

# Community Harlem News

"Good News You Can Use"

Vol. 5 No. 11

March 23, 2006

FREE

## BLACK CHURCHES AND MOSQUES UNITE TO FIGHT AIDS

On Friday, March 10th hands clapped, feet stomped, tambourines shook and folks testified in an effort to stop the transmission of HIV/AIDS and provide compassion for people affected by the disease. "A Healing in Harlem: An 8-hour Prayer & Gospel Vigil for the Healing of AIDS" was held from 4PM to 12 midnight at Harlem's Salvation and Deliverance Church. Presented by Harlem Congregations for Community Improvement, Inc. (HCCI), this community rally against HIV/AIDS was hosted by the legendary gospel singer Dr. Cissy Houston (mother of Whitney Houston) and featured more than 16 choirs from the tri-state area. The vigil was held in concert with thousands of churches across the nation observing the Black Church Week of Prayer for the Healing of AIDS.

The William F. Ryan Medical Center provided on-site HIV/AIDS testing. "We were there from 8pm to 12 midnight and it takes about 45 minutes to conduct a test," said Evans Asumang, Coordinator of Counseling and Testing at The Ryan Center. We reached a good number of people."

"We host this vigil each year because the spread of HIV/AIDS is the number one public health crisis in our community," said (The Reverend) Canon Frederick B. Williams, Chairman of HCCI. "We realize that in order to stop the spread of AIDS, we have to encourage people to get tested, erase the stigma associated with the disease, and discuss the virus as often as possible."

According to the Centers of Disease Control and Prevention, the rate of infection among African Americans has exploded over the past decade. AIDS is the leading cause of death among African American women ages 25



After more than seven hours of song and praise, Bishop Norman Quick brought the enthusiastic crowd to their feet.

to 34 and is the leading cause of death for African-American men ages 35-44. As a Certified Partner of the Balm in Gilead, HCCI works with the other 300 congregations in Harlem to promote the importance of the Black Church Week of Prayer and provide technical assistance that shows congregations how they can become involved and effectively address the issue.

"We joined this effort to show solidarity around this issue because HIV/AIDS is clearly ravaging the Black community," said Imam Pasha, an HCCI board member. "We want to make sure that our people are informed

about the disease and know how to avoid contracting the virus."

HCCI kicked off the Black Church Week of Prayer for the Healing of AIDS with a breakfast at Harlem's St. Charles Borromeo Church on Friday March 3, 2006. Featuring a keynote address by Rev. W. Franklyn Richardson, the breakfast was attended by a multi-faith contingency of clergy, AIDS ministry coordinators and local service providers. Breakfast participants were also treated to an excerpted reading of Yvette Heyliger's play "What Would Jesus Do?"



The legendary Dr. Cissy Houston is greeted by Brother J.C. Joseph of Gospel 1 Radio.

Located in New York City's Harlem community, HCCI was formed in 1986 as a diverse interfaith consortium of more than 90 congregations. It is a multi-service organization with five divisions, one of which is the Office of Health and Wellness Strategies (HWS). HWS provides education, outreach and technical assistance to the community about the health disparities that affect the Harlem community including HIV/AIDS, along with housing and a WIC Program site.