

MCC New Members Class Resource Manual



This manual has resources, materials, and ideas for content and format of class(es) for prospective New Members. It is not intended as an exhaustive source, but as a springboard. Congregations should not necessarily use all the material contained within and may have other material that they would like to add. All material contained within, however, will necessarily have to be adapted for each congregation's particular context.

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Overview

Resource Manual: *This manual has resources, materials, and ideas for content and format of class(es) for prospective New Members. It is not intended as an exhaustive source, but as a springboard. Congregations may not use all the material contained within and may have other material that they would like to add. All material contained within, however, will need to be adapted for each congregation's particular context.*

Format and Purpose of New Member Class: *Depending on the content and context, membership classes would usually last from 2 to 4.5 hours, either in one session or in multiple sessions. Classes could be completed*

- *in one block of time,*
- *or in one day with break(s),*
- *or in a series of classes over days or weeks.*

Each congregation will have to determine what is most appropriate for its situation.

Each congregation will have determine their own specific goals for membership class -

- *to learn more about MCC,*
- *to learn more about the local church,*
- *to learn more about theological issues,*
- *to learn more about one another,*
- *to learn what the commitment of membership means*

- all of these, some combination of these, or something else entirely.

Publicizing Class(es): *Once the purpose, format, and the days and times of the class(es) are determined, details need to be shared and publicized with the congregation in enough time to allow for people to arrange their schedules. A written and/or verbal invitation from the Pastor or other leaders in the congregation may be issued with specific targeting of those who are new to the community and seem ready to learn more and possibly commit.*

Facilitator(s): *Each congregation will also have to determine who best to facilitate the membership class(es). The Pastor or other Pastoral Leader is very often involved in at least a good portion of the class, or at least designates a facilitator, but other Pastoral Staff, Board Members, Team Leaders may be involved in at least part of the facilitation. If more than one person is involved in facilitating the class(es), it is important to be clear ahead of time about who is responsible for which part and how the facilitators will work together to make the learning experience positive.*

Delivery Methods: *In addition to suggestions about content, this manual will also attempt to provide some suggestions about delivery methods. In working with adult learners, it is important to keep in mind that adults learn best in experiential, interactive modes: simply reading to them or lecturing is rarely enough to help the learning process. It is also important to remember that there are different learning styles represented among the participants, and by varying the format and mode of delivery, it will keep participants engaged at different levels and appeal to the various learning styles present.*

Handouts/Printed Material: *If there will be handouts of any kind, the details of printing them - what goes into them, who is responsible for printing, where they will be printed - need to be ironed out in sufficient time to assure that the handouts are completely prepared well before the class(es) start. Each participant should be provided with a good writing utensil and paper for taking notes if they choose to do so.*

Multimedia: *Very often, membership classes will include some sort of video, PowerPoint presentation, or even music. If there are any multimedia elements like these to be included, it will be important to determine who will set those up ahead of time and test that they work, and to ensure someone trained - the facilitator(s) or someone else - is available during the class(es) to operate the multimedia equipment.*

Refreshments: *Classes presented in one day with a significant break would usually include a meal at the break. Snacks would often be served at classes in any format. At the very least, drinks should be provided. It will be important to determine ahead of time which Team/Committee/person(s) will be responsible for any food, snacks, or drinks and for them to set up in plenty of time.*

Registration: *Each local church will need to determine if and how there will be any sort of registration or RSVP for participants. Doing so will provide estimates to allow planning for handouts and food.*

Start of Class

The start of the class is a time to meet, greet, and get to know the participants, for them to get to know one another and the facilitators. There are a variety of ways to do introductions. It is important to create a safe space for people to speak freely or not to speak, and also to create space that is shared and not monopolized by one or a few individuals. Some people are naturally more shy and reticent and some more outgoing and gregarious. Try to be sensitive to these differences in introductions. Model the introductions so participants get an idea of the content and length requested. Depending on purpose and length of class, introductions can be brief or can be more in depth.

Some possible brief introductions:

- Name, where from, occupation, how long attending
- Name, where from, occupation, what brought you to this church
- Name, where from, occupation, religious background
- Name, where from, what is your favorite place to go to think
- Name, story of how you got your name

Some possible 'icebreaker' type introductions to go with telling name

- All stand (or sit if unable to stand) in a circle. Read the following conditions. If they apply, step into circle (or raise hand if seated)
 - Live in city of _____; _____ County; (name other nearby cities and counties)
 - Over 50; under 50; under 35
 - Single; partnered
 - Like sports; like the arts
 - This is first MCC church; first church at all
 - Belonged to a Catholic/Lutheran/Episcopal church; to a Baptist/Pentecostal/Assemblies of God church; to a Presbyterian/Methodist/UCC church; another faith
 - Speak another language besides English
 - Other categories/conditions

-There are several introductory activities/icebreakers available. The internet offers many examples.

Some congregations, depending on time and purpose, may choose to make this a time of each person sharing their faith stories. Some questions that might help people in telling these stories might be:

- How did you understand faith when you were younger? How, if at all, has this changed?
- Who has been particularly instrumental in your faith story?
- Has there ever been a time when you felt like you had no place in a faith community? In God's love?
- What changed that?
- How is God present in the events of your everyday life?
- What is it that you believe the world needs more than anything else?

With all of the introduction activities, be sure to thank people for sharing.

Topics: *Following are some examples of possible topics that may be covered in membership classes. They do not have to all be covered and may be covered in any order that makes sense.*

MCC History

A brief history of MCC is helpful in understanding MCC in the current context. It is not important to go over each and every historical detail, but the founding narrative and broad strokes.

-For additional background: <http://mccchurch.org/overview/history-of-mcc/>

-Consider using a brief clip from the movie Call Me Troy: <http://mccchurch.org/call-me-troy-video/>

In 1968: Troy Perry, once a Pentecostal minister, defrocked and searching, was stunned when his lover Benny announced that their relationship was over. Following the failed suicide attempt, Perry experienced a renewed sense of spirituality. He began to pray again. And he was perplexed by the words of a stranger who prophesied, "God has a ministry for you. You are going to pastor a church." At that time, that was far from Troy Perry's mind.

October 6, 1968 – First MCC worship service had 12 people who sang, prayed, shared in communion, and gave in an offering.

***Community from the Beginning**

- 1970 – Denomination established at a meeting of church leaders from five cities: Chicago, Honolulu, Los Angeles, San Diego, and San Francisco.
- 1971 – Establishment of its "Mother Church," in Los Angeles, CA and more than 1,000 members attended.
- 1973 – International expansion with opening of first churches outside of the United States.

***Social Action from the Beginning**

Only two months after founding Metropolitan Community Church of Los Angeles (MCCLA), Rev. Troy Perry, then 28-years old, performs what Time Magazine describes as the first public same-sex wedding ceremony in the United States.

1968 – The marriage ceremony for the two Latino gay men performed by Rev. Perry at Metropolitan Community Church of Los Angeles, then located at 6205 Miles Avenue in Huntington Park, California.

***Spiritual Transformation from the Beginning**

- 1985 – 50-hour AIDS prayer vigil held in San Diego, CA
- 1986 – First International AIDS Vigil of Prayer held at MCC San Diego, which evolves into World AIDS Day
- Thousands of funerals and memorial services in a decade where other churches would not provide dignity to victims of HIV and AIDS

***Inclusion from the Beginning**

Transgender, straight, bisexual, immigrant, queer, gay, lesbian, and persons of all races all worked side by side since the first meetings.

- 1972 – First woman pastor, Freda Smith, was appointed within MCC
- 1981 – MCC officially adopted Inclusive Language as a standard practice for churches and worship (began in 1972 in MCC San Francisco, CA)

This is a good place to stop for reflection about what part of MCC history is most surprising, intriguing, touching...

MCC Today

- Global Presence currently present in 29 Nations
 - For examples: <http://mccchurch.org/overview/global-presence/>
 - Over 200 churches and ministries
- A voice for global justice
 - An advocate for the marginalized and oppressed
 - A partner in working for positive change
 - A witness calling attention to human rights abuses

-For additional information and facts about MCC to include or talk about: [MCC Fact Sheet](#)

-Another possible way to depict and start a conversation about MCC today is this page from the website: <http://mccchurch.org/meet-mcc/>

This is a good place to stop for reflection about what part of MCC today is most surprising, intriguing, touching, exciting...

MCC Mission

Be MCC: Transforming ourselves as we transform the world.

There are three parts to our wider Mission:

1. Metropolitan Community Church is an increasingly global and diverse people who proclaim and practice a spirituality that is liberating and sufficiently profound to address the issues of our volatile, uncertain and complex world.
2. We are called to develop and equip leaders, congregations and ministries to do the work of justice, compassion and the integration of sexuality and spirituality, gender identity and expression.
3. We will do this through high value training, cutting edge theological exploration, expanding partnerships and engaging with similarly minded justice movements.

MCC Vision

Metropolitan Community Church is compelled by an unfinished calling and a prophetic destiny. We are a global movement of spiritually diverse people fully awake to God's enduring love. Following the example of Jesus and empowered by the Spirit, we demand, proclaim and do justice in the world.

MCC Values

1. Inclusion

Love is our greatest moral value and resisting exclusion is a primary focus of our ministry. We want to continue to be the conduits of a faith where everyone is included in the family of God and where all parts of our being are welcomed at God's table.

2. Community

Offering a safe and open community for people to worship, learn and grow in their faith is our deep desire. We are committed to equipping ourselves and each other to do the work that God has called us to do in the world.

3. Spiritual Transformation

Providing a message of liberation from the oppressive religious environment of our day or to those experiencing God for the first time is what guides our ministry. We believe that when people are invited to experience God through the life and ministry of Christ, lives will be transformed.

4. Social Action

Working to talk less and do more, we are committed to resisting the structures that oppress people and standing with those who suffer under the weight of oppressive systems, being guided always by our commitment to global human rights.

This is a good place to stop for reflection about what MCC Mission, Vision, and Values might mean for, be most important to, speak most to, the participants...

MCC Statement of Purpose

As God's liberated people, we boldly. . .

Reclaim our Holy Identity

At MCC, we believe that even in our humanness, we are holy. We are liberated from other people's definitions of who we are. We are made both body and spirit. We believe that our sexuality is a holy gift from God so we no longer distance our bodies from our experience with God. We are a people who proudly participate in the communion of body and spirit.

Advance Our Call to Social Justice and Action

At MCC, we believe that Jesus led the way in acts of compassion and acts of justice. Because we have been a people in the margins of society, we understand fully the grace that God has extended to us. We seek to distance ourselves from exclusion and draw ourselves closer to including all those who are marginalized in any way. We stand boldly with those who resist the structures of exclusion, as Jesus did, and work to insure freedom for all people. In the margins, we are blessed.

Tell the Story of God’s Transforming Grace

At MCC, we come as we are to Christ and are changed by what we find. We experience a God with open arms, inviting all to take the sacred journey of faith and transformation. We are growing in our faith and claim that our place in society has magnified our place in God’s family. We are one of the many voices of God that, until now, has been lost in the margins!

Nurture the Value of Community

At MCC, we believe our ultimate ministry is in the world. We know that in order to prepare ourselves for radical service that changes lives, we must equip ourselves and others in the safety of a supportive community. We strive to live out a message that rejects the idea that any are excluded from the family of God.

Build Bridges that Liberate and Unite

At MCC, we have experienced the soul destruction that comes from hate filled rhetoric. In restoring our souls, we have come to find that our voices will speak the liberation that comes through peace, compassion, love, respect and grace. As followers of Jesus, we believe in everyone’s holy privilege to work out their own salvation. While we are a Christian church who follows Jesus, we respect those of other faith traditions and work together with them to free all those who are oppressed by hate, disregard and violence.

This is a good place to stop for reflection about the ways the MCC Statement of Purpose may be pertinent to the participants’ community...

MCC Structure

General Conference: Clergy and Lay delegates from each local MCC affiliated church gather every three years to conduct the business of the ministries, by-laws, and leadership structure of MCC. The next General Conference will be in July, 2016 in Victoria, British Columbia, Canada. Special General Conferences may be convened virtually for specific reasons.

The Moderator: The Moderator is elected by the General Conference for a six-year term. Moderator Rev. Dr. Elder Nancy Wilson was reelected at the 2010 General Conference and has announced that she will not seek another term in 2016. The Governing Board has created a Moderator Nomination Committee that will be seeking out qualified for moderator to present to General Conference in 2016.
-For more information: [Moderator’s Corner](#)

The Governing Board: Comprised of nine members, the Moderator, four clergy and four laity, and is authorized by the General Conference to carry on the governance of the MCC in an orderly manner between General Conferences, including finances and operations, matters pertaining to all documents of legal organization. The members of the Governing Board are elected by General Conference and serve in a voluntary capacity. In addition to the Moderator, current members of the Governing Board are:

Rev. Onetta Brooks	Raquel Benítez-Rojas
Rev. Clinton Crawshaw	Kareem Murphy
Rev. Dr. Robert Griffin	Sarah-Jane Ramage
Vacant	Gail Rissler

-For more information about the Governing Board and to ensure information is accurate and up-to-date, you will want to go to the website <http://governingboard.mccchurch.org/>

Council of Elders:

Elders have two primary roles:

- 1) As members of the Council of Elders, Elders have an ecclesial role: they oversee the affiliation of churches; and they have authority over the Clergy Manual and protocols for authorizing MCC clergy.
- 2) Elders have a spiritual/pastoral and teaching role in the Church: Elders are looked to as spiritual and pastoral leaders by the pastors, lay leaders and people of MCC. They may also be asked by the Moderator to represent and to speak for the denomination publicly.

Current Elders are:

Rev. Elder Dr. Nancy Wilson
Rev. Elder Darlene Garner
Rev. Elder Hector Gutierrez
Rev. Elder Mona West, Ph.D.
Rev. Elder Tony Freeman
Rev. Elder Dr. Candace Shultis
Rev. Elder Margarita Sanchez de Leon
Elder Nancy Maxwell
Rev. Elder Dwayne Johnson
Rev. Elder Pat Bumgardner
Rev. Elder Ines-Paul Baumann

-For more information about the Council of Elders, and to ensure information is accurate and up-to-date, you will want to go to the website: <http://mccchurch.org/how-we-work/council-of-elders/>

MCC Offices: In order to support churches, pastors, and members, MCC has 3 offices to provide staff and resources.

- **The Office of Formation and Leadership Development:** Headed by Rev. Elder Mona West, Ph.D, this office oversees the development and training of clergy and lay leaders
- **The Office of Emerging Ministries:** Headed by Rev. Elder Darlene Garner and Rev. Elder Hector Gutierrez, this office oversees development of ministries in new areas, with new peoples, and in new ways
- **The Office of Church Life and Health:** Headed by Rev. Elder Tony Freeman, this office, oversees the resourcing and support of our churches, especially those in transition

Day-to-Day Business Operations are the responsibility of the Director of Operations, Barbara Crabtree.

Network Groups: Network Group meetings with geographically close churches give pastors and congregations the opportunity for care and connection through fellowship, learning, and sharing.

Now is a good opportunity to check for general comprehension and questions about the MCC Structure. The most significant understanding is how MCC is connected and accountable...

MCC Strategic Plan

In order to help MCC live out its mission and more fully live into its vision, a Strategic Plan was developed and is being implemented. Having a plan in place helps to align the gifts and resources God has given MCC to most effectively take advantage of opportunities that MCC is given.

Objectives for this plan are:

1. **Global Growth:** Become a growing multicultural, international, spiritual community.
2. **Justice:** Claim our prophetic role as a justice movement for the 21st century.
3. **Congregations and Ministries:** Strengthen our congregations and ministries.
4. **People:** Cultivate, nurture, and deploy lay and clergy leaders that are equipped and empowered to carry out our global mission.
5. **Finances:** Build a culture of generosity to achieve our vision and mission.

Each objective has several priority actions that are being worked to help to achieve that objective.

-For specifics or more information about the Strategic Plan and to ensure information is accurate and up-to-date, you will want to go to the website : [MCC Strategic Plan 2014-2018](#)

This is a good place to stop for reflection about what might feel important to participants about the Strategic Plan...

MCC Statement of Faith

MCC contains in its Bylaws a Statement of Faith that was adopted in the early years of MCC. It is a broad statement, and it has never been intended as a litmus test or checklist of beliefs, so there is no need for participants to feel as though they must believe exactly as this is written. MCCers have a wide range of beliefs; MCC theology is a “wide tent.” It might even be said that MCCers have differing beliefs, but common values. Questions, doubts, and even disagreements in theology are absolutely encouraged. These are important points to highlight in looking over the Statement of Faith.

We believe...

1. In one triune God, omnipotent, omnipresent and omniscient, of one substance and of three persons: God – our Parent-Creator; Jesus Christ – the only begotten son of God, God in flesh, human; and the Holy Spirit – God as our Sustainer.
2. That the Bible is the divinely inspired word of God, showing forth God to every person through the law and the prophets, and finally, completely and ultimately on earth in the being of Jesus Christ.
3. That Jesus .. the Christ.. historically recorded as living some 2,000 years before this writing, is God incarnate, of human birth, fully God and fully human, and that by being one with God, Jesus has demonstrated once and forever that all people are likewise Children of God, being spiritually made in God's image.
4. That the Holy Spirit is God making known God's love and interest to all people. The Holy Spirit is God, available to and working through all who are willing to place their welfare in God's keeping.
5. Every person is justified by grace to God through faith in Jesus Christ.
6. We are saved from loneliness, despair and degradation through God's gift of grace, as was declared by our Savior. Such grace is not earned, but is a pure gift from a God of pure love. We further commend the community of the faithful to a life of prayer to seek genuine forgiveness for unkind, thoughtless and unloving acts' and to a committed life of Christian service.
7. The Church serves to bring all people to God through Christ. To this end, it shall arrange for regular services of worship, prayer, interpretation of the Scriptures, and edification through the teaching and preaching of the Word.

The Moderator and Governing Board have appointed a special task force to review, renew, and update the MCC Statement of Faith. This task force includes representatives from the Council of Elders, the Theologies Team, and those representing the theological, cultural, and global diversity of MCC. It has sought consultation from resources inside and outside of MCC. This new Statement of Faith will be presented to General Conference in 2016.

*-For more information and updates on, as well as to provide feedback to, the Commission on the MCC Statement of Faith: <http://mccchurch.org/commission-on-the-mcc-statement-of-faith/>
On that page, there is a link to the Facebook Page that will have the most up to date information.*

After looking at the Statement of Faith and understanding it is being revised, you may want to take a moment for reflection or questions...

Sacraments and Rites

MCC, in its Bylaws, provides for two sacraments and a number of rites. Again, there is no need for universal agreement about these, what they mean, how exactly they are administered, if there may be more or fewer.

Sacraments: *quite simply, visible signs of God's invisible grace. These ceremonial acts are of particular importance and significance to the church and to those who participate in them.*

MCC celebrates two sacraments:

1. **Baptism:** by water and by the Spirit, as recorded in the Scriptures, as a sign of the dedication to each life to God and God's service.

MCC is an ecumenical denomination that respects and includes varied theological beliefs about baptism and its power and significance.

MCC leaves up to each Pastor and local church the particulars of the celebration of baptism.

Again, MCC has many differing beliefs and practices around baptism.

**Infant Baptism: Some Pastors and local churches baptize infants and small children, signifying the intent of the caregivers, with the support of the congregation, to dedicate the child's life to learning about and growing in God. In these cases, the child will have to decide for themselves as they grow how they will continue and commit to their own spiritual life.*

**Believers Baptism: Some Pastors and local churches will baptize only youth and adults who are capable of making their own proclamation of faith for themselves, to dedicate themselves to their own spiritual growth as part of the community, with the support of the community.*

**Mode of Baptism: Depending on the Pastor, local church, context, and availability, baptisms may be done by sprinkling of water, pouring of water, or immersion in water.*

**Baptism is usually a one-time event, but Pastors and local churches may re-baptize for a number of pastoral reasons.*

**Many Pastors and local churches participate in baptismal re-affirmations either as individuals or as an act of congregational worship.*

-Pages 46-51 of MCC Theologies Team Holy Conversations resource provide one way for further dialogue on Baptism and its meaning in MCC: [Holy Conversations](#)

2. **Holy Communion:** Also known as the Eucharist and the Lord's Supper, this is a partaking of simple elements of a meal as Jesus did at his last meal with his followers when he commanded them eat and drink to remember who he was and what he had taught them. In MCC, we celebrate Holy Communion at least weekly and the meal and table are open to everyone, wherever they may be on their journey.

Again, there are a wide variety of beliefs and practices around Holy Communion and particulars are left up to each Pastor and local church.

**Communion Celebrants: Holy Communion may be celebrated by the Pastor or whomever the Pastor designates and the ceremony itself usually includes a telling of the story of the last meal Jesus shared with his followers, a prayer over the elements, and an open invitation to receive.*

**Communion Elements: The elements themselves are usually some sort of bread and some sort of juice or wine. Jesus used the elements he had available; the context of each congregation will influence what exact elements are used. Also of consideration in determining elements to use are the issues of gluten allergy regarding the bread or wafers, and the need for those in recovery to abstain from alcohol regarding the juice or wine.*

**Mode of Serving Communion: Communion may be served in the seats, by people coming to the altar in groups to receive the elements, or by being served as individuals or groups of family or friends. Elements may be received one at a time, first the bread, which may be a piece of a common loaf or crackers or wafers; then the cup, which may be small individual cups or a common cup.*

**Very frequently, communion in MCC is served by intinction, meaning bread of whatever form is dipped into the cup and then consumed.*

**Also very common in MCCs is the practice of the server of communion providing a brief prayer of blessing over those who have received communion.*

-Pages 52-58 of MCC Theologies Team Holy Conversations resource provide one way for further dialogue on Holy Communion and its meaning in MCC: [Holy Conversations](#)

Rites: *quite simply ritual, ceremonial acts of worship. In MCC, we have several rites, including:*

- **The Rite of Ordination** - setting apart of duly qualified persons for the professional ministry of this Church, in accordance with Bylaws and policies established
- **The Rite of Attaining Membership in the Church** - becoming a member of the local congregation after meeting criteria for membership (usually participation in a membership class)
- **The Rite of Holy Union/Holy Matrimony** - Holy Union is the joining of persons without legal standing, but provision for a sacred blessing. Holy Matrimony is the joining of person with legal standing and a provision of a sacred blessing.
- **The Rite of Funeral or Memorial Service** - celebration of life for the deceased
- **The Rite of Laying on of Hands** - prayer for the healing of the sick in mind, body or spirit conducted by the ministers of the Church, at their discretion, upon request
- **The Rite of Blessing** - for persons, things and relationships. This may include Boards, Teams, staff people, lay leaders, church buildings, hymnals, pets, rings, families...

After going over the Sacraments and Rites, you will probably want to take some time for questions and reflections, maybe even ask participants to share previous experiences of baptism and/or communion...

Progressive Christianity

Many MCC congregations and members, but by no means all, identify themselves as embracing Progressive Christianity, meaning a willingness to question tradition, acceptance of human diversity, a strong emphasis on social justice and care for the poor and the oppressed, and environmental stewardship of the Earth. While this may manifest in rejection of traditional doctrines by some, it does not necessarily follow that all progressives reject all traditional doctrines. It is also quite possible to be both a Progressive and an Evangelical. Evangelicalism simply means sharing the Good News of life lived in the way of Jesus.

Some characteristics of Progressive Christianity:

- A spiritual vitality and expressiveness, including participatory, arts-infused worship
- Intellectual integrity and creativity, including an openness to questioning
- Critical interpretation of the scripture
- Acceptance of people who have differing understandings of the concept of "God"
- An affirmation of Christian belief with a simultaneous sincere respect for values present in other religions and belief systems
- An affirmation of both human spiritual unity and social diversity
- An unyielding commitment to steadfast solidarity with the poor as the subjects of their own emancipation, rather than being the objects of charity.
- Compassion for all living beings.

-More resources: [The Center for Progressive Christianity](#)

After looking at Progressive Christianity, which may be a new concept for some, you may want to take a moment for reflection or questions...

View of Scripture

The view of Scripture is yet another area where there are varying beliefs among MCCers. The overwhelming majority of those in MCC take the Bible quite seriously, but not literally.

In the scope of a membership class, it is not likely possible to explore with any depth how the Bible was developed (from oral tradition to being written down), how the canon was solidified (voted on by Councils), how translations have been made (not having originals; from old language to new; by committee), and how the continuing discoveries of history and archaeology inform how we read the Bible. Nor is it likely possible to explore how changing contexts shape our understanding of the texts. However, it is likely that prospective members have questions about the Bible and its application to life today, and many have experienced wounds inflicted by those using the Bible as a weapon.

In [The Good Book: Reading the Bible with Mind and Heart](#), Rev. Dr. Peter Gomes encourages thoughtful questions of the Bible, gives an overview of how the Bible came to be, and emphasizes these three points about the Bible:

1. The Bible is public in nature, belonging to the whole community and not any one person.
2. The Bible is a living text; this dynamic power comes from the Spirit that is still moving today.
3. The Bible is inclusive of all people; we can all find ourselves in some part of it.

In [Reading the Bible Again for the First Time](#), Dr. Marcus Borg talks about an older way of seeing the Bible as inerrant and infallible that is literalistic, moralistic, and excluding he names the "literal-factual" lens of reading the Bible. He shows this lens is no longer working for many people, that more people are looking at the Bible with a new lens aware of historical and cultural realities, is experiential, and recognizes stories can be true without being factually true. This he names the "historical-metaphorical" lens of reading the Bible that "is about a deepening relationship with the God to whom the Bible points."

In [Our Tribe: Queer Folks, God, Jesus, and the Bible](#), our own Rev. Elder Dr. Nancy Wilson says this: For me, the Bible is an elastic, resilient friend who bounces back and even talks back when I question it. It would be so much easier for these students if we gays and lesbians [and bisexual, transgender, and allies] would just continue to hate ourselves and the Bible....

But it's not their Bible or their God to control. The Bible belongs to anyone who will love it, play with it, push it to its limits, touch it, and be touched by it – and the same is true for God. The Bible must be a holy text for [us] because we are truly human, created by the God who created heaven and earth. We are at a critical moment on this question. Either we will believe what others have told us about the Bible, feel awful about it and ourselves (and possibly reject the Bible or devalue ourselves); or, we will dare to learn and study and struggle with our own canon. The choice is ours.

-Another MCC resource: [The Power of the Bible](#)

After looking at the Bible with new lenses, which may be very new for some, you may want to take a moment for reflection or questions...

Sexuality and Spirituality

Very closely related to the way we read Scripture is our theology of sexuality and spirituality. In MCC, we read the Bible and Christian tradition and theology, as well as our own experiences, to see that sexuality is a gift from God.

A heartfelt longing to reconcile homosexuality and Christianity led Troy Perry to establish Metropolitan Community Churches, and the integration of sexuality and spirituality remains at the core of MCC. Both sexuality and spirituality are born of the same impulse to connect with that which is beyond ourselves and are both good; we are created by God as spiritual, sensual, sexual people. Our sexuality, in fact, can be a way into deepening our spirituality.

-Pages 22-29 of MCC Theologies Team Holy Conversations resource provide an excellent way to discuss the integration of sexuality and spirituality: [Holy Conversations](#)

This resource provides a mechanism for dialoguing about the diversity of human sexual expression in MCC and how it may relate to our spirituality.

-Homosexuality and the Bible MCC Resources:

[The Bible and Homosexuality](#)

[Not a Sin, Not a Sickness](#)

[Our Story, Too: Reading the Bible with New Eyes](#)

-Sexuality and Spirituality MCC Resource: [Coming Out as Sacrament](#)

-A few books that may be helpful:

[The Children Are Free](#)

[What the Bible Really Says About Homosexuality](#)

[God and the Gay Christian](#)

[Outing the Bible: Queer Folks, God, Jesus, and the Christian Scriptures](#)

[Radical Love: Introduction to Queer Theology](#)

The notion of talking about sexuality and especially sexuality and spirituality is new for many people. You

may want to take a moment of reflection and check how people are feeling...

Expansive Language/Inclusive Behavior

As MCC, inclusion is one of our core values. It is not enough to say we are inclusive, we must be intentionally inclusive in our language and our actions. It is a matter of justice to include people.

Be Inclusive ...in our language, our attitudes, and our actions.

In 1973, UFMCC Bylaws were amended so that neither God nor church leaders would be referred to with only male pronouns. At the 1974 and 1976 UFMCC General Conferences, strong stands were made for inclusive, non-sexist language in church documents, publications, Bylaws, Statement of Faith, and worship.

In 1981 MCC adopted guidelines for using inclusive language in church life and worship and the amendment of the wording of the UFMCC Statement of Faith according to these guidelines.

The Inclusive Language policy is not written in stone -- our understanding of what it means to be inclusive will and must continue to evolve.

What is inclusivity? Inclusivity is an attitude of mutuality and openness toward others that recognizes everyone's right of equal access to the experience and realization of wholeness and it is a commitment to remove barriers between individuals and among communities that deny such access.

What is inclusive language? Inclusive language reflects an attitude of mutuality and openness toward others that recognizes everyone's right of equal access to the experiences and realization of wholeness. Inclusive language reflects a sensitivity to overcome barriers that exist between individuals and among communities in such areas as gender, race, class, age, physical differences, nationality, theological beliefs, culture and lifestyle.

<i>Exclusive Words</i>	<i>More Inclusive Words</i>
mankind, man, men	humankind, humans, all people
brotherhood, brothers	humanity, neighbors, friends
sons of God	people of God, children of God
forefathers	ancestors
man-made	made by human hands, constructed
chairman	chairperson, chair, presider
husband and wife, man and wife	spouses, partners
please stand	please rise in body or spirit as you feel comfortable
disabled person	person with a disability
minority people	people of differing ethnicities
alien, foreigner	immigrant, visitor from another country
third world	developing countries
washed white	washed clean

darkness of evil	presence of evil
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Some good general guidelines for being inclusive of people in language:

Use language that reflects what people call themselves. For example, taking the time to find out what labels or words a person or group uses for their identities and experiences rather than making assumptions, and always respecting the language a person uses to self-identify.

Use “person-centered” language as a general rule. For example, not using an identity as a stand-in for a person or a group: “people with disabilities” instead of “the disabled”; “transgender people” instead of “transgenders” etc., remembering that any aspect of a person is just that: an aspect of a person.

Understand and respect the difference between sexual orientation and gender identity. Also, do not assume all people that attend MCC are GLBTQI.

Use words that encompass all genders rather than only two. For example, “people of all genders” instead of “women and men”; “children” instead of “boys and girls”; “siblings” or “kindred” instead of “brothers and sisters.”

Avoid negative or demeaning language for people with disabilities. For example, “people living with HIV/AIDS” rather than “AIDS victims”; “people who use wheelchairs” rather than “wheelchair-bound” or “someone confined to a wheelchair.”

Be thoughtful about the imagery you use. For example, words like “black,” “dark,” and “blind” are often used symbolically to express negative concepts. There are many alternatives and ways to diversify our use of certain symbolism.

Use language that does not assume a certain level of education. For example, not assuming that all people have graduated from high school and/or gone to college (or will go to college after high school).

Use language that does not assume a certain level of financial means or certain sort of vocation. For example, not assuming that everyone present is employed, has a stable living situation, can afford to meet their basic needs, works a first shift job, etc.

If this kind of inclusive language and behavior is very new or uncomfortable, you may need to take some time with it, especially before moving on to expansive language about God...

Be Reconciliation...

Scripture provides a myriad of names, images, and terms for God. Jesus, the Hebrew prophets and the New Testament authors were very daring in their imagery for God. Scripture gives us a richer and fuller picture of God. It frees God from the limits our humanness wants to place upon God. Thus, it is important for us to release God from the boxes of Father, Mother, Creator, or Spirit, in which we have trapped God. God is beyond gender, beyond race, beyond nationality, beyond any culture or time. By no longer identifying God with words or concepts primarily or exclusively associated with one gender, one race, one group, we more faithfully witness to the nature of a God who is not limited to one gender, one race, or one group.

We are called to reconcile humanity to God.

The fact that such a change is neither familiar nor comfortable for many of us does not mean that we need not expend the effort. Allowing our lives to be transformed by the power of God often involves our

submitting to changes that we initially resist. The work of learning to restate the traditional formulations of our faith in light of God's present Word is not a burden, but a sacred privilege.

Expansive language for God:

Use non-gendered or inclusive gendered terms for God wherever such changes do not alter the fundamental meaning. Balance male images for God with female images. Where possible, replace pronouns with non-gendered nouns, or use balanced gendered pronouns or words such as 'who', 'whom', 'one', and 'God-self.'

Expansive language for Jesus, the Christ:

The historical person, Jesus, was male. The historical fact that Jesus was male affirms not that God chose to become incarnate with masculine characteristics, but that Jesus is fully human as well as fully divine. Because Jesus incorporates the humanity of both men and women, it is appropriate to emphasize the full humanity rather than primarily the maleness of Jesus. Use direct address, adjectives and verbs to replace nouns or pronouns, considering whether meaning would be adversely changed.

Some Examples of Expansive Images of God in the Bible

Mother	<i>Numbers 11:12-13, Isaiah 46:3-4, Isaiah 66:9</i>
Woman	<i>Luke 15:8-10</i>
Baker	<i>Matthew 13:33, Luke 13:20-21</i>
Hen	<i>Psalms 61:4, Luke 13:34</i>
Eagle	<i>Deuteronomy 32:11-12</i>
Potter	<i>Jeremiah 18:1-11</i>
Rock	<i>Deuteronomy 32:18, Psalm 62:6-7</i>
Wind	<i>John 3:8, Acts 2:2</i>
Fire	<i>Deuteronomy 4:24, Acts 2:3</i>
Water	<i>Jeremiah 17:13, John 7:37-38</i>

It is often helpful to look several scripture passages to really see the breadth of imagery used for God.

Because expansive language is often a very new concept and people are very accustomed to hearing the same names and images of God frequently, they may need reassurance that this is really about expanding our understanding of God and thereby deepening our relationship with God. You may want to ask people, if they are comfortable, to name any challenge they may have, and also name an image of God they have not used frequently but are willing to explore...

-A great group study and reflection guide for inclusive language for both people and God:

[More Than Just Words](#)

-Excellent resource for including transgender and gender non-conforming persons:

[MCC TransFormative Church Ministry Program](#)

-Other resources for diversity and inclusion: <http://mccchurch.org/resources/diversity-inclusion/>:

Local Church Specifics

History of Local Church

It is helpful to include a history of the local church. Many churches have histories written up and available. If you are need of writing or revising a church history, here are some things to include:

- When, how, and by whom the church was founded
- Worship spaces over the years
- Pastoral leaders and transitions
- Significant programs in the life of the church
- Any other significant events

If there are longtime members who are good storytellers, it may be helpful to have them come in and share stories about the church.

Local Church Mission/Vision/Values

Include here the Mission/Vision/Values/Purpose of the local church. These foundational documents should be able to give a clear picture of what the church is being called to be and do by God.

Local Church Structure

It is extremely helpful to those new to the local church to understand how the church functions.

- *Who is the Senior Pastor? Are there other pastoral staff? Who are they and what are their responsibilities? Any other church staff (including volunteer staff)?*
- *Is there a Board of Directors/Board of Servants/Administrative Council?*
- *What is their purpose? How often do they meet? Are meetings open?*
- *Are there Deacons/Lay Ministers? Who are they and what is their role?*
- *What other Teams/Committees/Ministries are there? What do they do?*

Introduction to Board/Staff/Team Leaders

Any Board/Staff/Team Leaders that are able to attend should be introduced and even say a few brief words. It is helpful to be able to put faces and names together and important for relationships to start.

Worship in the Local Church

New Members Class is often a good time to explain worship practices the local church has. For example, if the church follows the liturgical year and/or lectionary, particular special prayers or songs, etc.

Behavior Covenant

Conflict is a fact of our lives, even in the church. Conflict is not bad; on the contrary, conflict is necessary for growth. Being in conflict can bring issues to the forefront to deal with and be stronger in the process, and can help in learning how to be real community. The issue is handling conflict in a healthy way so as to be transformative. In order to handle the inevitable conflict in healthy ways, some congregations opt to have a behavioral covenant in place that outlines how people will treat one another, spells out the expectations of how members will act in community.

If your congregation has a behavior covenant or some other document outlining behavior expectations, it is important to ensure prospective members understand its meaning and significance.

“A behavioral covenant is a written document developed by leaders, agreed to and owned by its creators and practiced on a daily basis as a spiritual discipline. The Covenant answers the question, “How will we behave...when we don’t understand each other and when we don’t agree?” – Gil Rendle, Consultant

-A few sample [Behavioral Covenants](#) to look over

Spiritual Location Exercise

*Just as we have personality types, we also have spirituality types. In her book, [Discover Your Spiritual Type](#), Corinne Ware identifies four spiritual types. All of these styles seek after God and desire to serve God and others. Each one simply takes a different route to get there. Helping people understand their spiritual type will help them to understand more about how they experience God and what spiritual practices, worship experiences, programs, and activities will enhance their spiritual lives. *-Here is a link to a [Spiritual Style Inventory](#) and a link to a [Spiritual Type Quiz](#). Taking either one will lead participants to discover their spiritual type.**

Spiritual Types

A Head Spirituality: This is an intellectual “thinking” spirituality that favors what it can see, touch and vividly imagine. This type will usually choose more study, better sermons and some sort of theological renewal within the worshipping community. It supports education and publication. Content is primary and preserving the faith from generation to generation is important.

A Heart Spirituality: For this type, it is all heart – combined with the concrete, real life stuff. The transformational goal is that of personal renewal. Theologically, this experience stresses that God is real in the here and now. Prayer is usually extemporaneous and a focus on service to others is the witness of one’s faith. This style contributes warmth of feeling, energy and freedom of expression.

A Mystic Spirituality: This type tends to “hear from God” rather than “speak to God.” The aim is union with the Holy and although this is never completely achievable, only the continued attempt or “the journey” satisfies. This type of spirituality is contemplative, introspective, intuitive and focused on an inner world. This style contributes the wisdom of quieting outside distractions.

A Visionary Spirituality: This type is single-minded with a deeply focused, almost crusading type of spirituality. Their aim is simply to obey God and to witness to God’s coming reign. They are inclined to be assertive in desire to implement a vision of the world as the dominion of God on earth. They equate prayer and theology with action. They have a vision of the ideal they strive for.

-This [Journal Exercise](#) will help participants understand spiritual types and then, based on that, place their spiritual location.

Spiritual Locations

Searching: Not sure where I am or what I believe. Am looking for myself and for God. Am wondering about the church, Christianity, God.

Changing: Moving in a different direction than before. Reaching for a new way to be. Interested in knowing a different kind of God. Desire to be different.

Connecting: Want community, friends, a spiritual family. Desire to play and worship with others. Want to participate in a small group.

Listening: Need to do things that help me listen for God. Desire to do something creative while listening for my life to speak to me. Want to learn how to listen for the still small voice.

Serving: Ready to use my gifts to serve others. Want to serve in a ministry. Want to do justice work or be involved in acts of compassion.

Preparing: Desire to expand my understanding of sacred texts or world religions or theological ideas. Want to prepare to live out my call or passion.

This [Shopping Cart Exercise](#) will help participants choose and commit to activities to deepen their spiritual lives.

Spiritual Gifts

In writing to the early churches, Paul emphasized more than once that every person has spiritual gifts from God and the church, as the community of those gathered in God, needs all of those gifts.

1 Corinthians 12:4-30; Romans 12:4-8; and Ephesians 4:11-13 contain teachings about the gifts and roles God has given to the church and how they are all needed in community.

In order to help people discover their spiritual gifts so that they can be shared in community, many congregations will provide an opportunity for completing a Spiritual Gifts Inventory. There are many different ones available online.

Stewardship

New Members class is a time to teach about how our generosity impacts the church, the community, and the world. How does sharing of time, talent, treasure make a positive difference?

Stewardship is not just about money; however, money is not 'dirty' topic not to be talked about at church. Jesus, in fact, spoke about money more than any other subject, except the realm of God itself.

Money is indeed one of the resources, the gifts, that God gives us to do the ministry of the church.

This is a good time to share how people's lives are being changed at your church, in your community, in the world, because of how people in the congregation at this MCC are sharing generously.

This would be a good time to introduce any members of the Stewardship Team.

In Christian tradition stewardship refers to the way

- time
- talents (spiritual gifts)
- treasure (material possessions)

are given or shared for the service of God.

Being generous is when we give or share, without the expectation of anything in return.

Our own generosity helps us to experience just a little of the heart of our abundantly generous God.

We do not give to get something from God like favor or material goods.

We do not give out of guilt or because we think God will punish us if we don't.

We give out of gratitude for all God has done for us, giving us life, loving us unconditionally.

Some scriptures about stewardship:

2 Corinthians 9: 6-8

Matthew 25: 35-36

Matthew 7:6

Malachi 3: 10

-MCC Resources on Stewardship

[Stewardship Webinar](#)

[How to Develop a Stewardship Team](#)

-Some possible book resources on Stewardship:

[Extravagant Generosity](#)

[Creating Congregations of Generous People](#)

How to get involved

New members are very often looking for the ways to best make connections and relationships and to share their gifts. Getting people involved helps them to engage and strengthen their spirituality.

You will want to make it easy for these participants to get involved in the groups and activities that will help them grow and use their gifts well. If Team/Committee/Ministry leaders are available for New Members class, give them an opportunity to share what kinds of programs, activities, ministries are available to participate in and how to get involved

In addition to any presentations by leaders, it is best practice to have a form for participants to fill out. Use this form to capture contact information - name, address, phone, email, birthday, anniversary - as well as an opportunity to indicate which activities/programs/teams/ministries they are interested in and how they will share their gifts of time, talent, and treasure.

Ensure that their personal information is kept confidential and only given to people who really need it and that it is only shared as the participants choose.

However, it is important to ensure that Team/Committee/Ministry leaders responsible for the groups and activities that will help them grow and use their gifts well to know of their interest and that the leader(s) follow through quickly.

Meaning of Membership

Membership will have slightly different meanings in each congregation, based on context and what the liturgy for the Rite of Attaining Membership includes. In general, however, in MCC, non-members are welcome to participate in every area of church life, except they are unable to serve on the Board/Council and they are unable to vote at Congregational Meetings. MCC does allow for dual church memberships. Simply attending the New Members class does not obligate the participants to join; the final decision rests with them. However, if they choose to join as members, the

Rite of Attaining Membership usually asks for those joining to promise to support the local church, generally through such activities as these:

- worship attendance
- continued spiritual growth
- faithful stewardship
- serving in at least one ministry
- participating in church activities
- attending Congregational Meetings
- praying for the church and its leaders

It also usually asks the local church to pledge its support to new members to help them grow as they all journey together.

Going over the liturgy used for the Rite of Attaining Membership is important so that participants will know exactly what will happen in the Rite (keep in mind that many people are very shy and nervous being in front of a group of people) and what it is that they will promise.

-Sample liturgies:

[New Member Liturgy](#)
[Membership](#)

Closing

Make sure to thank everyone for coming and participating, as well as any volunteers who helped make the class possible. Make sure participants understand that whether to join or not to join is their choice

and that even if they choose not to join, their participation in the life of the congregation is appreciated. If they are undecided, or if you want to give time for decision-making, ensure that they know who to contact when their decision is made. If they do choose to join, ensure they know what the next steps are.