



Imam Askia Muhammad Aquil is a St. Petersburg, FL native raised in a 120-year-old Bethel African Methodist Episcopal Church, where several members of his family have worshipped continuously for over 65 years. The husband and father of seven has been on the front lines of political activism, social justice reform, religious leadership and community building since the civil rights era of the 60's, a civic passion sparked by the untimely death of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. in 1968. The Imam's early efforts in 1969-70 led to creation of the first Black Studies Program at a Florida college or university.

For 11 years Imam Askia served as President & CEO of St. Petersburg Neighborhood Housing Services, Inc., a nonprofit community housing development organization co-administering a multi-million dollar homeownership redevelopment project. He oversaw more than 125 single-family affordable new construction and acquisition/rehab houses and provided budgeting, financial management, home purchase and foreclosure prevention counseling to over 500 families, many of whom became proud first-time homeowners.

The Imam helped oversee research and development for the design and construction of prototype sustainable, energy-efficient, natural disaster-resistant homes using recycled shipping containers. The high profile project was documented by housing guru Bob Vila and in a feature interview with Askia by NBC Nightly News. He also led negotiations with major banks--obtaining operating agreements for redeveloping 40 vacant lots and blighted housing in St. Petersburg's urban core.

Imam Askia formerly served as a housing authority deputy director, associate project engineer, assistant manager and safety program coordinator for several construction companies.

It was in 1968 when Imam Askia began a serious study of the Islamic faith. He became a student imam in 1977 and would lead mosques and Islamic centers locally and serve as a regional convener for Islamic centers in six southern states. He is a leader in interfaith dialogue and collaboration with a commitment spanning some 40 years. The Imam has served as Secretary for the Hillsborough Association of Religious Leaders (HARL); member of the Board of Directors of Congregations United for Community Action (CUCA); and board member for Community Tampa Bay.

In 2015 Imam Askia was appointed Chair of the Founding Board of Directors of the Collective Empowerment Group of the Tampa Bay Area (CEGTBA), the newest chapter of the national Collective Empowerment Group. The mission of CEGTBA is economic empowerment by helping families and congregations buy, build and bank collectively.