

**Dianna "Chekesha" Baker** was one of the first members to join the Shrine of the Black Madonna when the church opened its doors in Houston, Texas. Her unique gift as a premier vocalist helped to revamp the music ministry of the Shrine toward more traditional gospel. This shift enabled Shrine 10 to be more appealing and readily accepted by the Houston community, facilitating explosive growth and popularity. The founder and first Holy Patriarch, Jaramogi Abebe Agyeman featured her vocal talents in church services and at the first Pan African Synod held in Houston in 1978. This exposure was influential in getting Shrines in other cities to follow the success enjoyed by Shrine 10.

In 1980, at the request of Jaramogi Abebe, Chekesha moved with her children to Detroit to help him introduce the Science of KUA. In Detroit, she noticed how progressive the church was in the methods used to educate children. The seven to ten-year-olds were learning computer programming at a time when the advantages of personal computers were still not commonly understood. But what really got her attention was the nursery program. Jaramogi required everyone who worked with nursery children to master a course in the cutting-edge program DISTAR (Direct Instructional System for Teaching Arithmetic and Reading) developed by Scientific Research Associates. She was impressed and inspired by four-year olds that could spell four syllable words and were reading on a third-grade level. Chekesha felt a call to dedicate her life to teaching young children to read. She learned the program and made a commitment to share its benefits with black children everywhere.

She moved back to Houston in 1982 and was hired by the Small World Learning Center in the Hillcroft Square Apartments. She quit her high paying job at Texas Instruments and took a much lower wage to pursue her passion. Soon, she had three-year-olds reading on a first-grade level. Her success led to rapid growth of the school and gave many children a life-altering head start into a process of lifelong learning.

After ten years of success, she was afforded the opportunity to help open the Uboru School at Covenant Glen United Methodist Church. As director, she was given the freedom to realize her vision and to grow and explore utilizing her own teaching philosophy.

Ten years later, God blessed Ms. Baker with her own school, appropriately named, Baker's Prep. She developed loyal and hard-working teachers who shared her passion and vision of excellence for black children. Baker's Prep has flourished for the last eighteen years. These teachers are now teaching the children of their former students who realize and appreciate the value of the education that they received.

Chekesha is widely recognized as an educational pioneer. She has received numerous awards and recognitions for her contributions by many organizations, including the NAACP. "Ms. Baker," as she is affectionately known by her students, gives thanks to Almighty God who opened her eyes to what she was intended to do. She recognizes that God put her in the right places and put the right people in her path to realize her vision and to carry out God ' s mission to nurture the genius in His little ones and to help them find God's purpose for their lives in this world.