



Mamie Zwadie King Chalmers

Mamie King Chalmers (Sis. Zwadie Kariuki) was born in Birmingham, Alabama into a working class family. Her father Berry King and mother Mattie Marlowe King were both hard working people. Her father, Berry King, was employed as a coal miner for Tennessee Coal and Iron at Hampton Slopes Mine in Pratt City, a subdivision of Birmingham, and her mother worked at Marshall Durbin Chicken Factory. The Mine's inhumane working conditions contributed to Mr. King's premature death at the age of 45 years from black lung disease. This was the pre-1960 Jim Crow south and Birmingham was a stronghold for racial hatred. She attended Birmingham schools and graduated from Western Olin High School's graduate class of 1960. She was employed at several low paying jobs, one worth mentioning was when she worked for Two Dollars (\$2.00) a day before she was employed at Jefferson County University Hospital as a nursing assistant.

Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. came to Birmingham, Alabama and campaigned against segregation in public places and Jim Crow laws. He made it clear to the citizens that fighting for change was necessary, but some blood might be shed and some people might even lose their lives. She didn't hesitate to join the Movement and was ultimately attacked with fire hoses and police dogs. After losing part of her hearing from the water hose blasts, she was arrested and spent five days in the Birmingham County jail. Yet, still she attended the historic March on Washington in 1963. In 1966 her family moved north to Youngstown Ohio, where she served on the Mahoney County Welfare Rights Board as a community activist. She was Tod School PTA president, and Briar Hill Block Club Girl Scout Troop #256 leader.

In 1968, the Birmingham jail officials informed her that she was pardoned for her participation in the civil rights demonstration. She could have spent two to ten years for her role in the civil rights struggle. In 1973, her family moved to Detroit, Michigan. She was invited out to church by a good friend named Stella Boyer. After listening to the message by Jaramogi Abebe Agyeman, our beloved founder and first Holy Patriarch, she literally ran down the aisle and joined in February of 1976. She met and married her husband, Walter Chalmers (Col. Sele Kariuki), and became a missionary for the church. Zwadie has nine children, 22 grandchildren and one great grandchild. She was a member of numerous groups in the church for years. She and her husband were involved in benevolence and even today are a part of the church's Pastoral Call to Care Ministry.

Other programs she participated in were Shoes for Children of Liberia Committee, the church's food pantry, the Elders Circle, Shrine UCC with the Detroit Metropolitan Association and the Social Justice Committee. Sis. Zwadie is also involved in several youth programs and is President of the Berry King and Berry Scholarship fund, the Detroit Parents Network and the Democratic Party. She's been a volunteer at Henry Ford Hospice where she sat and comforted terminally ill patients. She has served with the Rutland Street Block Club, is a vital part of Feeding my Neighbor Project, President of King-Gill Genealogical Study Group, a member of the Fred Hart Genealogical Society, Chairperson for the Election Committee and the Black Slate where she works to register voters and does community service work. She is president of Sankofa Travel Club, a member of Ladies of Distinction Social Club, and president of Western Jackson Olin Alumni Association Detroit chapter. She returned to school and attended Wayne County Community College where she received an Associate's Degree in Applied Science in Gerontology. Sis. Zwadie is also a group leader in the Central Region's Shrine of the Black Madonna No. 1. Ultimately, Sis. Zwadie has received many awards from many groups; among these are recognitions and awards from U.S. Senator Carl Levin, U.S. Congressmen John Conyers and Gary Peters, and County Commissioner Martha Scott. In conclusion, she leaves us, "My life has been a struggle and I will continue to struggle with faith until the work is done."