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## **Leading with Light: Three Charlotteans recognized for fostering unity across differences**

By Kristen Anderson

Three members of Charlotte's faith community were recently recognized by the Mecklenburg Metropolitan Interfaith Network (MeckMIN) for their service and contributions to interfaith harmony.

Amee Roome, Joanne Stevenson Jenkins, and Reverend Dr. Abdue Knox shared inspiring messages at the Community Leader Awards Breakfast, which was held at Friendship Missionary Baptist Church. Over 300 people, representing various beliefs, faiths, and cultures, gathered not only to hear their words but also to unite in a shared commitment to interfaith collaboration and community building.

“You will not find a more diverse gathering of people in Charlotte than at this event,” said Reverend LeDayne McLeese Polaski, executive director of MeckMIN. “We are honored to recognize those in our community who exemplify the MeckMIN mission of respecting the dignity of every person and fostering understanding, compassion, and justice.”

Roome, a member of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, received the Beth Wells Interfaith Service Award for her many years of dedicated service with MeckMIN. In addition to being a former MeckMIN board member, she continues to head the MeckMIN community service committee, is the president of the Charlotte chapter of Church Women United, and serves as a regional community outreach specialist for her church. “I believe each of you is a beloved son or daughter of God,” she said. “We are His children, which means we are family.”

Jenkins, the Bridge Builder Award recipient, was honored for her example in addressing social needs and commitment to interfaith dialogue through one-on-one discussions and relationship building as part of her daily life. She chairs the board of Galilee Ministries of East Charlotte and actively participates in the ministry work at Christ Episcopal Church. After 44 years in the nonprofit sector, she now dedicates countless volunteer hours to various Charlotte and North Carolina committees, addressing community concerns and serving our most vulnerable neighbors. “I believe everyone deserves a safe passage across troubling waters,” she declared.

Finally, Rev. Dr. Knox received the Sydnor Thompson, Jr. award for his leadership and interfaith collaboration as the head pastor of Greater Bethel AME Church. Since he arrived in Charlotte in 2019, he has revitalized and created new ministries, opened up space at his church to host community programs, and partnered with Habitat for Humanity to build affordable housing on the church campus. Said Rev. Dr. Knox, “The work that God has called for us to do is to make this world a better place.”

Building bridges of interfaith cooperation is challenging, but as evidenced by these three award recipients, it is both possible and profoundly rewarding. “MeckMIN is committed to continuing to celebrate these positive examples in our community,” says Rev. Polaski. “We hope to inspire more people to join the effort.”

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Cutline: Joanne Stevenson Jenkins, Ameer Roome, and Rev. Dr. Abdue Knox received recognition for their work in interfaith collaboration at the 2024 MeckMIN Community Leader Awards Breakfast at Friendship Missionary Baptist Church on May 2, 2024. Photo courtesy of John Bambach