

Cardinal Gary “Muthamaki” Bennett



Cardinal Muthamaki's community involvement started when he was in his teens. He volunteered as a youth columnist and penned a youth-based weekly social happenings column for the Detroit Pittsburgh Courier newspaper. Even at that age, his intention and goal was to integrate and provide opportunity for the stratified Black youth in Detroit to realize and share in building common goals. His column deliberately brought attention to the activities of a cross section of young Black Detroiters.

As a teenager, Cardinal Muthamaki helped to fuel the initiation of city-wide teen clubs that catered to all Black youthful Detroiters who wanted to share progressive agendas for themselves and for the whole Detroit community. These clubs helped to transcend the stratification barriers between the Black petite bourgeois, the church groups and the street gangs. The result was an opened door that chronicled the evolution and the rise of new clubs and other groups from broader cross-sections of Detroit's Black youth who, in turn, enjoyed greater venues to develop and contribute to the progressive Black community. Cardinal Muthamaki was also involved in a successful movement in Detroit to help integrate the lunch counters in the South.

Consciousness and intention was not relaxed when Cardinal Muthamaki joined the US Army. He trained as a Psychiatric Social Worker Technician. He sought the training and the practice to help him in his personal career and subsequently allow him to influence some progressive development when he returned to his own community. Although often thwarted by racism, he was not deterred. In practice, his job was to help maintain the mental, social and motivational stability of the soldiers, the military families and the whole military community in which he worked. Because of his racial awareness and willingness to uplift his brother, he thwarted deadly attempts on Black soldiers' lives and also helped to thwart suicides and non-productive behavior. His activism led to demonstrations with the local college and community civil rights organizations, challenging racial segregation.

After returning to Detroit, he was employed by the City of Detroit in many community "assisting" occupations, to list a few: being an Assistant Director of the City-Wide Cultural Arts program (deploying 500 musicians, dancers, singers, comedians, singers, writers, actors and actresses to provide free entertainment for Detroit and area residents); helping to develop adult and youth community groups; helping to develop a new national platform for local east-side Detroit gangs--taking thirty members of three gangs and youth clubs to two National conferences to give them a more positive outlook on life; developed an emergency civil disturbance plan for the City of Detroit prior to the 1967 rebellion; developed and submitted to the Cable Study Committee for the City of Detroit, an inclusive cable television plan that would have empowered neighborhoods in Detroit to operate their own cable venues. When not working with the city, he with his business partner, challenged the then (1960s) white media, negotiated with them for over a year, and established and operated the third Black Television program. The program, shown on WXVZ called "Pride", showcased the abundant Black youthful talent, and criticized the racism that impacted Black People in Detroit. He supervised and coordinated, up to fifty staff members, for twenty years, in a series of training and job placement programs. And these are just a few of Cardinal Muthamaki's many great offerings and accomplishments on behalf the Detroit community. (A more extensive listing, too long to include in this brief excerpt, is available upon request.)

Cardinal Muthamaki was married to our beloved Bishop Ayele for 38 years. He has served the Pan African Orthodox Christian Church, in many capacities: minister, group leader, lecturer, Alkebulan Coordinator, Special Projects Coordinator, Social Outreach group leader, Black Slate Coordinator, counselor and representative to many other external venues. Through the urging of our Church, Cardinal Muthamaki served on the Region 1 Board of Education where he chaired both the City-Wide Citizens For Millage, which resulted in the first successful millage campaign in many years, and the City-Wide Multi-Cultural Task Force.

Cardinal Muthamaki was ordained by Jaramogi Abebe Agyeman. He is a licensed UCC minister pending ordination. On direction of Cardinal Mbyu, our Pastor, and with Fundi Nomsa, the Shrine's "Called to Care" program was developed and continues to grow. This is essentially a two faceted program: (1) the care, attention and comfort of the membership and the community and (2) venues through which members and community can share in discussion to recognize the commonality of needs and collaborate through co-intelligence to evolve needed solutions. Cardinal Muthamaki is also a certified UCC Justice Leaders Engaging and Developing (LED) trainer for the United Church of Christ.

Clearly, Cardinal Muthamaki is the very embodiment, the epitome, the essence of community service.