

**Interim Moderator Report
to the
UFMCC General Conference
2 July 2019
Orlando, Florida, U.S.A.**

To the many churches, leaders, and members of UFMCC, it has been a gift to fulfill the call of God and urging of the Holy Spirit, to serve you during this Interim time. The last few years has been filled with prayer, seeking spiritual guidance, and wisdom, alongside being part of difficult conversations and decisions in this season of significant change and challenges.

As many recall, the vote for a Moderator at the 2016 General Conference in Victoria, British Columbia, Canada, ended without election for Moderator. The Governing Board a few months later appointed an Interim Moderator as outlined in the UFMCC Bylaws. The concern and confusion leading up to, throughout, and in the months following the 2016 General Conference vary in degree of intensity depending on the person and context within the Fellowship.

Global social and political division, rise of extremism, increases in violence, and legal challenges to equality have presented incredible challenges not seen in decades. The blessings include raised consciousness, justice arriving in new places, and ways in which local MCC churches, leaders, and ministries continue to address this unusual season of upheaval.

MCC is not immune from conflict and changing culture. We were formed and born in a season of significant cultural shifts during the last part of the previous century. Our presence and testimony transformed the conversation about human sexuality and gender identity within Christianity and other faith traditions. In the year of our 50th anniversary, MCC is still the voice in the wilderness for majority of small cities and urban areas in every nation, yes even the United States. MCC's Mission is relevant and the call for transformation is loud.

Over the last few years MCC has been challenged at every level to deepen our commitment to dialogue around racial, gender, class, and theological diversities. The means to improve inclusion have yet to produce results that fully reflect the equity and justice of our values. Today the current denominational staff and Governing Board are more racially diverse than in 2016. This is only a first step. In this very moment, we are all painfully aware that diversity in leadership does not automatically ensure outcomes which affirm the breadth and depth of diversity within MCC churches. Our call is to ask new questions and start new streams of dialogue rooted in the embodied reality of our diversities in language, race, ethnicity, gender identity, orientation, and theology.

Reflecting upon the Interim time is similar to shining a light into a prism that illuminates:

- new space created by the appointment of an Interim Moderator,
- declining revenue,
- updating the organizational structure,
- assessing resources, and
- leading the first steps of a shift from a person-centric to a mission-driven denomination.

In late 2016, the goals of the Interim time began to take shape through collaborative work within leadership bodies. During the first few months, three points became clear to listen deeply and act boldly:

1. Actively discover, discern, and decide our future.
2. Position MCC to respond to 21st century people.
3. Prepare to select the next Moderator.

In January 2017, myself, the Governing Board, Council of Elders, and Senior staff presented this framework, plus four goals of the Interim time to the churches and leaders of MCC.

1. Heal and build healthy relationships among churches, ministries, lay and clergy leaders and with the denomination.
2. Expand and establish sustainable, culturally-appropriate systems and protocols for recruitment, development and support of leaders, churches and ministries in each global area.
3. Develop realistic sustainable financial models that will serve to strengthen local churches, ministries and the denomination.
4. Expand and strengthen a lived commitment to diversity and inclusion in a local and global context.

Discovery, Discernment, and Decision

The Listening Tour began in February 2017 and continued through November 2017. The initial four questions presented in person, through webinars, and online survey provided volumes of information which was carefully evaluated forming the three-part Listening Tour Report that included recommendations. Listening to the testimonies of lives profoundly changed because of MCC is a testimony to the past and present. There were also many accounts of pain from structural changes over the last two decades.

Read all three parts of the Listening Tour Report:

<https://www.mccchurch.org/listening-tour-report-part-1-released/>
<https://www.mccchurch.org/listening-tour-report-part-2-discern/>
<https://www.mccchurch.org/listening-tour-report-part-3-path-forward/>

Closing the Gap Between Income and Expenses

The operational reality of what was in 2016 and what is needed is an ongoing, and at times intense, conversation between the SLT and Governing Board from January 2017 through June 2018. Adjusting expenditures while reinforcing, shifting, or in some instances, building infrastructure for denominational support became one of the primary opportunities.

The primary source of income are assessments from local churches. A number of agreements made through email or conversations between churches and UFMCC on assessments is now a formalized process that includes a written Restoration Plan agreement created by the Governing Board, Finance Department, and Assessment Liaison. With at least three (3) people who represent staff and the Governing Board involved in the creation of an agreement, checks and balances are in place. Follow up on agreements include a semi-annual check in and full annual review.

Review of Operational Expenses began in late 2016. The scale of multiple MCC Offices, staffed with administrative support for each, maintaining over a dozen home offices, and over 50% of the staff at Director or Assistant Director level presented significant financial challenges to meet the needs of local churches and leaders. A slow culture change from Offices to team-based Programs and Projects began in early 2017. Over the last 2 ½ years a shift toward a collaborative approach in staffing, streamlining operations, addressing needs of leadership bodies, and working with many volunteers continues to reap benefits in the quality of sustainable Programs and Projects and reducing operational expenses. The level of change in staffing and operations meant significant changes in payroll and staff.

In the process of discovery which informed the discernment and decision stages, it is important to note that over a decade ago recommendations to reduce staff, payroll liabilities, and expenses to just below the current income level were presented as the appropriate scale for the organization based on trends at the beginning of the 21st century. Unfortunately, those recommendations were not selected and the decline in revenue continued without an adjustment in expenses. Today, as an organization, we are much closer to the reality proposed in 2010. What was a staff of 18 that included six (6) director executive staff plus twelve (12) employees with payroll exceeding assessment income is now a two director executive staff, plus (12) employees and payroll aligning with a 10% assessment rate that began in January 2019. Reduction in payroll and staff was a very painful process for all of us. These deep changes were vital to the immediate stability of the organization.

The staff continues to focus on the success of local churches and leaders. Without viable local churches living into the mission of MCC, and both clergy and lay leaders courageously guiding in their own context, the vision and mission of MCC would remain unfilled.

21st Century Infrastructure

Alongside the staffing changes, three key areas of infrastructure adjustments included modernization of data management, Human Relations (HR), and relationships with churches struggling financially. Each of these areas were addressed carefully and systematically by staff with Governance support as needed.

In November 2016, I guided Operations to move forward to identify a data management solution to better serve the denomination. What was five (5) MCC offices with separate contact lists and data storage solutions is now a 21st century Non Profit Salesforce database customized for MCC and scalable for continued improvements for secure data that meets European Union (EU) standards and ensures more accurate reporting and points of contact. The database project, completed in late 2018, provides invaluable analysis and report for the staff and denominational leadership bodies.

A review of the Employee Handbook and staff relations began immediately through the Office of Operations. The review covered many years and demonstrated a need for a more robust and modern HR program. Through consultation with an HR specialist, the payroll and benefits provider, and a new position of HR Liaison from late 2018 through early 2019, a U.S. industry standard and equitable HR program is in place for equity in hiring, evaluations, and benefits for denominational employees. Evaluation continues to explore the Goliath-like challenges of health care benefits for local church leaders in the U.S. operating under the UFMCC 501c3 umbrella.

Global infrastructure and stabilization are key areas addressed by myself, key staff, and various members of the Governing Board. The need for MCC globally is greater now than ever. Primary concerns include isolation, lack of infrastructure, and relevant support. Projects to begin addressing

concerns include encouraging leaders in nations outside the U.S. to form a recognized charity where legally possible and safe, establish bank accounts to generate revenue, and create an agreement or Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with UFMCC. Local leadership in conversation with MCC staff and Governing Board is vital to the ongoing success of local churches outside the U.S.

Enlarging the Tent and Expanding the Open Table

Over the last few years, I have advised the MCC Theologies Team on two major projects: Holy Conversation on the many meanings of the word “Queer” and an official MCC Statement on Human Sexuality. These two topics are deeply important for the Mission of MCC because more persons who identify as Queer are seeking spiritual community, and because as a denomination, we lack an official position that blesses and celebrates orientations, genders, and families. Clarity is vital as other Christian denominations and churches use statements such as this to inflict spiritual harm. Our light will shine brighter for so many living in isolation and fear through the materials created by this incredibly diverse Theologies Team.

The use of the word “Queer” and conversations on various family formations, including Polyamory, have created discomfort for some and built bridges for others. MCC is reaching people beyond gay and lesbian persons of previous generations. Many bisexual, pansexual, transgender, non-binary persons, their families and all types of families still question if there is a place to be fully visible and engaged. The ways in which language surrounding pronouns, gender identity, orientation, and family formation is ever changing. It is my intention to expand the Open Table beyond one’s individual identity to ensure we bless and celebrate all persons.

Finally, intentional outreach during this season included building bridges between MCC and LGBTQ Evangelical organizations in the U.S. and Canada including Q Christian Fellowship (formerly the Gay Christian Network), The Reformation Project, Generous Space groups in Canada, and persons active publicly and privately within Southern Baptist Convention, Seventh Day Adventists, and Evangelical mega-churches. These efforts sought to re-introduce MCC to a new generation of leaders and begin dialogue towards mutual ministry. As we watch many denominations and faith traditions continue to debate matters of tolerance and acceptance, MCC continues to enlarge our tent for many still seeking the blessing and celebration we offer.

Continued Discernment

As we come to the end of the Interim time, a few key areas of work remain unfinished and await next steps from the next Moderator, Governing Board, and Council of Elders. Below are four areas for MCC denominational leadership to continue addressing in the immediate future.

Leadership for Local Churches. Moving to the next generation of MCC leadership will include adjusting protocols related to ordination and local church leadership in order to recruit and sustain much needed ministry leaders. The work began in 2015 to create new pathways to MCC church leadership. This work is nearly complete. Implementation of many new pathways will ensure diversity in theology, faith experiences, and the formation of new MCC churches needed in so many areas of the world.

New Revenue Stream through Formation of a Foundation. In early 2018, I authorized the renewal of a U.S. 501c3, non-religious designation originally set up by UFMCC. The organization was then called Metropolitan Communities. The original purpose of the designation was for LGBTQ Senior Housing in Florida. Economic changes a decade ago halted the project. Renewing the 501c3 was initiated with the

intent of setting up a Metropolitan Communities Foundation. Preliminary work has begun to change the legal description and there is much left to complete. A non-profit and non-religious Foundation would be eligible for grants currently inaccessible. The purpose of the Foundation includes support for education programs in multiple nations to continue developing and empowering MCC leadership, scholarships for students, leaders, and churches, health and wellness initiatives including mental health, HIV prevention, care for those with AIDS, and other ministry support which all MCC to live fully into the mission. The vision for the Foundation also addresses staff and leadership capacity based on the current revenue streams by identifying new ways to monetize programs and projects and better support local churches.

Address Denominational Structure. To completely live into MCC's Mission in this age of Christianity requires a change in denominational structure to reflect the Fellowship within our name. A Fellowship structure includes local church agency in various nations and networks outside the U.S. which also allows support and development according to context.

Organizational change is consistent in MCC's 50 year history. I am confident that the next season will lead to changes to continue to improve stability. I also strongly encourage local churches to utilize the network structure to create recommendations from the Networks to the denomination that reflect ministry and spiritual needs for the next 10 years.

Final thoughts

The Interim time has discovered intense conflict among denominational leaders around multiple issues with deep roots, some spanning a decade or more. The conflict which may lessen at times is not resolved and requires a more intensive intervention. It is my deeply held belief as a follower of Jesus, that the path of grace is best, yet that path is often filled with stones. Stones may cause stumbling, or become weapons inflicting pain upon others, and those same stones may be used as a resource for the future. What matters for us as the Body of Christ is how these stones are cleared away from the path: gathering what is needed for shared ministry to lift one another up and ensure we do not create a new stumbling block for others on the path towards liberation.

As in any season of change, there were incredible challenges. I made unintentional mistakes along the way and accept responsibility for falling short in those moments. Leaders bear responsibility and equally push towards healthy dialogue and ensuring processes are honored even in times of disagreement.

Finally, it is my deep conviction that the call of MCC from 1968 is not fulfilled. Today, people are still living in fear and isolation because of spiritual and political abuse. Millions are living hundreds or thousands of miles from the nearest MCC church or ministry. In fact, until every city and nation has heard the message of liberation and experienced the Open Table we offer, our life transforming ministries are vital. Our call is not limited to the churches in which we gather. Our call is to use every resource possible, including technology, to share the message in every language and to every nation and city. I continue to pray and work for our call to be fulfilled.

It has been an honor to serve the people of MCC. May God bless you, Christ be your light, and the Holy Spirit your fire.

Rev. Elder Rachelle Brown

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