



Co-Creating a New Reality: MCC's Truth about Turning 50 in the 21st Century

I am Rev. Elder Rachelle Brown, Interim Moderator of Metropolitan Community Churches.

Preface

MCC is nearly 50 years old. Since that first service in Rev. Elder Troy Perry's living room in 1968, MCC has boldly challenged society to fully accept LGBTQ people from a foundation of unflinching confidence that we are all God's children, loved unconditionally, and made in God's image. MCC's growth from one home in Los Angeles to 33 countries worldwide is testimony to the dedication of church and leaders, laity and clergy, who have been part of MCC's decades of work. God has blessed us beyond imagination.

I am so grateful to serve in a time such as this.

Today, we are less than a year away from General Conference in Orlando, Florida, USA. As we prepare for that gathering, I want to share key organizational steps yet to be completed.

Interim Moderator Transitional Work

The Interim time, as I described in January of 2017 (<http://bit.ly/2KWLE2R>), includes three key steps: Discover, Discern, and Decide. Today, we continue with steps to discern and make way for decision.

In the spirit of discernment, I am very clear about the call from God to the transitional work as Interim. I am clear that on the floor of the Business Meeting in 2016 in Victoria, Canada, after election was not achieved, God called me to this transitional work. I am also clear that the work of transition is not complete. The work of Interim is vital and must include clarity in our leadership roles. *After much prayer, I have discerned that I will not apply for the position of Moderator.*

I am fully committed to continue the very important work which still needs to be done during this Interim period.

In order to accomplish the highest level of integrity, service, and transparency, I have completely recused myself from the Governance Committee work to select the Moderator Nominating Committee and the Governing Board Nominating Committee, and each committee's next steps.

I will continue to recuse myself from these very important processes to ensure that each Lay Delegate and Clergy person representing the wider body have full confidence in the work of these committees and the candidates selected.

I have been, and will continue to be involved in planning the General Conference Business Forum and Business Meeting. I will also continue to work with staff and volunteers on the General Conference Core Team to help prepare a world-class General Conference next year.

Honesty

One of the four goals established for the Interim time includes addressing MCC's current financial model. This is vital work in an age of change for Christianity and society. The strength of MCC is our ability to be both Church and Movement. In an era where church and traditions are in a season of change, MCC leadership, too, must pay close attention to shifts in the religious landscape.

Across Christianity, the tradition is changing. Lower attendance, reduced income, and fewer churches in Europe, Australia, Canada, and the United States is the reality. The majority of Christian denominations and organizations turn to investment funds, selling of property, and adjusting staff size to meet the new realities. Despite these actions, the outcome is still the same. In the United States, the current decline in attendance and funding realities, which have significantly impacted other denominations, have had similar repercussions on the majority of MCC churches.

MCC has started to respond to this shift in the religious landscape. Over a year ago, MCC began a "reVitalization Program" and some churches discovered this to be a wonderful resource to shift the momentum. Today, many MCC churches are stable, and others have seen growth, yet some churches are experiencing decline. In addition to the reVitalization Program, we are now engaging another important shift in culture towards Generosity.

MCC's strategies for fiscal adaptation have included selling property, relying upon investment funds and savings, shifting from one funding source to cover another, and adjusting staff. This cycle has continued for over a decade. These actions, while with good intent, have not resolved

the fact that funds are not meeting expenses. Over the last two years, the Governing Board has discussed options, and yes, we have taken calculated risks.

I believe the work of MCC is unfinished in communities around the world, even in places where Christianity is in decline. Some say this persistence is foolish, yet, the Spirit is moving. The testimonies are proclaimed every day. MCC churches and ministries and leaders goes beyond a welcoming or accepting experience and blesses and celebrates LGBTQ persons, allies, and those seeking liberation.

To fully embody MCC's Mission, Vision and Core Values, I also believe that deep change is needed for sustainability. We must look beyond downsizing staff and other financial maneuvers to make ends meet.

Today, I want to share with you important steps towards deep change. These steps include meeting immediate needs, and over the next year, evaluating, and even reimagining the organizational structure.

To address the immediate, and longer-term, cash flow crisis, the Governing Board has voted to reduce expenses up to \$400,000 USD, or nearly 30% percent of the budget, for the remainder of 2018. In doing so, these painful, yet necessary decisions will help stop the cycle of small cuts that continue year after year.

The reductions in expenses will begin with payroll and include salary, hours, and even benefits for majority of the staff. The reductions in salary begin with me. I am reducing my own salary by 20%. Other directors will also experience a reduction in salary and hours immediately while other staff positions will be adjusted as needed to ensure we close the financial gap. We are also eliminating some Face-to-Face meetings, including the second Governing Board meeting of the year and other travel expenses.

The adjustments in expenses, primarily from payroll, will be done in a way that allow the staff and volunteers to focus on the foundational work, rooted in our bylaws, and honoring our covenant with the churches, ministries, and leaders.

Another way we are addressing the fiscal reality is through evaluating Assessments. The Assessment Review Commission was formed following the 2016 General Conference to examine and evaluate the current assessment process and make recommendations to be received by the Governing Board and presented for a vote at a Special General Conference. The Commission's report will be received and released very soon and the Special General Conference will be called. Each church and lay delegate will receive the Assessment Review Commission report and an impact statement from the Governing Board. We will host webinar forums to discuss the report and impact statement.

Hopeful

During the Listening Tour, I visited with many MCC church members and leaders. I heard disappointment and concern that MCC's organizational model, which goes beyond staffing, is not successful to meet the local needs of churches, ministries, and leaders. There were multiple conversations about changes in church attendance and proposals for a way to live into our Fellowship roots. It is true, as some have said, the word "Denomination" is not in our Bylaws. We have become a denomination, and as we look at the religious landscape, that identity is a downhill ski slope. The shift in culture points to a new energy around associations with a key purpose. MCC has a key spiritual purpose that meets present spiritual needs.

We have to ask ourselves a few questions like, "Is the denominational model really serving needs of the churches and leaders well?" "In what ways can local MCC communities flourish and continue to bear much needed spiritual fruit?"

Over the next week, I will continue to work with the Governing Board to establish a wider conversation with the General Conference to address the organizational structure. While we work to meet the immediate needs and evaluate the organizational structure, it is important to continue building and serving the body of Christ. The Point Elder program, launched earlier this year, pairs churches directly with a member of the Council of Elders for another pathway for connection and care. In order to continue the wonderful work that has begun, I am proposing that we expand the base of volunteers serving on the Council of Elders to better reflect MCC outside of the United States, and increase the diversity of the Elders serving MCC. Doing so will allow MCC to provide pastoral support to churches and leaders in a way that meets a local community's needs and support the Council of Elders to meet its responsibilities as outlined in MCC's bylaws. The process to expand the Council of Elders will begin by the end of July.

While we address the immediate needs and continue to design the future together, I assure you that we will fulfill our responsibilities as leaders who have been entrusted to honor both the people of MCC and MCC's Bylaws. I also assure you that leaders will continue to be ordained, authorized, and equipped to serve MCC churches and ministries. We will continue to assist churches, ministries, and leaders in times of transition and crisis. And we will continue to provide resources and pastoral support. How we do that as staff, and as Elders, may need to change as we live into our financial realities.

Over the years many gifted, skilled, and spirit-led persons have served. Yet, we are all human, and there have been times of falling short. There are also times of incredible blessing and celebration. This season is a balance of urgency to respond to a financial crisis and a time of inspiration to envision our shared future. We are called into deeper conversations that prepare us for what God has in store for us as a people who have been liberated and living in the loving embrace of God.

Helpful

The actions we are taking now to live into MCC's financial reality may seem shocking for some people, and others may not be surprised. MCC, like other churches and denominations, must make adjustments. Our actions ensure that we work together and continue to live into our calling. MCC's work is not done.

Within the next week, you will receive a newsletter that will include the following:

- A transcript of today's presentation
- Two powerpoint presentations. The first is about the Religious Landscape and the other is an MCC attendance, staffing, and finances presentation
- Assessment Review Commission Report
- Details about upcoming webinars including the Assessment Review Commission recommendations and Special General Conference Forum
- MCC's Bylaws
- Process for Appointing, Approving, and Affirming Elders to serve on the MCC Council of Elders.

I come to you rooted in faith and filled with hope. As leaders, we have had very difficult conversations during the previous months. At the end of each meeting, we hold out hope that these changes will allow MCC as Church and as Movement to flourish.

MCC's first offering was \$3.18 USD, and since then, we have continued to rely on your vision and generosity to continue our work. We recently launched a campaign to Let Your Light Shine, and celebrate MCC's 50 years of life-changing work. Rev. Elder Troy Perry, and his husband Phillip de Blieck are co-chairing this campaign. Here is Troy and Phillip.

(Rev. Elder Troy & Phillips Video)

Thank you Troy and Phillip! We love you. And thank you for drawing attention to one of the ways in which you can help MCC in months leading up to GC.

As leaders, we are making important changes.

We know many of you will be asking, "How can we help?" Besides your generous gifts, we hope you will consider participating in the the following:

PRAY!

In spite of our human frailties, MCC has been an answer to prayer for countless thousands of people over the past 50 years. In what new ways is God calling MCC to be a beacon of hope and wholeness for next 50 years?

Prayer is the foundation and fuel of renewal and revival. The Council of Elders emails weekly prayers written by MCC laity and clergy. Today, our hope and fervent request is for all of MCC to join together to pray for our future.

If you are willing to join us in praying daily, please email us

(Communications@MCCchurch.net) and we will add your name to list of those in MCC petitioning the Spirit to reveal to us the new ways in which we are being called to let our Light Shine—for our future Moderator, for our Movement, for churches and leaders, for the next 50 years of faithful and fruitful proclamation of the inclusive Gospel and the Open Table.

- Sign on to pray daily between now and General Conference: if possible, please pray as close to 9 am at your local time each day
- Send us your prayers! We'll share them with others for inspiration and encouragement
- Ask two or three people you know to join us in praying for MCC's future—that we may be a holy force for justice, equality, holiness, and wholeness in our world

PARTICIPATE!

- Sign on to participate in the 50th Anniversary celebration and receive a special offering for Fellowship Sunday. (Worship Resources: <http://bit.ly/2LKHHph>)
- Sign on as an individual or as a church to donate and be a part of strengthening our Movement for the next 50 years; we need this so we can do the work of discerning our future together
- Commit to making this a season of personal renewal and revival by deepening your spiritual practices.
- Register for General Conference and be part of celebrating 50 years, while making history: <http://bit.ly/2KPAeic>

Today, we are preparing the way to let the Holy Spirit refresh and inspire us, let us sing a new song, and step into the promise of new life together.

Let us pray:

Holy God. Thank you for your faithfulness and unending love. Through Jesus the Christ, we have learned how to build something new with courage, trusting in the resurrection in this life and the one to come. You have blessed us beyond words. Today, in our gratitude, we humbly ask for your guidance as we discern our future together. We come, with the light we have been given, asking for Your wisdom, compassion, and grace as we move into the new season. May we walk with humility, strengthened by the love, and filled with the Holy Spirit for this time of renewal. May Your Light shine through us in this day and in the years and decades to come.

Amen.