



Reverend Cynthia "Nailah" Nelson is a graduate of the Galena Park Independent School District. There she received numerous University Interscholastic League Awards for her skills in debate, poetry and dramatic interpretation. She received her Bachelors of Arts Degree from Texas Southern University in Communications. She was one of the pioneers in establishing 90.9 FM KTSU Radio Station as an on air personality and served as the 1430 AM KCOH community program announcer. She matriculated to Texas Tech University to pursue a Masters' Degree in Communications under the funding of fellows awarded to her by the American Women in Radio and Television and the W.K Kellogg Foundation. While there, she served as an on air personality for

KLBK TV in Lubbock, TX.

She worked for twenty years as a transportation logistician, sales, and customer service specialist for a number of global energy, chemical, and transportation corporations. In 1979, she joined the Shrine of the Black Madonna of the Pan African Orthodox Christian Church in Houston where she worked in a number of areas. In 1985, she was the first member to move into the church's newly established Missionary Training Institute. Most notably, she officiated at Sunday services and sang in the choir as a premier soloist. In 1993, Jaramogi Abebe Agyeman selected her to be ordained into the ministry.

From 1997-2007 she took a leave of absence from the church and from corporate America to care for her widowed mother, two widowed aunts and an uncle. In 2007, her mother was the last of her relatives to pass away. She immediately returned to active participation in the church. In 2009, she became the Executive Director of the Shrine Houston Community Development Corporation, dedicated to the development of affordable housing in the greater Third Ward community. In 2012, Reverend Nelson became the Executive Director of the Shrine of the Black Madonna Bookstore and Cultural Center in Houston that had been closed due to hurricane damage. She immediately shifted its focus to serving as an event center. Over the last four years, it has become Houston's premiere black event and consciousness elevating venue. Each weekend the Shrine Cultural Center hosts events and classes that provide enlightenment, inspiration, education and services to the Houston community.

In November 2015, she introduced the Buy Black Marketplace to provide an opportunity for local Black vendors to market their products and services to the Black community encouraging the practice of spending our dollars in our own community whenever possible in order to build businesses and jobs. The Buy Black Marketplace has grown each month since its inception. Vendors come from many surrounding cities to participate in this effort. She has inspired other cities around the country to establish their own marketplaces and has been asked to help facilitate their development. This year Nailah arranged with the support of community barbers for children returning to school to receive free haircuts and hair-braiding and free school supplies. Under her leadership, the Shrine Cultural Center has also served as a successful incubator for fledgling grassroots organizations that seek to make a positive difference in the Black community. Young people who she has mentored refer to her affectionately as "Queen Mother."

Community participants in the cultural center's activity include Jack n Jill, 100 Black Men, Houston Museum of African American Culture, Organization for Black Unity, Black Lives Matter, Ta-Seti Historical Society, The People's Law Study Group, The National Black United Front, Nation Liberation, The Masons, Eastern Star, Omega Psi Phi, Phi Beta Sigma, Delta Sigma Theta, Broken Chains Cultural Awareness Development Group, Houston Livestock Show and Rodeo, Wheeler Avenue Baptist Church, Nation of Islam Mosque #45, Shape Community Center, Mayor Sylvester Turner, Councilwoman Amanda Edwards and many more. In August 2016, she arranged for Dr. Boyce Watkins to hold the All Black National Convention at the Shrine Cultural Center in Atlanta, GA. The convention brought together thousands of people from throughout the country and the Pan African Diaspora.

Due to the success of the Houston Shrine Cultural Center, Reverend Cynthia Nailah Nelson has been appointed as National Program Coordinator for the Shrine Cultural Centers as we seek to develop all of our cultural centers on the Houston model.