

Leona H. Cooper and M. Athalie Range TWO African American Catholic Women Activists

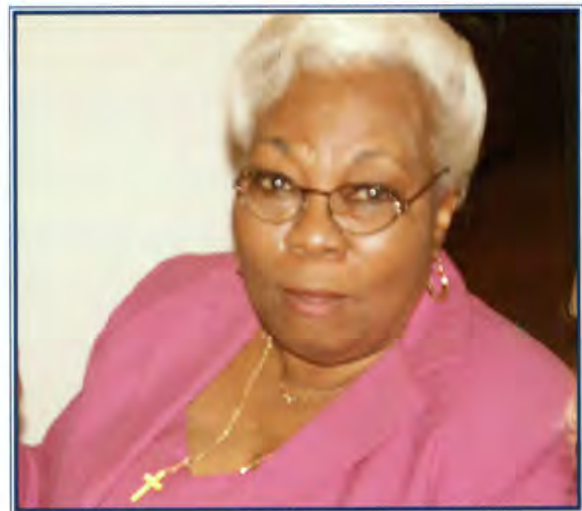


s. Leona H. Cooper is an active member of St. Hugh Catholic Church in Coconut Grove, Miami, where she is currently a lay Reader (Lector) and Eucharistic Minister. She is also a member of the St. Hugh Women's Guild and a Past President of the Parish Council.

A native of Nassau in the Bahamas, she completed Booker T. Washington High School in Miami, and began her career as a microbiologist in the medical laboratories of Jackson Memorial Hospital and Mount Sinai Hospital. She currently is a supervisory microbiologist at the Miami Veterans Administration Medical Center. Ms. Cooper has received numerous commendations from fellow professionals and has been published in major medical journals. She has acted as the Black Employment Manager and coordinator of the Brown Bag Seminars, Martin Luther King, Jr. Day, and Black History activities at the Miami VA. In 1968 Ms. Cooper founded the St. Martin de Porres Association, an organization of Black lay Catholics in the Archdiocese of Miami committed to the goal of improving the status of Black Catholics. During her presidency, projects such as the Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Birthday Commemorative Mass, Black History Month Celebration, and specially intentioned Masses for the feast day and anniversary of the Canonization of St. Martin de Porres have been instituted in the Archdiocese of Miami.

In recognition of her service she was presented with the Pro Ecclesia et Pontifice Award from Pope John Paul II on December 8, 1992, at St. Mary Cathedral, by Archbishop Edward A. McCarthy. St. Thomas University conferred an Honorary Doctorate of Humane Letters upon Ms. Cooper at the Spring Commencement in May 1993. In 1999, she was invested as Lady Leona H. Cooper in The Equestrian Order of the Holy Sepulcher of Jerusalem. She was one of several Miami-Dade County women honored for outstanding achievements by the Coalition for Women and the Historical Museum of Southern Florida during Women's History Month in March 1991. She was honored as a Pioneer by the Miami-Dade County Parks & Recreation Department at its annual "In the Company of Women" celebration in 1992. Other awards include: "Lumen Christi" from the Catholic Educators Guild (1991), and recognition among "Coral Gables' Best" by Mayor Raul Valdes-Fauli.

Her board memberships include: Archdiocese of Miami's Catholic Charities; Catholic Commission for Social Advocacy (Chairperson); Board of Trustees of Catholic Charities USA, Washington, DC;



Ms. Leona H. Cooper.

Miami-Dade County Health Policy Authority (Vice Chairperson); Board of Trustees of Human Rights Institute, St. Thomas University; Carrolton School of the Sacred Heart; Camillus House; and Miami Children's Hospital.

The mother of five children and the grandmother of six, she resides in Coral Gables with her husband, William. Both are affiliated with the Lola B. Walker Homeowners Association. She served on the City of Coral Gables Trial Board for two and one-half terms.

Ms. M. Athalie Range is an active member of Holy Redeemer Parish in Miami. She contributes her time and energy to the St. Margaret Mary Guild and to the Knights of St. Peter Claver, Ladies Auxiliary. Born in Key West, she migrated with her family at an early age to Miami, where she would become one



Ms. M. Athalie Range.

of the city's--and nation's--most influential African American voices, as much "behind the scenes" as in her many public appearances. Professionally, she is a licensed embalmer and funeral director, a graduate of the New England Institute of Anatomy and Embalming, in Boston, Massachusetts.

She was the first black and second woman elected to the City of Miami Commission where she served for five and one half years. In the 1970's Governor Reubin Askew appointed her the first black to head a department in the State of Florida, as Secretary of the Department of Community Affairs. She is Past President of the Martin Luther King, Jr. Boulevard Development Corporation, and past member of the Southern Growth Conference Committee.

As Miami commissioner, Ms. Range introduced numerous ordinances, including stringent handgun laws, updated fire codes, and dedication of land under expressways for use as parks and play areas. Activity in community and political affairs has earned her widespread respect and thanks including more than 125 public awards. Among the organizations she presently serves are Black Archives, Tacoley Economic Development Corporation, Belafonte-Tacoley Center, Greater Miami Urban League, Miami-Dade County Chamber of Commerce, and the National Conference of Christians and Jews.

On her eightieth birthday, Ms. Range established the M. Athalie Range Cultural Arts Foundation to enhance and expand community awareness of African American Performing Arts in South Florida; to provide a forum for distinguished African American performers; to pay tribute to selected honorees for exemplary achievements to the community; and to provide scholarships to young people pursuing careers in the performing arts.

In December 2000 Pope John Paul II conferred on her the honor Pro Ecclesia et Pontifice. At the same time she was made a Dame of St. Gregory.