

2012 History and Highlights

Maria's Remarks, 2012 Awards Breakfast

It is wonderful to see so many people pay tribute to our remarkable honorees. Thank you, Gail, Dale and Dianne, for dedicating your lives to building a community that is not fearful of diversity, but committed to building bridges across differences. And thank you to our awesome Breakfast Committee, our dedicated Board of Directors, our phenomenal staff, Mary, Sarah and Jason, and Park Road Baptist Church.

As Mecklenburg Ministries celebrates a quarter of a century, we stand on the shoulders of so many who have joined hands to build interfaith collaboration and increase racial and ethnic understanding. Our 25th year was filled with many accomplishments. But certain moments stand out.

Like watching Mayor Foxx proclaim 2012 "The Year of Our Neighbor," in response to the documentary we created, "*Souls of Our Neighbors: Fears, Facts & Affordable Housing.*"

Or partnering with many of you for a Faith Summit on Affordable Housing that attracted over 350 people representing 171 congregations and organizations dedicated to more housing for the working poor.

It's seeing Charlotte teenagers from different faiths, economic backgrounds and ethnicities co-signing an "Anti-bullying" pledge as part of a program sponsored by our Youth Council.

It's receiving a note from Rev. Loris Adams after she served as a counselor for the "In Our Own Backyard" interfaith camp. She wrote: "*I'm thankful to God for bringing Mecklenburg Ministries into my life to push, challenge, affirm and force me to ask bigger questions of this life. I feel that my (understanding of) God grew 10,000 times.*"

It's knowing that the Interfaith Young Adult Council served over 250 homeless men and women as the first of what will be many inspirational initiatives from this new group.

It's standing with Charlotte faith leaders in a candlelight vigil at the Sikh Gurdwara after the horrendous shooting in Wisconsin.

It's the poignant insights of Dr. Rodney Sadler at the clergy lunch we co-sponsored with the Levine Museum and its exhibit, "Without Sanctuary", which chronicles the

horrific history of lynching in America. Dr. Sadler asked, "What is it that we are condoning today?"

It's listening as Dr. Marian Wright Edelman challenges us to take care of ALL our nation's children at the Prayers for Children service we co-sponsored during the DNC.

It's experiencing the impact of the Sermon Exchange program. This year, Rev. Mike Moses, who represents a 10-year-old white congregation, partnered with Rev. Byron Davis, from a 142-year-old AA congregation. During their collaboration, Mike realized that the land on which his church was built had once been cotton fields tended by slaves, and that Bryon's church had been founded by emancipated slaves. This compelled these two very different congregations to gather at Mike's church and confess the original sin of America - slavery; to repent of the generational sin of racism; and to pray for God to turn that land into a place of generational blessing and reconciliation. Now the two congregations share men's Bible studies and sit together on Friday nights each fall, cheering together for the Hopewell High School football team.

Friends, this is why Mecklenburg Ministries' work is so critical - it transforms individuals, congregations and communities. When we create dialog and collaboration across our religions, we move our community from segregation to integration, from exclusion to inclusion, from fear to faith. As Thich Nhat Hanh, the Buddhist monk and teacher said, "When you touch someone who authentically represents a (different faith) tradition, you not only touch his or her tradition, you also touch your own."

Our world is starving for interfaith cooperation today. More than ever, we must redouble our efforts to make it unacceptable in our community to dismiss people because of their ethnicity, to discount any persons because of their faith, to dehumanize human beings because of their economic situation, or to demonize people because of their sexual orientation or political party.

As our world gets smaller, our vision must get larger. We cannot afford the arrogance of racism, classism, or faithism. We are one race - the human race. We share one planet - Mother Earth. We are one family - God's family. Let us learn to greet one another like our Hindu neighbors saying, "Namaste", the divine in me greets the divine in you.

If you have a vision of creating a better community, we hope you will join us. Together, we can take our community from common ground to higher ground.