

Derrick Hammond



Derrick Hammond, a native of Birmingham, Alabama, is the pastor of Oak Valley Baptist Church in Oak Ridge. Prior to becoming pastor, he served as Church Business Administrator for First Mount Zion Baptist Church in Dumfries, Va. In this role, he functioned as the senior operations manager for a 4,500-member church with oversight of an annual budget of about \$6 million and responsibility for all aspects of risk management, food service, fitness center operations, safety, security, human resources, information technology, document retention, fleet management and volunteer mobilization. Prior to that, Derrick served as Church Business Administrator for First Calvary Baptist Church in Durham, NC, where he secured a \$6 million construction loan during the 2008 recession and coordinated the \$8 million subsequent project that established a new church campus in the low-income neighborhood.

Derrick holds a B.S. in Chemical Engineering from Auburn University where he was inducted into the Omicron Kappa fraternity, the local chapter of the prestigious Alpha Phi Alpha, Inc international fraternity. He also completed the dual master's degree program at Samford University in 2006, earning a Master of Divinity and a Master of Business Administration. His technical experience includes two years with Mead Coated Board as a process engineer co-op and eight years of military experience with the U.S. Army Chemical Corps as a Chemical Operations Specialist, receiving an honorable discharge from the Army Reserves in 1999.

If you were to ask any of the 350 members of Oak Valley Baptist Church or anyone he represents as a City Councilman to describe Derrick Hammond, you would hear phrases such as: "an eloquent speaker"; "he is an effective community and political leader"; and "Pastor Hammond connects with everyone". However, Derrick Hammond simply describes himself as a blessed servant leader of the Lord Jesus Christ who seeks to integrate all people, especially those who have been marginalized by systems of power, into the life of the community, the city and the church. According to Derrick Hammond, when leaders at all levels seek to "integrate all people" they we see positive results and real change. At an early age Derrick Hammond realized that the perception others have of him could influence their behavior. Even though he was raised in a single parent household in Zion City, an "at-risk" community in Birmingham, Derrick's mother made sure he excelled in school and prepared himself for a productive future. In addition to his family and the church, he interestingly credits drug dealers, crack addicts and those given to lifestyles of crime for his early commitment to education and community. "When I aspired to be among them," he explained, "they saw something in me that I did not see in myself and shielded me from the gangs, drugs and bad influences of the streets". Derrick fondly talks about how they referred to him as the 'Little Professor' and told him, *"We do what we do because we have to, but you have a head on you and you have a chance to make something of your life. In fact, you are going to be the one to come back and get us out of here one day!"*

Shortly after his acceptance of the pastoral leadership of the Oak Valley Baptist Church in 2014, Derrick Hammond sought advice from the Reverend Dr. Harold Middlebrook on how to build upon the civil rights work of his predecessors in the Greater Knoxville area. Dr. Middlebrook indicated that civil rights tactics today must differ from the 1960's because "when we marched, we did not actually get what we were marching for". "We marched for the 'open doors' of integration but got the 'torn down walls' of desegregation. So, when blacks climbed over the rubble of desegregated walls into new spaces, the whites left and build 'invisible walls' because the door was 'never opened to us'. Therefore, we need different tools to be effective today, ones that enable us to integrate people who are merely being tolerated into the life of the community". ***The sage advice from Dr. Middlebrook established the foundation for Derrick Hammond's mission to integrate the downtrodden and disenfranchised into the life of the community, the city and the church.*** It was soon put to the test in 2015 when a local

Unitarian Church posted “Black Lives Matter” on their outside sign in response to the police shooting of Michael Brown in Ferguson, Missouri. The sign was met by anonymous threats of property damage and violence. Derrick Hammond, along with then-Police Chief Jim Akagi, Rev. Morrill of the Oak Ridge Unitarian Universalist Church and Father Shelton of St. Mary’s Catholic Church in Oak Ridge, developed the following strategy in response: for the three consecutive Sundays there would be a public forum held at three different churches titled “Community Matters”. During the Community Matters forums an open microphone would be made available to any member of the Oak Ridge public to make any statement they wanted to a panel of clergy and government leaders. The goal of the forums was to collect information from citizens, present the content of this input to the appropriate entity (city government, schools, private business, non-profits, etc.), and bring holistic, long term, and systemic solutions to the community. During these forums, several areas of concern were identified, which centered on the school system, police/citizen interaction, jobs and deteriorating housing. Those public conversations generated several small-group efforts that continue to this day. A few include:

- Community Policing – The Oak Ridge Police Department sought greater input from the minority neighborhoods regarding policing methods and, though challenges remain, has enhanced communication between residents and the Police Department.
- Suspension from Oak Ridge Schools – Oak Ridge School Administration was asked to explain why African Americans were statistically 3-4 times more likely to receive out of school suspension than White, Asian or Hispanic Students. Review of suspension policies revealed a subjective process that adversely affected African Americans. The policy has since been modified to be more objective and, within two years, the rate of suspensions of African American students declined substantially; with total suspensions falling to a 10-year low.
- Additional Support for Disadvantaged Students- A wide ranges of needs involving disadvantaged students were raised. A few of the actions taken in response include: 1) Additional bus routes were added so more students to stay after school for clubs, tutoring, and other activities; 2) A program called Advancement via Individual Determination (AVID) was implemented, which provides skill development opportunities for 8th grades and better positions them for Advanced Placement Opportunities in High School; and 3) A RISE pantry for disadvantaged students was created, which housed clothing, toiletries, food, snacks, shoes and many other items. It was initially stocked solely by teacher donations.

In addition to these community accomplishments, Derrick Hammond in the past couple of years has exerted his servant leadership style to address these issues:

- Community Representation on City Council – As a City Councilman, Derrick Hammond works closely to ensure marginalized community voices are heard. This association has been exemplified in ways that range from working with Trevor King to align the resources necessary for a peaceful protest in Oak Ridge (in response to the murder of George Floyd) and ongoing support of the efforts to recognize the 85 students who desegregated Oak Ridge (first public school system in the south to do so) to support of a popular flag-football event in the community.
- Oak Ridge Solutions on Racism (ORSOR)- Along with Leonard Vaughn, Mary Palmer, and Valeria Roberson, Pastor Hammond coordinates a diverse group that employs democratic practices of the Kettering Foundation to name, frame, and deliberate challenges concerning race. The significance of this approach involves recognizing the extent to which race and race relations have been framed by existing historical and current narratives. The group makes an intentional effort to acknowledge these frames and how they play out in deliberations, as well as reframe them for healthier deliberative dialogue on race.

- Youth Programs at Oak Valley Baptist Church – Utilizing the same model of integration then participation, the number of youth (ages 6 to 18 years) attending Oak Valley Baptist Church has dramatically increased during Pastor Hammond’s tenure. Prior to COVID-19 and implementation of CDC guidelines, the attendance of youth attending OVBC for Wednesday night service ranged between 75 to 100 youth. More important, over half were members of the community with no formal church affiliation but received plenty of love, spiritual nourishment, and food at OVBC.
- NAACP Youth Chapter – Pastor Hammond and Oak Valley Baptist Church provide instrumental support to the establishment and ongoing support of the local youth chapter of the NAACP. Under the leadership of the late Dave Anderson, the chapter received several awards at a conference in Nashville, including one for having the largest youth chapter attending a national conference in the State of Tennessee. Currently, Oak Valley and the NAACP have a COVID vaccination drive planned for June and July.
- Affordable Housing – Pastor Hammond is aware that a significant number of Oak Ridge residents reside in rental housing. Given current housing market trends, he readily acknowledges the lack of affordable housing as the next crisis facing disadvantaged citizens of his community and church congregation. He has begun contacting local, state, and federal officials about the need to plan and develop affordable housing for the City of Oak Ridge.

In addition to his pastoral duties, Derrick has other, notable community service accomplishments. He is a 2015 graduate of both Leadership Oak Ridge and the Citizen’s Police Academy. He is also an active board member of the National Issues Forums Institute (NIFI), Oak Ridge Chamber of Commerce, Oak Ridge Public Schools Education Foundation, Emory Valley Center, and United Way of Anderson County. Additionally, Derrick serves as the Finance Commissioner for the Knoxville Baptist District Association, an adjunct professor for Tennessee Technical University and Pellissippi State Community College, an instructor for Kettering’s Deliberative Dialogue Institute, and a member of the Beeson Divinity School Alumni Advisory Board in Birmingham, Al.

Derrick and Davyda, his wife of twenty years, moved to Oak Ridge in August of 2014 when he accepted his call to the pastorate. He has two children, Ruth, who is a student at Rose-Hulman Institute of Technology and Alexis, a student at Auburn University. Both young ladies served as members of the Youth Advisory Board of Oak Ridge. Given the body of work by an energetic servant leader, the Beta Theta Boulé is honored to present the “**2021 Fatherhood Excellence Award**” to Pastor Derrick Hammond.