

**REV. ELDER DARLENE GARNER**  
**TOWN HALL OPENING STATEMENT**  
**3 May 2016**

This is a very exciting time for us. We are just two months away from selecting the third Moderator of MCC in almost 50 years.

As a candidate, I want you to get to know me. Some of you have known me for a long time. Others do not know me at all. So in the question and answer time, feel free to ask questions about me as a person along with the questions you have about me as a candidate for Moderator.

As many of you know, I have been part of MCC for a long time – so long that it is now part of my DNA. MCC is not only a part of me. MCC is also woven into the fabric of my family. My wife is MCC clergy. My four children and a sister were baptized in MCC. My mother was touched by MCC shortly before she died when we worshipped and shared Communion together at New Creation MCC in Columbus OH.

Like many of you, I can still remember the first time I attended an MCC service. It was at MCC DC and I was a little nervous going in because I had no idea what to expect. What I actually experienced, though, changed my spiritual life forever.

There were all kinds of people there and to my surprise they were all friendly. Most of the songs were familiar and the preaching was powerful. Even the announcements excited me. I had never heard of a church offering so many things to do, opportunities to serve, and ways to get involved in doing social action. By the time we got to Communion, I was crying like a baby. Tears of joy were just rolling down my face.

I had found my people and a blessed assurance that Jesus is mine! From that day to this one, I have known that God led me to MCC and so this is my home.

I have done a lot of things in MCC. I was an active church volunteer and on a District Committee, some MCC-level task forces and the Department of People of Colors. I have also taught courses for student clergy.

I was pastor for three churches, a volunteer elder, and then a member of MCC staff. I have worked with churches of every size on 5 continents. And I have represented MCC at the US White House, with national and international organizations, and twice at the World Council of Churches.

I have had the privilege of working with many of the great lay and clergy pioneers of our movement, including our founder Rev. Elder Troy Perry, as well as working with those who are new to MCC.

I am honored to be a candidate. And I know there is a lot of work to be done. As a local church pastor, I always believed in infinite possibilities and that is the belief that I will have as Moderator. Not only can we be MCC, we can also become MCC – becoming even more than what we are or have been.

The experiences that I have had and the lessons I continue to learn from our people combine in a way that allows me to have knowledge and insight into the reality of who and where we have been; a deep understanding of how we got to where we are today; and a passion to go forward to where God is leading us next.

My personal vision of our next God-given destination is this:



A Vision for  
Metropolitan  
Community  
Churches

#GarnerTheVision

MCC  
METROPOLITAN  
COMMUNITY CHURCHES

- MCC is a global movement of diverse and compassionate congregations, communities and people.
- We are bound together by our mutual desire to follow the examples of Jesus – touching lives, transforming hearts and pursuing justice as we build the Beloved Community.

The current reality is that in the US, as in Australia, Canada, Europe, and some other parts of the world, church attendance and giving has dropped considerably since the late-20<sup>th</sup> century. MCC has not been immune to this culture shift.

There are many reasons for this decline but the impact is that our churches, and by extension, our denomination now have fewer people and far less money than we need in order to do everything we want to do. At every level in MCC, we are challenged to tailor our expectations to fit this new reality.

The 20<sup>th</sup> century model of building, doing, and financing church is no longer working. The old model of being the kind of denomination that all churches and the world turn to for everything they want or need is no longer working either.

Getting from where we are to where God is leading us will not be a simple thing yet it really is possible. Getting there will require making some difficult decisions. While I will always honor our history, in order to keep MCC relevant and moving forward, we must engage a new model for our movement. Let me show you a picture that I believe illustrates this new model.



**Many Trees Create the Forest of MCC**

Our churches,  
our communities and our people  
together create the diverse  
**MCC Forest,**  
a sign of hope for our world.



When I look at MCC of tomorrow, I see that MCC is like a global forest of strong and healthy trees. Each tree is a vibrant church, no matter its size or shape, and springs forth as a sign of hope to the world.



**Every Church is Rooted  
in the Values of MCC**

Each church has its own God-given  
purpose, mission, and  
pattern of growth.



Whether it is a new church that is just emerging or a mature church that has been around for a while, each one is deeply rooted in MCC values, committed to growing in their love for God, their neighbor, and for one another; making a positive difference in their communities; and working for justice wherever injustice is found.



### MCC is the Soil in which Each Church is Planted

- MCC provides historical connection and a collective identity
- MCC supports the trees so they will not blow over in the wind
- MCC protects the seeds from which new churches and leaders spring forth
- MCC offers the nutrients that feed the roots of all trees in the forest



The denomination of MCC is the soil in which each church is planted. It is the purpose of MCC to provide historical connection and a collective identity; to support the trees so they will not blow over in the wind; to protect the seeds from which new churches and leaders spring forth; and to offer the nutrients that feed the roots of all trees in the forest.

The effect of implementing this model would be that the denomination of MCC would then be clear about its re-defined purpose, be able to align with it, and then be free to focus its resources on pursuing its mission of supporting churches.

At the same time, the churches of MCC would be able to do the same thing – claim their purpose, identify their mission, and pursue that unique mission in innovative ways that are relevant and attractive to their own communities.

Through these strong, vibrant, and focused churches, led by called, qualified, and well-supported pastors, people’s lives are being changed for the better, justice is rising up, and, because of them, MCC is transforming the world.

With this model in mind, as Moderator, my immediate priorities would be:

- To fast-track a strategy to get us a fund development program that incorporates funding for churches as well as for our global movement.
- Also to fast-track a strategy to get us a marketing program that will help us attract more people to our churches.
- The level of contributions by churches to MCC will go down from 12% to 11.5% in January and down again in 2018 to 11%. So a definite priority would be to develop a right-sized 2017 budget to fit the declines in assessments.

- To maximize access to technology for use by our churches and by MCC as a strategic tool for reaching new people; teaching, training, and resource delivery; connecting us to one another; and enhancing communication.
- To implement an MCC-wide grassroots process of holy conversations so that a shared vision and mission for our future can emerge. This will also enable us to come to mutual agreement about what our churches can expect from MCC and what MCC can expect from our churches.
- And then I would inspire MCC at every level to organize and mobilize ourselves around the new shared vision, mission, and expectations.

And so it is that I am before you as a candidate for Moderator.

- ✓ One who knows and loves MCC, honors our past, and is fully focused on the future;
- ✓ One who listens deeply to every concern and feels compassion.
- ✓ One who is creative and works collaboratively, with the courage to make tough decisions when needed.
- ✓ One who is wise and knows how to effectively apply my wisdom, experience, and skills to changing circumstances.

Let us garner our future together. Walk with me as Moderator and we will boldly step into the infinite possibilities that a new tomorrow will hold.

**#GarnerOurFuture**  
**#GarnerOurVision**  
**#TheGarnerEffect**