

*Mecklenburg Ministries*  
**25 Year Legacy Award – October 17, 2012**

It is a privilege to be with you this morning and to be honored by an organization that has meant so much to me over the years – apparently it's been over 25 years.

I can honestly say that 25 years ago many of us could not have imagined what Meck Min could become – or anticipated our collective good fortune in having someone as gifted as Maria as its director.

Within those 25 years I have had the joy of working with Gail and the opportunity to be on the committee that had the good sense to hire Dale.

Receiving this award has allowed me to surround myself **in memory** with the experiences and the people that are truly part of me. Happily, many of you are in the room today. . .and I could quite comfortably spend the next few minutes acknowledging you and then reciting the names of others. . . known to you. . .and dear to me.

I have literally been transformed by the people. . .the experiences. . .the learning. . .the moments of extreme discomfort and serious embarrassment – my memorable and documented “interfaith mishaps” – as well as the times when my heart has been so full or my spirit so free that I simply didn't know the words to use:

- The first BridgeBuilder picnic at Reedy Creek Park;
- The ramp built by Youth Breaking Barrier teens that allowed a wheelchair bound woman to leave her home for the first time in many months;
- Sitting under the trees at McClintock Presbyterian with Imam Khalil, Nasif Majeed, Rabbi Ezring, James Ephraim and Steve Hockfield for our first Jewish – Christian – Muslim exchange and visit;
- Singing How Great Is Thy Faithfulness at Little Rock AME Zion or howling like a wolf with the Paul Winter Quintet in the darkened sanctuary of First United Methodist.

Meck Min has been my bridge into our community. It has connected me to people. . .to issues of consequence. . .and to neighborhoods. . .and in time to the work I'm doing today.

I am so very fortunate to have partners on this path – my CBI family, my cherished community partners and friends, and my own quite amazing family. I'm thrilled to share this breakfast with my oldest son David – who has known me longer than anyone in this room and – who still takes my calls and now sends me text messages and brings my exquisite grandsons to Didi's house to play.

I am mindful always of the family from which I came – my mother and my father who modeled for us the blending of the outward journey and the inward journey. My father – a CPA who became a minister and activist during the civil rights era – was born and raised in Canada. My mother was a “no nonsense girl” from the north woods of Ontario who developed quite extraordinary gifts in response to the **spirit within her** and through dedication and discipline. She was very close to God because she chose to be. . .and because she worked at it.

When my parents arrived in America, they gravitated to the Methodist church – a movement described by its “no nonsense” founder John Wesley as a “spiritual revolution with a social conscience.”

Well. . .that “conscience thing” finally caught up with **me**.

I realized that I had become accustomed to equating my parents' efforts with **my** conscience and contribution – my father's work was my connection to social justice and activism. . .and I fancied my mother as a personal emissary to the almighty.

What I began to understand – as I acknowledged the disconnect within me – was that I had to do **my own work** – that my parents' investment couldn't pay my way – that I and indeed each of us are responsible for using what we have and who we are – to develop ourselves and make a difference where we are – to be on both an inward and an outward journey – however it manifests itself in our own unique lives.

In my particular life. . .finding – or being found – by Meck Min was simply and purely God's touch on my life – or God giving me a swift and serious kick in the pants.

So, thank you dear friends and Mecklenburg Ministries for recognizing me today and for confirming what Parish Priest and Suffragan Bishop Gary Gloster said years ago. . .namely that. . .“Anything worth doing is worth doing for. . .at least. . .20 years.”

Little did I know **then. . .just** how very right he was!

Leon –

We met in the parking lot of The Olive Tree when it was on Independence

Blvd. Charles Farrar thought you would be someone who might take on

Meck Min’s newly formed Race Relations Task Force. Surprisingly you

said “yes”. . .and from that luncheon came both a treasured friendship and

three amazing Meck Min programs that we launched during the early years – BridgeBuilders, InnerChange and Youth Breaking Barriers.

Sister Mary Thomas Burke used to say, “There’s no such thing as a chance meeting.”

Well, if that’s true, it can make a walk through the mall like a trip through a mine field. . .but, in the case of Leon, she was right on point.