Minister of Education

By TANANGACHI MFUNI
Amsterdam News Staff

Michael A. Baston's office at Berkeley College's midtown campus is a newly painted banana color.

"It's warming," said Berkeley's dean of student development and campus life, who explained his students helped him paint it.

Baston, who oversees the gamut of student life—from student body he oversees in New Jersey and New York.

What's the Cliff Notes version of Baston's sermons? Change your life because it's not as good as it can be.

"To me, the word of God says, 'You can do better than this,'" observed Baston, who desires his students, whether they are in the dungeon or penthouse of the skyscraper of life, to achieve higher.

As a boy growing up in Jamaica, Queens, Baston had dreams like the sky, wishing one day to be elected president of the United States.

His mom advised him to become a lawyer, as most politicians practice law.

"She said you can do it," recalled Baston, whose mom recently passed.

Her faith-filled words reverberated in Baston, now in his thirties, who after graduating from New Rochelle's Iona College, pursued a law degree at Brooklyn Law School.

Yet even as an associate at

(Continued on Page 36)

Black New Yorkers admission to retention—sees himself as more than an administrator.

"I'm a father, a preacher, a doctor, a nurse, a counselor...anything that you can imagine," said Baston, who has the uncanny ability to be tender and tough.

"For most of the students, I'm the only dean they know," Baston said, adding jovially, "They know if they need a kick in the pants...I'll do it!"

A Baptist minister active in his Queens church, Baston preaches a message of self and community empowerment without ever quoting a scripture.

"I'm a preacher with a captive audience of 3,000 strong," quipped Baston of the Berkeley...
Black New Yorkers

admission to retention—sees himself as more than an administrator.

"I’m a father, a preacher, a doctor, a nurse, a counselor...anything that you can imagine," said Baston, who has the uncanny ability to be tender and tough.

"For most of the students, I’m the only dean they know," Baston said, adding jovially, "They know if they need a kick in the pants...I’ll do it!"

A Baptist minister active in his Queens church, Baston preaches a message of self and community empowerment without ever quoting a scripture.

"I’m a preacher with a captive audience of 3,000 strong," quipped Baston of the Berkeley student body he oversees in New Jersey and New York.

What’s the Cliff Notes version of Baston’s sermons? "Change your life because it’s not as good as it can be."

"To me, the word of God says, ‘You can do better than this,'" observed Baston, who desires his students, whether they are in the dungeon or penthouse of the skyscraper of life, to achieve higher.

As a boy growing up in Jamaica, Queens, Baston had dreams like the sky, wishing one day to be elected president of the United States.

His mom advised him to become a lawyer, as most politicians practice law.

“She said you can do it,” recalled Baston, whose mom recently passed.

Her faith-filled words reverberated in Baston, now in his thirties, who after graduating from New Rochelle’s Iona College, pursued a law degree at Brooklyn Law School.

Yet even as an associate at...

(Continued on Page 36)

Baston

(Continued from Page 5)

a New York-based law firm, Baston was involved in educational causes representing learning institutions as well as non-profit and religious organizations.

Joining Berkeley’s paralegal department as an adjunct professor, Baston quickly rose to his present position, which he has held since 2002.

He has approached the arduous task of overseeing the college’s six locations as a venture in community building.

It’s something he learned while growing up in Rochdale Village, the populous, middle-class African-American cooperative in Queens.

“I was born and raised with this sense of community,” said the newly married Baston, who still resides in Rochdale with his wife, Reverend Tasha Sharon Baston.

“Where we’re going as a community depends on where we’re going as a community,” Baston remarked as he tapped his temple. For Baston, the practical, career-driven education Berkeley delivers is what students of color need to flourish in an increasingly global job market.

“We don’t have the luxury of going to college to find ourselves,” said Baston, boasting, “I’m at a place that says when you graduate, you should be able to have a job. [Actually] when you leave this place you should have more than a job, you should have skills.”

Whether in the classroom, the law office or the pulpit, the guiding principle of Baston’s life remains quite simple.

“MY mission is to really look after my neighbor...like Jesus said. Love my neighbor more tomorrow than I did today.”