, not just any Baptist preacher. This was the Rev. Suzan Johnson Cook and they came to join in her Lunch Hour of Power at Mariner's Temple Baptist Church at the corner of Henry and Oliver Streets on the tip of Manhattan.

In 1983 with a Masters Degree in Divinity from Union Theological Seminary Rev. Cook was appointed pastor of the faltering church, becoming the first African American woman to be named pastor by the American Baptist Association in its 200 year history.

Working tirelessly and with her usual dedication and creativity, the congregation grew steadily and she began to build a name for herself as an electrifying orator and speaker whose messages are relevant.

In 1996 Johnson Cook took the lunch hour services up to the Bronx and started services at the Epworth United Methodist Church in Concourse Village.

A few months later, in June, she left Mariner's Temple to found her own church. During her 13 year ministry at Mariner's Temple, Dr. Cook had built an active and passionate ministry. Rev. Johnson Cook says that shortly after beginning the lunch hour services in the Bronx she received a vision from God that told her "This is your new community." And she has made it just that. After three moves and with a steadily growing congregation the church has finally settled into its permanent home, a former Jewish

synagogue. They had rented space, sharing it with Temple Judea. But in March when they purchased the building with a \$150,000 down payment the Jewish congregation moved out.

Considered one of the Bronx's fastest growing churches, Bronx Fellowship Christian Church is developing a range of services its community was desperately in need of. Along with plans for economic development projects, a technical and career training center and other programs designed to empower people. Bronx Fellowship has already established a mentoring component and sports and dance programs. A \$100,00 donation from USA Network head, philanthropist Barry Diller.

Though her duties as a leader of her burgeoning flock seem daunting, Johnson Cook also has an impressive record of community involvement in both local and national arenas.

A pioneer and a trailblazer, she is uninhibited in the midst of challenge. She is president of the New York Coalition of 100 Black women, the largest African American Women's civic organization in New York City. She is the only African American woman and faith community leader appointed by President Clinton to the historic President's Initiative on Race. She is the New York City Police Department's only female chaplain.

In 1993, she served on the Domestic Policy Council in the White House and from 1994-1997 with HUD Secretary for Faith Initiatives. In 1997 Ebony Magazine selected Dr. Cook as one of the top 15 women in ministry in the nation and in the same year she was honored by Time Out magazine as one of New York's top five preachers.

An advocate for children and young people, she is Executive Director of the Multi-ethnic Center for Children and Families. One of her most recent projects is the creation of JONCO Productions, Inc. Dr. Cook is co-founder and CEO of the company, which organizes conferences, runs a speakers bureau and arranges her speaking engagements and media/book distributions. Speaking of books, the lady is also an author. Too Blessed to be Stressed: Words of Wisdom for Women on the Move (Nelson:Nashville) was published in 1998. The best-selling book emerged out of her national seminars for women.

Sister Strength (Nelson:Nashville) is a collection of devotionals for and from African American women and includes 48 authors. She is in demand throughout the United States, the Caribbean and Africa as a preacher, teacher, motivational speaker and seminar leader. She is a frequent and engaging guest on radio and television news and talk programs.

Suzan Johnson Cook is a graduate of Harvard University's President's Administrative Fellows Program and Emerson College in Boston (B.S. cum laude); Columbia University Teacher's College in New York, Union Theological Seminary (M.A. & M. Div) and United Theological Seminary in Ohio where she received her Doctorate in Ministry.

It is clear that Rev. Dr. Suzan Johnson Cook has prepared herself to accomplish mega things. And now that her mega dreams are coming true she says that her dreams will just get bigger.