

At 40 years and 40 churches, Kalamazoo's Northside Ministerial Alliance bridges faith and community

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Editor's Note: This is the fourth in our Faith in Action series of stories exploring faith-based and faith-inspired works, the people accomplishing them, and the connections with the community they are creating. The series is supported by the Fetzer Institute.

As part of its Faith in Action series, Second Wave spoke with three passionate participants of the Northside Ministerial Alliance, a group of over 40 Kalamazoo area churches.

If someone were to walk out that door right now and live in truth and righteousness, what would that mean? What would they do?

Rev. Dr. Addis Moore leans back a bit in his chair across the table and smiled.

“Everybody being treated right and fairly.”

Pastor Moore of the Northside Ministerial Alliance says the original intent for this tenet comes from the Bible and also says “a lot of racist type things begin in the church, and a lot of people use the Bible to do that.”

Moore is the Senior Pastor of Mt. Zion Baptist Church, and the President of the Northside Ministerial Alliance – an organization that has been operating in Kalamazoo since the 1970s. Pastor Moore began serving in Christian ministry 34 years ago and has been with Mt. Zion for the past 28 years. Soon after moving to the Kalamazoo area in 1995, Pastor Moore got involved with the NMA.

One of the founders of the Northside Ministerial Alliance, Bishop Doctor T.D. Lockett of Faith Temple Church of God in Kalamazoo told Second Wave that the purpose of the organization is “to unite church with community. It serves as a voice for those who otherwise may not be heard.”



Pastor Addis Moore after the Secondwave interview.

This relationship of church and community in the NMA has changed with time as more churches joined the collaboration which has added extensive programming dedicated to the following areas: mentorship, addressing violence in Kalamazoo, social justice, health and welfare, financial literacy, homeownership, and economic development.

In August each year, a large-scale, NMA-planned event called The Northside Community Carnival takes place. In 2022, the carnival became an Anti-Gun Violence Community Carnival to raise awareness about Kalamazoo's growing issue of gun violence, particularly among teens. Pastor Moore said the Carnival gives the community a sense of ownership and pride. The Carnival “shows this community can be trusted to have something like that, on this side of town.” The Carnival is for everyone and involves dozens of vendors, and community partners from all over Kalamazoo.

In the 1990s, NMA concentrated on African American Churches, particularly in Kalamazoo’s Northside neighborhood. NMA exists to uplift Black voices and to address Black issues and concerns in the community. By organizing effective community programming, NMA gives a platform to these voices and addresses the issues with institutions and organizations specifically integrated into the Alliance for how they champion Black issues.

Once the year 2000 hit, NMA made a conscious effort to bring other organizations and Christian denominations into the mix. As an organization that started as just pastors, the leaders turned to their flocks – their congregations. Think of it this way, if you attend a church, all around you each week at the various services are people who have their own networks. There are doctors, tradespeople, lawyers, community organizers, leaders, etc... the organizations brought into the fold of NMA grew it substantially and organically.

How many churches are involved now?

“Educated guess – as many as 40. All denominations.” Pastor Moore said, and it’s “not just Northside, but it reflects all of Kalamazoo now.” As far as how many community organizations have worked with the

NMA at this point – hundreds. This sentiment was echoed by Reverend Bobette Hampton, a member of NMA since 1998. Rev. Hampton spoke with Second Wave Media about the importance of using our collective power as a community to change lives.



A volunteer working at Sunnyside Community Garden.

Until Rev. Hampton was nominated in 1998, women were not traditionally able to become members of the Alliance. Since then, the NMA has even had women leadership. Rev. Hampton, who had recently been ordained, was an increasingly present and positive influence in her church. She was nominated by her male colleagues (and seconded by Pastor Moore) who saw that she had within her the

“spirit of kindness,” something Rev. Hampton shared with Second Wave as being integral to the NMA mission.

When asked the same question, about how to apply NMA principles of truth and righteousness in everyday life, Rev. Hampton spoke of the difference in all of us, and how God gifts all of us differently.

“All of us need to get outside of our comfort zone. Allow the God inside of us to stretch us,” said Rev. Hampton, and the way God gifted her was a calling to help transform the lives of those in the community. This calling to live life non-judgementally and to accept others for where and who they are, is how Rev. Hampton continues to live her life now.



Fresh Food Distribution- Thanksgiving Food giveaway. Two-hundred families received one box, one bag and a turkey breast or ham.

At what she called, “79 years young,” Rev. Hampton is starting a church called Transformed by Fire, after pastoring Fresh Fire AME Church in Kalamazoo for 19 years. Rev. Hampton also co-manages Growing Community Garden off of Gull Road on 2 acres of land owned by Sunnyside United Methodist Church, and the East Main Church of Christ, and City Life Food Pantry, which provides fresh food to the community two to three times monthly. Needless to say, Rev. Hampton has by no means been lazy in what some would call her retirement. Even through the computer screen on our Zoom call, Rev. Hampton beamed with energy and was magnetic.

The passion for service seen in both Pastor Moore and Reverend Hampton is evident in their work at the Northside Ministerial Alliance. The NMA make a point to provide programming that centers on the importance of creating upward mobility for Black folks and instilling in them the fact that they can make a difference in any community to which they belong.

Why is this type of uplifting programming important, specifically for Black folks and People of Color?

“It is important to black folk and (People of Color) because it adversely affects us at a time when it shouldn’t be.” Pastor Moore says, – the “it” refers to racism in the community and the whole country. Pastor Moore went on to say that racism at the institutional level “hurts the city, the community, even if individuals don’t recognize it.” Throughout conversations with Pastor Moore and Rev. Hampton, there was a common element of how diversity just makes us stronger as a community, keeps us safe, and allows us to grow.

When asked how their lives would have changed if there had been an organization like NMA around when they were younger, both Rev. Hampton and Pastor Moore became thoughtful. They both remembered how difficult it was for them as young Black people in the United States. Pastor Moore and his sister were the first to integrate an all-white school in Sylvania, Georgia. Rev. Hampton said she and her family stuck out “like flies in an ointment” when she grew up in Comstock, Michigan.

Both leaders asserted that having an organization like the Northside Ministerial Alliance in their lives as young people would have decreased the sense of otherness they experienced, and they would have achieved self-confidence faster. Pastor Moore said if something like NMA had been around in his younger days, he would have reached where he is now sooner, and it would have been “better for everyone sooner.”

Bishop Dr. Lockett ended his statement to Second Wave with a personal note about the NMA.



Cars lined up for Fresh Food Distribution.

“I thank God for the Northside Ministerial Alliance. Throughout the years, I have witnessed its growth and many great accomplishments, including its membership to include all races, churches and denominations, governmental officials, educators, medical professionals, women, etc. I applaud Dr. Addis Moore and all past NMA presidents for their vision and leadership, as they have been instrumental in building bridges, breaking barriers, and promoting unity in our community.”

The Northside Ministerial Alliance continues into 2023 strong, with a full year of programming. Bishop Dr. Lockett, Rev. Hampton, and Pastor Moore are three individuals who see the importance of bridging the Northside faith community with other entities in Kalamazoo.

It is dire for organizations like NMA to continue to thrive to help adults and young folks of all races. It is especially important for Black folks, at a time when they continue to feel marginalized. NMA programming helps Black folks empower themselves from within, and if something like NMA existed long ago, in the words of Pastor Moore, "Some individuals would have made it, who didn't make it."

Please check out these resources if you are interested in learning more about the organizations mentioned in this article:

Northside Ministerial Alliance
Youth For Christ
Mt. Zion Baptist Church
Growing Community Garden
Faith Temple