Dr. Kevin R. Johnson



Dr. Kevin R. Johnson's journey as a visionary leader, believer, and builder began at the tender age of 16 when he was licensed to preach at his home church, David Chapel Missionary Baptist Church in Austin, Texas. This early calling set the foundation for a life dedicated to spiritual leadership and community transformation, culminating as a nationally recognized religious leader.

Called in June 2024 to become the 21st Senior Pastor of The Abyssinian Baptist Church, Dr. Johnson succeeds his mentor, the late Rev. Dr. Calvin O. Butts, III, marking a new chapter in Abyssinian's storied legacy. As the first African American Baptist Church in New York State and one of the oldest in the nation, Abyssinian is renowned as the "flagship" church and holds a place of profound significance in American religious and cultural life. Since accepting the call as pastor, Dr. Johnson has already made an impact, with over 308 new members joining the church since he began his tenure. His vision for Abyssinian involves honoring its rich legacy while breathing new life into its mission, positioning the church to address the spiritual and social needs of the 21st century.

Dr. Johnson's path to this prestigious position was paved with faith in God, family, academic excellence, and a commitment to service. He attended Morehouse College, where he graduated Phi Beta Kappa and Magna Cum Laude, having been awarded both the Martin Luther King Jr. and Oprah Winfrey scholarships. His thirst for knowledge and leadership skills led him to earn a Master of Divinity degree as a Union Scholar from Union Theological Seminary and later, a Doctor of Education (Ed.D.) degree in Organizational Leadership and Transformational Learning from Columbia University.

Prior to his role at Abyssinian, Dr. Johnson founded and led Dare to Imagine Church, Inc. in Philadelphia. Starting with just 20 people meeting in his home, he grew the congregation to 1,500 members in seven years, developing a $2.2 million, 6.8-acre campus in the Mt. Airy section of the city. This growth was not just in numbers, but in impact: the church has donated over $750,000 to support local organizations providing services to citizens in need.

Dr. Johnson's influence extends beyond the pulpit. As President and CEO of Philadelphia Opportunities Industrialization Center (OIC), he revolutionized workforce training in the city. He developed new programs in banking, energy, construction, and technology, increasing the organization's budget from $2 million to over $5 million. His innovative approach led to securing a $6.6 million alternative school contract from The School District of Philadelphia, creating pathways for over-aged and under-credited youth to earn high school diplomas and access life-sustaining careers.

His commitment to community development is further evidenced by his role as founder and President & CEO of Dare to Imagine Community Development Corporation. Previously, as President & CEO of Bridge of Hope Community Development Corporation, he collaborated with The Goldenberg Group to build a $100 million, 14-story student apartment tower for Temple University, demonstrating his ability to bring large-scale projects to fruition.

Dr. Johnson's influence reaches far beyond Philadelphia. He has been invited to speak at some of the world's most prestigious religious institutions, including the largest Protestant church in the world, Yoido Full Gospel Church in Seoul, South Korea. He made history as the first African-American in 200 years to speak at Africa's oldest Baptist church, Regent Road Baptist in Freetown, Sierra Leone. Inspired by this experience, he raised funds to establish a new church in West Africa - Bright Hope Baptist Church in Moyamba, Sierra Leone.

His expertise and insights are regularly sought by media outlets. Dr. Johnson has been featured on major networks such as CNN, NBC, MSNBC, ABC, and FOX NEWS. He reaches 400,000 listeners every Sunday morning on WDAS-FM 105.3 and pens columns for The Philadelphia Tribune, the oldest continually-running African-American newspaper. Newsweek has recognized him as one of the "up-and-coming" national post-Civil Rights ministers.

Throughout his career, Dr. Johnson has been actively involved in various organizations, serving on boards such as the Greater Philadelphia Chamber of Commerce, City of Philadelphia Workforce Steering Committee, and PHL Diversity. He is a member of Omega Psi Phi Fraternity and Sigma Pi Phi Fraternity (Alpha Boulé), and holds a lifetime membership in the Morehouse College National Alumni Association.

Despite his numerous professional accomplishments, Dr. Johnson remains grounded in his personal life. He is married to Mrs. Kimya S. P. Johnson, Esq., a corporate diversity professional and employment attorney. They are the proud parents of three children—a son, an alum of Morehouse College and New York University, and two daughters--one a sophomore at Spelman College and the other a high school senior in Public Schools.

From his early calling at 16 to his current role leading one of the nation's most historic churches, Dr. Kevin R. Johnson's life and career exemplify a commitment to education, spiritual leadership, and community development. His ability to transform organizations, inspire individuals, and create lasting change has made him a respected figure in both religious and secular circles. As he continues his work at The Abyssinian Baptist Church, Dr. Johnson stands poised to usher in a new era of growth and impact, building on the church's rich history while breathing new life into its mission and vision.