

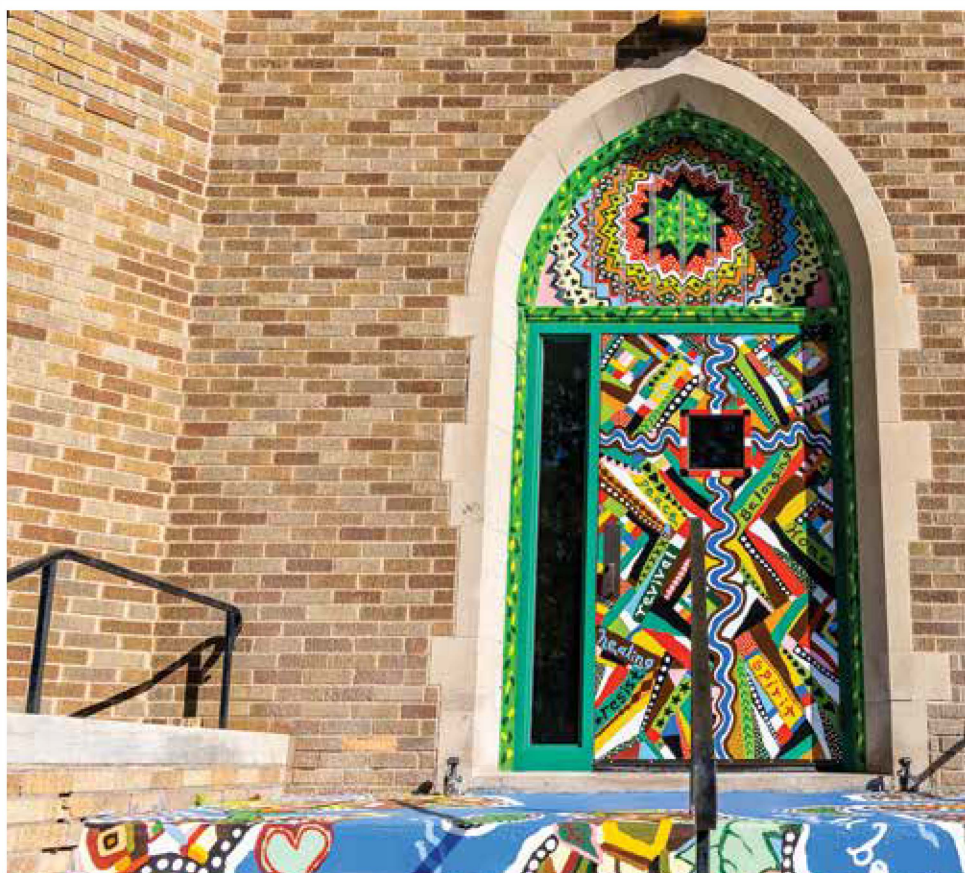
LIBERTY COMMUNITY CHURCH

PEACE AND BLESSINGS IN 2020

PEACE AND BLESSINGS as we end another year! This year we have been particularly called to love above and beyond ourselves, listening and learning how to support our community as we work together to recover from the COVID-19 pandemic—within an ongoing pandemic of violence, racism, and oppression. We move into the new year with great joy and great responsibility. We remain faithful to our calling to support our North Minneapolis community as we heal and hope, and provide beautiful places to rest, revive, and resist—now and for future generations.

This season we are excited to share with you stories about three of the youth that have grown up in our programs. Liberty has been opening doors, nurturing learners and leaders, and helping young people believe in themselves when they didn't know how. We invite you to celebrate with us—we are seeing the past, present, and future, and it looks bright!

IN GRATITUDE,
Reverend Drs. Ralph and Alike Galloway



THE FRONT DOOR of the Northside Healing Space (NHS) replicates a quilt made by our ancestors who created healing works of art using discarded scraps of fabric, sewn in community for our protection, guidance and rest. Liberty's NHS welcomes the stranger, invites sacred storytelling as life, love, hope, and a spiritual covering to all who enter.

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MS. CYRETA

I grew up in North Minneapolis with my brother and sister and a huge extended family. I was a pretty average kid, didn't get into trouble, and was on the serious side, personality-wise. I always knew what I was going to do and not do. I've always been driven—as soon as I could work, I got a job, graduated from Cooper high school, graduated from the University of Minnesota with a Youth Studies degree, and completed a Masters of Divinity from United Theological Seminary with a concentration in pastoral care and counseling. When I was 17 I worked at a local coffee shop, and the kids from the neighborhood kept inviting me to the Imani Center (Imani). Imani was Liberty's drop-in center for youth right around the corner at 2100 Emerson Avenue. Imani was a safe place where you knew you were loved, going to have fun, and that you were going to eat.

The Imani adult leaders were really cool, and made me want to have the same kind of connection with people in my own work

when I grew up. One of the youth leaders said, "The best youth workers are the ones that pass on to kids the resources to branch off and do other things." We had exposure and experiences that we would not have had otherwise, like the Underground Railroad Assimilation and serving on the Youth Coordinating Board where we learned that we could inform policy. My friend and I were asked to run a group for girls ages 11–16. To be a youth leader at such a young age and being entrusted with this opportunity helped me believe in my ability to cultivate leadership in others. This was my first job in youth work. I know now that the principles behind Ladder to Leadership (an in-depth capacity building program) were integrated into everything we did.

All the special moments in my life have happened around this Church and community. I've always been protected by the relationships in this Church. When I was working at the coffee shop, I was not aware it was in a high trafficking area—but the Liberty community watched out and protected me. The love and support I received showed me that I was trusted; I was a young person that people were able to depend on, and they gave me a head start in life. The love I saw at Liberty by the married staff informed what kind of partner I wanted—someone who loved the things I love like my community and activism.

Today, because the people at Liberty believed and invested in me, I am part of the community in a way that I didn't think possible. At 17, I was a young girl working at a coffee shop hoping to go to MCTC (Minneapolis Community & Technical College) someday. Today, just 10 years later, I have a master's degree and am the program director at the Northside Healing Space (NHS)! I am so proud to be in this space doing this great work.

BRODERICK

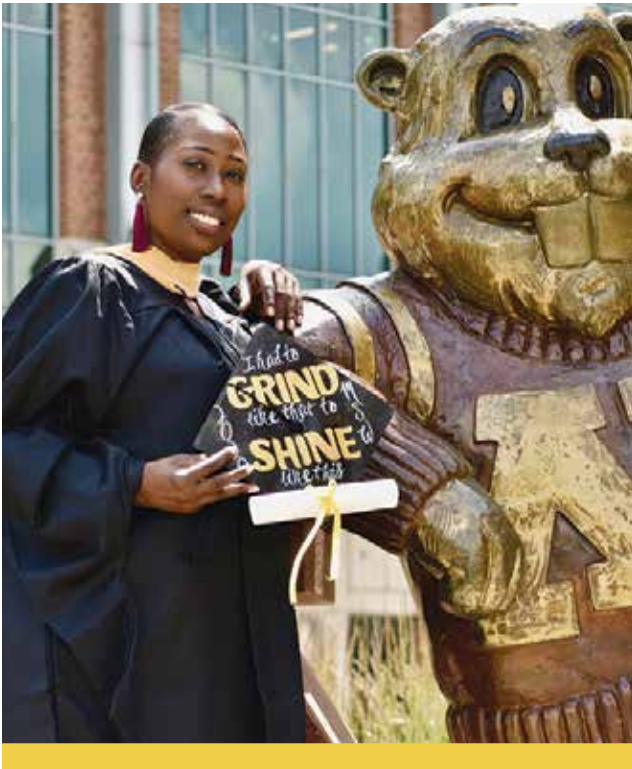
I grew up in North Minneapolis and in 2003, I met Pastor Ralph and Pastor Alikea while I was doing yard work for my dad. What first drew me in was Liberty's Imani Center. They always had something super engaging to do like art or computers, but the thing that blew my mind was the beat machine. I had never seen that before I came to Liberty. Programming was always fun and different—from Peace Jam to the Underground Railroad training. I transitioned to helping out at summer Freedom School at 2100 Emerson that helped a lot of younger kids from the neighborhood.



There was always leadership training going on, even when we didn't know it! The Imani Center put me in place to be a leader, representing northside youth. These opportunities were not mandatory, but you always knew that you were expected to do something that enriched you. Today, I am a facilitator amongst children—Ladder to Leadership in action is perpetuating itself!

I never thought facilitation, computers, or editing would be something I needed in the future—it was just fun when I was learning it—but now it is a huge part of who I am. When I was at Imani, I met an older student in the studio who was always making beats. I would watch and wait till he was done, and then do my own. He and other Liberty staff were mentors to me; I always had a room to have a beat. They listened to my music and always told me to go make some more. I was never told that my music was trash; they supported me and asked me to be myself. They said that all music is good, no matter how it sounds. Because of that support, today I am creatively fluid with no boundaries.

I know the opportunities I had at Liberty opened up everything in my life that I am today. I created a 5 C's (Competence, Character, Connection, Confidence, Caring/Compassion) soundtrack for Freedom School. We took this to National Training in Atlanta, where we taught it to thousands of teachers. I was a part of a hip-hop group that lasted five years. I own my own entertainment company, The Lair Enterprises. I've been on a couple of projects, including designing and playing background music to black children's audio books. Today, at 21st Century Academy, I work with students in our music studio, teaching them how to produce music and letting them learn how to do their own thing.



JUDY

My family moved around a lot, but I lived in and around North Minneapolis with my three older brothers and younger sister most of my life. I always had a hard time in school, not so much with academics, but I struggled with adults and authority and lived with undiagnosed ADHD for most of my life. At 15, I was really struggling in school and hanging out with friends who were involved in dangerous things. I didn't see the point of school, I was short credits to graduate, I had lost hope and could see myself going down an inevitable path; it didn't feel wrong to give up.

A friend invited me to her first day of work at Liberty's Imani Center. I still remember walking in and feeling a shift in my life; I was embraced in a way I had ever experienced. There was a big meeting with the Minnesota Department of Health happening that day. I really thought I should leave, but the adults and other youth asked me to stay and be a part of the conversation. I stayed, and soon became a regular at the center. I remember thinking "these people are so weird—they ask me what I think."

That summer I started working at Liberty's Summer Freedom School. This was the summer I stepped outside of my comfort zone, met college-bound kids from the neighborhood, and realized there were other options for me; I was being transformed.

By the end of summer, it didn't matter what was happening at the Imani Center, I just knew I was going there. I learned a lot more about myself and other ways of doing things. I wasn't told what to do but learned how to be part of the solution. I took advantage of any new opportunity that came up like trainings and out of state experiences. I was valued and paid for my participation and work. My younger sister and I were working at Liberty for Freedom School, and that money (\$134/week) was the only consistent money coming into our household.

Senior year came and everyone else was graduating but me. I was down on myself because I was nowhere near ready to

**"I REALIZED
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graduate. It used to feel natural to give up but dropping out and getting a job didn't feel like an option anymore. My experiences in the Imani Center made me feel like I had so much more to do and offer my community.

After my senior year, I was hired as an AmeriCorps Vista for Youthprise. I wanted to work at Freedom School again, but one of their rules required you be in school or college to work there, which put a fire under me. I needed a GED or to pass the Ability to Benefit test to start school. Long story short, I took both, passed them, and started at Minneapolis Community Technical College in the fall of 2011.

The next summer I entered the Youth Studies program at the University of Minnesota. Once I completed my undergraduate degree in 2016, I worked at 21st Century Academy. While there, I moved on to a position through Lutheran Social Services at Hennepin County working with young people in a truancy program. I then became a Foster Care case manager where I combined youth work with helping families.

So this is the story about how a girl, not even thinking about finishing high school, became a Senior Child Services Social Worker with a Master's in Social Work from the University of Minnesota.

WITH YOUR HELP, WE CONTINUE TO OPEN DOORS.

Please visit our website, libertychurchmpls.org, for more information. We encourage you to contact Andrée (andree@libertychurchmpls.org) for more information about our programs, our changing and growing work in North Minneapolis due to COVID-19, and/or to learn how you can get involved.

WE ARE GRATEFUL FOR YOU,
and pray you are blessed by learning
how you have helped open doors
and change lives.



21st Century Scholars



Cyreta, Program Director for NHS; and LaKisha, Executive Director of the 21st Century Academy