

Building Bridges in a Divided World Starts Close to Home

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On weekday mornings across Charlotte and Mecklenburg County, some parents now pause at the door. Do they send their children to school, or keep them home? Some workers take longer routes to jobs they have held for years. Some congregants hesitate before entering houses of worship that once felt unquestionably safe. These are not abstract policy debates. They are daily calculations shaped by fear, unfolding in neighborhoods, workplaces, and sanctuaries across our community.

In recent months, particularly within immigrant and mixed-status families, that fear has become a persistent feature of daily life amid continued federal immigration enforcement actions. What was once routine now requires vigilance. What was once assumed now feels uncertain. And the impact does not remain contained within individual families. Fear ripples outward, weakening schools, workplaces, congregations, and the fragile social trust that allows a diverse county to flourish.

As members of the Mecklenburg Metropolitan Interfaith Network (MeckMIN) Board of Directors, we believe this moment calls for moral clarity rooted in the deepest teachings of our faith traditions. Across religions, there is a shared ethic that becomes most urgent in times like these: how a society treats the stranger reveals what it truly values. In the Hebrew Scriptures, care for the stranger is a repeated command grounded in collective memory. Christian teaching centers on the love of neighbors without qualification. Islamic tradition emphasizes dignity and protection for the traveler and the displaced. Across Hindu, Buddhist, Sikh, and other traditions runs the same insistence that human worth is not earned by nationality, documentation, or status, but inherent in our shared humanity. The Bahá'í teaching that "the earth is but one country, and mankind its citizens" gives expression to this truth: that dignity is not conditional but inherent in our shared membership in one human family.

Here in Mecklenburg County, immigrant neighbors are woven into the fabric of our civic and spiritual life as caregivers, educators, service workers, entrepreneurs, and faith leaders. When enforcement actions generate widespread fear, the harm radiates. Parents withdraw from school life. Workers avoid public spaces. Congregations thin. Communities retreat. What frays is not only a sense of safety, but the web of relationships that allows people to belong to one another across difference.

Law exists to serve human dignity. When its application produces fear that isolates families and undermines trust, something essential is damaged. This is not an argument against the rule of law. It is an insistence that justice requires proportionality, compassion, and care for the vulnerable. Across faith traditions, justice is measured not only by order and compliance, but by whether people can live without fear and still participate fully in the life of their community. Law applied without these considerations erodes both justice and social cohesion.

It is within this moral framework that MeckMIN observes Interfaith Harmony Month this February, under the theme "Building Bridges in a Divided World," as proclaimed by the Mecklenburg Board of County Commissioners. Interfaith Harmony Month promotes peace and understanding through dialogue, relationship-building, and shared service across religious differences. At its core is a simple truth: the way we treat one another shapes the soul of a community. In times of division, choosing understanding over suspicion and relationship over fear is both a moral act and a civic responsibility.

Building bridges does not begin in distant debates or abstract ideals. It begins close to home, in how we show up for our neighbors, how we refuse to let fear define our relationships, and how we commit to the work of belonging even when it is difficult. We invite all residents of Mecklenburg County to take part in that work—together. A full calendar of Interfaith Harmony Month events is available at www.meckmin.org/interfaith-harmony-month.