



Event recognizes first ladies of the church

By JULIANA ACCIOLY

Entrusted with the spiritual lives of their members, church pastors are celebrated for the time, energy, devotion and prayers they invest in their congregations and communities they serve.

But so far, much less has been said about the work of the women behind them, the

pastors' wives and first ladies of the church. With arms and hearts big enough to embrace their immediate and spiritual family, they collaborate with their husbands to ensure the overall religious and civic work of the church, and sometimes even work as minister themselves.

The contributions of these mothers of the black

community will be honored on July 11 at the "ICABA Salutes South Florida's Leading First Ladies of Worship" event, where the Top 100 first ladies nominated by the public will gather at a recognition brunch at the Westin Diplomat Resort & Spa in Hollywood.

"Our company is dedicated to identifying and recognizing accomplished individuals who make a difference in our community," said Jerome Hutchinson Jr. CEO of ICABA (Identifying, Connecting and Activating the Black Accomplished), a Weston-based company dedicated to connecting black professionals, entrepreneurs and community leaders.

"And our First Ladies provide substantive leadership to their churches and communities."

The public may nominate first ladies by visiting ICABA's website. The deadline to do so is April 10.

Among the nominees is El pagnier Kay Hudson, who for seven years has been a co-pastor with her husband at the Cathedral of Hope

Ministry in Delray Beach.

She said it is important to raise awareness of the evolution of the role of first ladies within the church and community.

"I remember growing up that first ladies were seen as beautiful, but you could not reach out and touch them,"

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she said. "Now we are open and accessible; we can be change agents to what is positive," she added, noting that the event will also demonstrate the variations of the roles that come under the title.

Hudson is a director of human resources at Florida Atlantic University. In the church, she makes joint decisions for the ministry, preaches, and performs weddings together with her husband, in addition to leading several community projects.

Another nominee, Pastor



Pastor Yvette Brinson

Yvette Brinson, is the co-founder of the Redeeming Word Christian Center International in Fort Lauderdale. At 55, the mother of 4 and grandmother of 15 makes time not only to collaborate with her husband,



El pagnier Kay Hudson

but she also reaches out to the community with mentoring, educational and counseling programs.

"Many people have preconceived ideas about the role of a first lady — they think it's somebody who sits



Clarissa Willis

in the front row, but they don't know the amount of duties that come with the title," she said. "Things are changing as more people are touched by our work within the community."

Clarissa Willis of Miami

Shores, first lady of the Church of the Open Door in Liberty City, said she uses her career to express her spirituality.

As a commercial real-estate broker with the firm CB Richard Ellis, Willis said, she focuses on helping non-profits and religious organizations make good commercial real-estate decisions.

Willis, another ICABA First Ladies nominee, is the wife of the Rev. Dr. R. Joaquin Willis, the Church of the Open Door's pastor.

"I try to help my husband further his ministry in the church and in the com-

munity, but also I consider my career as a ministry," she said.

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IF YOU GO

WHAT: Recognition Brunch: ICABA Salutes South Florida's Leading First Ladies of Worship

WHEN: July 11

WHERE: Westin Diplomat Resort & Spa, Hollywood

COST: \$80. Tickets can be purchased at www.ICABA-World.com