

Alton's Night of Hope and Unity: A push for integrated faith

by Cory Davenport, Contributing Writer
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ALTON - Martin Luther King, Jr. once described Sunday mornings as the most segregated times in the nation, describing the racial segregation in American churches as "tragic."

To remedy that issue, which continues to this day, according to a release from Riverbend Ministerial Alliance President Jason Harrison, the alliance will be hosting a Night of Hope and Unity on Feb. 24, 2018, at 5 p.m. at Enjoy Church, located at 3303 Homer M. Adams Parkway in Alton. During that service, Harrison said he is "challenging Christians everywhere to take aim at divisiveness that is inherent among and inside many churches" as an African American himself.

Harrison quoted Baylor University Professor Kevin Dougherty who co-authored an article regarding divisiveness in churches, which, according to that article, was worse in churches than many other institutions.

"When interviewing local pastors, one main point surfaced more often than others - namely that attracting members of another race isn't good enough," Harrison said in the release. "Because, if we're truthful, most congregations that draw racial minorities can't keep them. Dougherty also said calling a church segregated may make some people uncomfortable, because it implies that its members are racist. But, many contemporary churches that are dominated by one racial group weren't formed by racial animosity."

During the event, Harrison said people from different races will "come together as one body to fellowship and worship together." Part of the night will be interviews and personal stories of struggle and success alongside projections of future endeavors and hopes.

"My hope this night we can first see the need to come together," Harrison said in an email. "Second, after hearing the testimonies of local men and women, they have more of an understanding of that person, which leads to forming a relationship. Some of the interviews include Alton's Black Chamber of Commerce Leader, my brother with Harrison's Funeral and Cremation, my uncle and dad, who have been pastors in the Alton area for over 30 years, a woman pastor who has been pastor since the late 80s and many more. Their message is of struggle, yet hope. How can you be an ally to someone whom you don't believe needs it?"

In an email, Harrison said many church leaders expect a lot out of situations, but do not put in the effort to build or mend the relationships needed to foster the fruits of growth.

"I believe churches are so segregated now, because leaders don't want to face it head on," he said. "We feel like we may be losing our identity or maybe even members. One way to look at it is: we want to put the least amount of energy, thought, resources, finances, etc. in mending relationships or building them - but expect the most of the little we do. As if that's not bad enough, we have the nerve to get upset if people don't respond in a positive way to our efforts."

Harrison is looking for volunteers to serve that day as greeters, ushers, musicians, singers and parking attendants. A meeting for volunteers will take place at Enjoy Church on February 19, 2018, at 6 p.m.

Anyone with any questions is invited to contact Harrison personally via email at jharrison@lbdnh.org, or on his cell number, (618) 223-4211.

