A Companion Guide
to the
MCC Statement of Faith
Our Faith

"Come, taste, and see." Jesus Christ, You invite all people to your open table.

You make us Your people, a beloved community.

You restore the joy of our relationship with God, even in the midst of loneliness, despair, and degradation.

We are each unique and we all belong, a priesthood of all believers.

Baptized and filled with Your Holy Spirit, You empower us to be Your healing presence in a hurting world.

We expect to see Your reign on earth as it is in heaven, and we will work toward a world where everyone has enough, wars cease, and all creation lives in harmony.

We affirm Your charge to all of humanity to care for the land, sea, and air.

Therefore, we will actively resist systems and structures which are destroying Your creation.

With all of creation we worship You—every tribe, every language, every people, every nation.

We know You by many names, Triune God, beyond comprehension, revealed to us in Jesus Christ, who invites us to the feast.

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The 2016 MCC Statement of Faith

As adopted 5 July 2016 at General Conference XXVI, Victoria, British Columbia, Canada
MCC Statement of Faith

Preamble
Metropolitan Community Churches is one chapter in the story of the Church, the Body of Christ. We are people on a journey, learning to live into our spirituality, while affirming our bodies, our genders, our sexualities. We don't all believe exactly the same things. And yet in the midst of our diversity, we build community, grounded in God's radically inclusive love for all people. We are part of an ongoing conversation on matters of belief and faith, shaped by scripture and the historic creeds, building on those who have come before us. Our chapter begins when God says to us: "Come, taste, and see."

Our Faith
"Come, taste, and see." Jesus Christ, You invite all people to Your open table. You make us Your people, a beloved community. You restore the joy of our relationship with God, even in the midst of loneliness, despair, and degradation. We are each unique and we all belong, a priesthood of all believers. Baptized and filled with Your Holy Spirit, You empower us to be Your healing presence in a hurting world.

We expect to see Your reign on earth as it is in heaven as we work toward a world where everyone has enough, wars cease, and all creation lives in harmony. We affirm Your charge to all of humanity to care for the land, sea, and air. Therefore, we will actively resist systems and structures which are destroying Your creation.

With all of creation we worship You—every tribe, every language, every people, every nation. We know You by many names, Triune God, beyond comprehension, revealed to us in Jesus Christ, who invites us to the feast.

Amen.
Commentary on the
MCC Statement of Faith
**Introduction**

The new Statement of Faith and this accompanying Companion Guide are meant to be a part of the ongoing openness to conversation within MCC about our faith and beliefs. MCC has long been an umbrella under which people from many different theological perspectives have found a home. We hope that the words you find here, which have been carefully and prayerfully chosen, will foster conversations which will lead us to the growing edges each of us has theologically and personally. We believe that when we are open to those possibilities, the Holy Spirit will lead us to new and exciting places in our experience of the Divine.

In the history of Christianity, statements of faith have often taken on the form of a document created for external use—a list of propositions presented to the world. They often include long explanations, citing scriptural references and the teachings of earlier Christian writers or the founders of a particular tradition.

For our revised Statement of Faith, we have chosen to forego a lengthy list of bullet points in favor of a shorter statement that can be used in worship.

The new Statement of Faith is written in the form of a prayer. We have done this for two reasons. First, MCC is committed to the use of inclusive language in reference to both humanity and God. Early on in our work, we were troubled by the awkward phrasings that resulted from our efforts to avoid gendered pronouns in our repeated references to God. By moving from speaking about God or specific persons of the Trinity in the third person (e.g., he, she, it), a move to speaking to them in the second person (you) alleviated this problem. The second reason was that once we made the initial shift, we recognized that a prayer, offered communally, transformed the Statement of Faith from a list of propositions about God into an intimate communication with God.

**About the name "Statement of Faith"**

Though MCC has used the name "Statement of Faith" for a very long time, the language that has existed in the Bylaws for our first 46 years doesn't actually contain this phrase. The new Statement of Faith incorporates these words as an official title.

**Preamble**

The preamble sets the stage for our new Statement of Faith. It briefly reminds us of the origins of MCC and our role within the Church universal.

**Metropolitan Community Churches is one chapter in the story of the Church, the Body of Christ.**

**Metropolitan Community Churches.** We have chosen to use Metropolitan Community Churches as it is more indicative of how we are known than our legal name of Universal Fellowship of Metropolitan Community Churches.
Is one chapter in the story of the Church. By acknowledging that we are one chapter, we honor the understanding that MCC is a part of the larger story of church history. We recognize the great "cloud of witnesses" (Hebrews 12:1) who have come before us, even as we make our own contributions and foster new generations. We claim our place in the continuum of faith communities charged with spreading God's love, providing life affirming community and connection.

The Body of Christ. A commanding image of the Church, especially in the early and undisputed letters of Paul (e.g., 1 Corinthians 12:27; Romans 12:4-5), the Body of Christ is the physical presence of Jesus in the world. As Christ's body, we continue Jesus' mission through table ministry, prophetic word and action, healing, and bringing about reconciliation between people and God.

As a body, we live in solidarity with one another. The body is many parts, each sharing in the pain and the joy of the others. Different parts have different functions, and each is given equally unique honor (1 Corinthians 12:12-31).

We are people on a journey, learning to live into our spirituality, while affirming our bodies, our genders, our sexualities.

On a journey. The language of journey reminds us of the Exodus, when the children of Israel left behind their bondage in Egypt to travel through the desert on their way to the Promised Land.

Many come to MCC from places of great pain. We acknowledge our roots in the good news of liberation for all God's people; and we move in faith toward God's promises for our wholeness. Like the peoples united in the story of the Exodus, the people of MCC come from many different backgrounds. We don't all believe exactly the same things; yet, we find community in the midst of our diversity.

In our interactions with one another and our encounter with God, we are transformed. The image of a journey describes this ongoing process. We haven't yet reached our destination. We are a work in progress. We're still figuring out how our life together works. We're open to new experiences and the movement of God's Spirit among us, in the Church, and in the world.

Learning to live into our spirituality. For many, spirituality is an evolutionary and sometimes revolutionary progression. Over time, theological messages have separated body and soul or spirit. Some early church theologians elevated the soul far above the body, not only in terms of the body's finitude, but also in terms of rigorous decrees regarding sex, sexuality, chastity, virginity, intercourse, and marriage.

We acknowledge the many and varied individual and congregational journeys and expressions of embodied spirituality that comprise MCC. As a church, we strive to create safe space with life affirming messages about God's creativity, love, and Spirit. We work to recognize the dignity, value, and worth of each person as a physical-spiritual being created in the image of God.

Affirming our bodies, our genders, our sexualities. Some in the MCC community have received messages about the separation of various aspects of personal identity from spirituality. A typical question that is often internalized from without is: "Can one be a member of the LGBTQIA or queer
community and Christian?” Responses to this question have also had varying impacts on individuals and communities in MCC.

Just as there are so many expressions of spirituality in MCC, there are many expressions of sex and sexuality. Living into our spirituality and affirming our whole selves also means having occasionally difficult conversations about gender identity, sexual expression, sexualities, sexual ethics, social norms, and constructs that have had damaging impacts on our lives or the lives of those in our community.

While MCC was founded during a time of great challenge for the LGBTQIA community, not everyone has the story of pain, sexual repression, and marginalization. The Statement of Faith and this Companion Guide invite us to a conversation about healthy sexual ethics, values, theologies of gender and sexuality, beliefs about sexual expression and practices, and where we believe God is at work within our individual embodied spirituality, as well as resulting actions. While “living into our spirituality and affirming our whole selves,” we are also led to inquire, consider, and talk about how the image of God (imago dei) might be reflected in our bodies, our sexualities, our sexual expressions, and our gender identities, when we live in integrity.

We don’t all believe exactly the same things. And yet in the midst of our diversity, we build community, grounded in God’s radically inclusive love for all people.

These seem like simple sentences. Yet they touch the very core of MCC. We are a people of diverse faith. No one is expected to subscribe to every single declaration in the new Statement of Faith. As a church and a community, we do not expect uniformity in our faith. Instead, we celebrate our diversity, along with the challenges and the tensions this brings.

We don’t all believe the same things. Creeds, statements of faith, and dogmas have traditionally been used as fences and safeguards against all that are different. They were built up like walls against the foreign, the dangerous, and the new. Often though, such statements have only helped to keep people in line. The MCC Statement of Faith is intended to do neither. The Statement of Faith is not intended to build a fence that keeps "us" in and "them" out. MCC acknowledges the fact that there is a richness of diversity among us and this gives us strength.

In the midst of our diversity, we build community. The Statement of Faith is not the answer to end all questions and discussion, but one step in our conversation. We hope it can be a stone for building community, shaped and reshaped by the standard of God's radically inclusive love. We practice and live this in every worship service: Together we celebrate an open table at Holy Communion, in the knowledge that the sister or brother next to us might have a different understanding of what exactly happens at the table. And still we experience community with God and with each other in this diversity.

Grounded in God's radically inclusive love for all people. God's love is radical in that we cannot contain it, hold power over it, or limit it. In God's love we dare to say: This is how we describe our faith at this moment in our history along our collective journey. We nurture the bonds of our community, knowing that our individual professions of faith may be different, more or less detailed, deeper, broader, challenging, at times frightening, fresh, surprising, and sometimes more traditionally worded. Yet,
always, we are held in God's love. Or, as it was formulated in the Reformation: *In essentials unity, in non-essentials liberty, in all things charity.*

We are part of an ongoing conversation on matters of belief and faith, shaped by scripture and the historic creeds, building on those who have come before us.

**Ongoing conversation.** Within MCC we share a strong conviction that in talking about faith, not everything has already been spoken. It is always possible to go deeper to achieve a better understanding of our beliefs. We are open to frank and respectful dialogue between different perspectives. Just as we recognize that MCC is one more chapter in Christian history, we share a profound belief that our understanding of God in our stories is always developing in an ongoing conversation. We honor those in our own MCC tradition who have expressed their faith and beliefs in both words and actions. And, we continue to build on this inclusive tradition today.

**Shaped by scripture.** Members of MCC come from a variety of traditions that recognize varying canons of scripture. Those with roots in historic Protestant traditions have fewer books in their bibles than those from Roman Catholic or various Eastern Orthodox communities. In addition to this, the various translations into modern languages are made from a variety of manuscript traditions. Some base their Old Testament collections on the Hebrew of the Masoretic Text, while others use the Septuagint and other Greek translations produced first by Greek-speaking Jews of the diaspora and later adopted by Greek-speaking Christians. This makes for a rich and diverse experience of scripture in MCC congregations around the world.

Today's MCC congregations continue to read from the bible. And, an increasing number of congregations and individuals also find value in an open canon that includes wisdom readings from a variety of religious traditions and contemporary writers.

**The historic creeds.** The original MCC Statement of Faith declares that MCC "moves in the mainstream of Christianity." While this phrase could be read as an attempt to fit into the religious landscape of North America in the early days of MCC, the Faith, Fellowship, and Order Commission had the following to say:

> For to move in 'the mainstream of Christianity' does *not* mean accepting the status quo of the Christian Church as it exists today in the U.S. or elsewhere, but to reach into the fullness of Christian history and tradition, and the fullness of Christian experience worldwide among all people, and the fullness of the varied scriptural images and themes available to us.¹

The historic creeds referred to in the many iterations of MCC's Statement of Faith are a part of the fullness that Jennie Bull describes in the passage above.

Whether we agree or push back against them, many of us are shaped by the historic creeds. This same dynamic of attraction and struggle characterizes the formation and our ongoing collective development as MCC. Previous versions of the MCC Statement of Faith have specifically listed the Apostles' Creed, the

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Nicene Creed, and the Athanasian Creed as having particular importance. (All three are provided in the third section of this Companion Guide.)

Our adoption and subsequent rejection of the Athanasian Creed provides a particularly clear example of both the shaping power of the historic creeds and our pushback against them. During an early general conference, delegates added the Athanasian Creed to the list of historic creeds recognized in the Bylaws. But, when the delegates went home and actually read the full text of the Athanasian Creed, they found its declaration that one cannot be saved without embracing the fullness of the creed to be more than they were willing to accept. As a result, the Athanasian Creed was removed from the list of historic creeds in the Bylaws shortly thereafter.

The historic creeds continue to shape MCC today in various ways. While some members of MCC profess full faith in these historic formulations of the Christian faith, others push against some of the declarations within them. As a non-credal denomination, there is no requirement that members or friends of MCC congregations give full assent to the positions within the creeds. Rather, we encourage open and respectful dialogue around these finer points of the Christian tradition.

**Those who have come before us.** We honor the two millennia of theological thought and reflection of our shared history within the Church, as well as the continual activity of the Holy Spirit that leads successive generations into reimagine faith and belief.

**Our chapter begins when God says to us: "Come, taste, and see."**

**Chapter.** We preface our Statement of Faith with the acknowledgment that MCC is not the whole Church. Our claim is modest. We locate ourselves within the trajectory of the greater arc of the Church in human history. Our chapter begins, concretely, in October of 1968.

**Our Faith**

"Come, taste, and see." Jesus Christ, You invite all people to your open table.

"Come, taste, and see." In the Gospel of John, Jesus calls new disciples such as Philip and Nathaniel with the words "come and see" (John 1:39). In contrast to the Synoptic invitation "follow me," and reminiscent of Psalm 34:8 which invites us to "taste and see the goodness of the Lord," this phrase is an invitation to experience Christ personally. Further, the invitation to taste and see reminds of our embodiment—a gift of God that many within our tradition are still in the process of reclaiming.

**Jesus Christ.** The past two hundred years of scholarship have drawn a distinction between "the historical Jesus" and "the Christ." The former, as we continue to discover with each new generation, is a shadowy figure who tends to take on the attributes of those who try to describe him. The latter sometimes becomes an abstraction that can be hard to relate to. We have deliberately chosen not to separate these two names, but rather to acknowledge that only by holding the tension between the two facets, truly God and truly human, are we able to encounter God through Jesus Christ.
Open table. From the very beginning of MCC’s story, in a worship service in the living room of his house that Sunday in 1968, Reverend Troy Perry offered an open table. Our understanding of the open table has evolved over time to generally mean that absolutely all are welcome. This understanding of God’s radical hospitality has outpaced even our Bylaws, which at this writing still place conditions that are at variance with our practice. We recognize that we are not the only Church that offers an open table now, but this has been our practice from MCC’s beginning. To offer an open table is in our very DNA. In every worship service in the far corners of the world, wherever MCC is present, we proclaim that the table is not MCC's table, but Jesus Christ's table, and that everyone is welcome to participate.

You make us Your people, a beloved community.

Beloved Community. The notion of a "Beloved Community" used here is a reminder of the expanded meaning of the phrase attributed to Reverend Doctor Martin Luther King, Jr., and engendered by many others. The King Center organization notes that Rev. King's use of the term has come to represent a broader communion of justice seeking, nonviolent people who have equality at their core. M has this sense of a Beloved Community which is a global vision, whereby all people can share in the wealth of the earth. In the Beloved Community, poverty, hunger and homelessness will not be tolerated because international standards of human decency will not allow it. Racism and all forms of discrimination, bigotry and prejudice will be replaced by an all-inclusive spirit of kinship.

One expression of agape love in the Beloved Community is behaving justly, not for any one oppressed group, but for all people. As Dr. King often said, "Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere." The sense was that justice could not be parceled out to individuals or groups, but was the birthright of every human being in the Beloved Community.

You restore the joy of our relationship with God, even in the midst of loneliness, despair, and degradation.

Restore the joy of our relationship with God. Based on the language of Psalm 51:12, the new Statement of Faith includes language that invokes wholeness and communion with God and with one another. We replaced the word salvation from the psalm with the language of "relationship with God." While not a perfect match for the full range of meanings of salvation, we made the change in response to feedback received from an earlier version of these explanatory notes. Respondents suggested that, in our own time, the language of salvation has been coopted by particular elements of Christian religious fundamentalism and has become a stumbling block to many who seek a relationship with God.

Our spiritual journeys are all unique. Some interpreted our original reference to salvation as a reference to the doctrine of original sin. However, the commissioners attempted to offer language inclusive of several possibilities. Participants in MCC embrace a variety of narratives of fall, redemption, and divine providence, including original sin (Augustine and the Western tradition), ancestral sin (Eastern Christianity), and original blessing (Matthew Fox and creation spirituality).

We also received comments from people who report having never felt estranged from God. Yet, even in the our most intimate relationships, most of us experience periods of greater and lesser connection.
This can also be the case in our relationship with God. In keeping with the image of a spiritual journey, the language of restoring relationship speaks to the periodic renewals and spiritual growth that we experience along our various paths.

**Even in the midst of loneliness, despair, and degradation.** The original MCC Statement of Faith includes the phrase, "we are saved from loneliness, despair, and degradation through God's gift of grace..." In many conversations about what people like from the old Statement of Faith, we have heard that this formulation is particularly meaningful. We chose to preserve it in the revised Statement.

Like the current concern with the language of *salvation*, the authors of the earlier Statement of Faith were conscious of the many people who come to MCC who are automatically suspicious of the word *sin* because they have been labeled as unrepentant sinners. Thus, the writers of the original Statement of Faith chose words that describe the effects of sin—a break in right relationship with God and others and a loss of human dignity—while carefully avoiding words that might serve as a stumbling block.

Finally, the new statement recognizes that even in the midst of God's restoring work, we are not guaranteed a life that is free of all suffering. Rather, the language of this new formulation calls us to recognize that God is with us in the midst of everything that we experience, both the good and the bad.

**We are each unique and we all belong, a priesthood of all believers.**

**We are each unique.** We are each created in the image of God (*imago dei*). Collectively we are all God's children. As individuals we each have unique gifts to offer back to God.

The psalmist writes, "I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made. Wonderful are your works; that I know very well" (Psalm 139:14). Each person has potential, and each person has something that can be offered to God.

**Priesthood of all believers.** In MCC we affirm a priesthood of all believers. By this we mean that in the Body of Christ, all parts are equally important, and all have a direct connection to God. While our Pastors and Elders are servants of the community, they are not intermediaries between humanity and God.

A priesthood of all believers implies that everyone who is willing and knowledgeable may fulfill a service in the church. This expressly includes all functions in our worship services, including the administering of Baptism and presiding during Holy Communion. While we are in broad ecumenical agreement regarding Baptism with many sacramental and non-sacramental traditions, our practice of empowering lay presiders at Holy Communion is unique among sacramental traditions. We base our practices on traditions in both the Hebrew Scriptures and the New Testament.
Baptized and filled with Your Holy Spirit, You empower us to be Your healing presence in a hurting world.

Baptized. MCC holds that Baptism is a sacrament, an act that confers God's grace on the individual receiving it. As a denomination, we recognize many modes of baptism (e.g., immersion, sprinkling, pouring) and perform this sacrament for both infants and adults. Some of our members are drawn from traditions that do not include water baptism, but still recognize a spiritual baptism. As a denomination, we have chosen to live in this tension.

Filled. On the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2:1-4, cf.4:8, 13:52, etc.), Peter and the disciples were filled with the Holy Spirit. They had been a group of terrified, confused, well-meaning disciples who had not understood the reason for Jesus' ministry, and who fled when Jesus was arrested. When they were filled with the Spirit, they became a courageous and unstoppable force which transformed Jesus' tiny movement into a global religion. When they were in trouble, needed a miracle, suffering arbitrary arrest, or were being tortured or put to the death by both mobs and government authorities, the Spirit would fill them moment by moment as they needed it, supplying power. This promise and power, we affirm, is also available for MCC.

Holy Spirit. The Synoptic tradition records the coming of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2), while John's gospel recounts Jesus' gift of the Holy Spirit during a visit to the Upper Room after Jesus' resurrection. The Holy Spirit is known by several names: the Paraclete, Advocate, Comforter, Giver of Life. Christian tradition teaches that the Holy Spirit is the Third Person of the Trinity (see below).

Empower. Through Baptism and the infilling of the Holy Spirit, we do not merely become members of the Church. Rather, we are both equipped with spiritual gifts and commissioned to spread the love of God in the world. This call extends beyond elders, clergy, and ministry leaders to each and every member.

Hurting world. In the beginning God called the creation and all that is "very good." Yet, we know that the creation and humanity do not live fully into this intended goodness. In many places and many times the world has been hurt. There have been many attempts to explain why this is the case. Very often those attempts lead to accusation and blaming of others or self.

We have not attempted to formulate yet another explanation or a particular understanding of sin. Instead, we understand that it is the task of the Church and all who live in it to be Christ's presence in the world. As this presence, we work towards healing of hurt, reconciliation of brokenness, and the proclamation of God's love for all the world.

We expect to see Your reign on earth as it is in heaven, and we will work toward a world where everyone has enough, wars cease, and all creation lives in harmony.

The historic creeds are written in response to the burning questions of their particular time. The middle paragraph of the Statement of Faith responds to problems of our own time. It is an eschatological vision,
an image of the coming reign of God. But, liberation theology teaches us not to simply sit idly by, waiting for the afterlife. Rather, we struggle in the here and now, even as we pray for the coming of God's reign.

**On earth as it is in heaven.** This phrase from the prayer which Jesus taught his disciples has been called a summary of Jesus' life and teaching. Tertullian called this prayer "an epitome of the gospel," or "the gospel in digest." It consists of two sections. One refers to the world above: God’s name, reign, and will. The other refers to three earthly realities: bread, debt, and trials. Jesus' prayer calls on God to pour the grace of heaven into simple daily experiences related to material survival, until earth looks like heaven. By adopting this language, MCC distances itself from theologies that would leave earth to "go to hell" while the Church escapes to heaven. Jesus' vision is broader: an ultimate reunification of heaven and earth, for "the dwelling of God will be with mortals" (Revelation 21:3).

**Everyone has enough.** In the prayer that Jesus taught the disciples, which is spoken throughout the Church, we ask: *Give us this day our daily bread.* We do not ask for wealth and treasures, but for what is needed to sustain us each day. And we ask this not only for us, but for every human being in the world. This sentence therefore is two-fold. It is a prophetic vision of a just world, where every human being has equal access to all resources and all resources are shared equally and justly. It is also the calling we have heard as a church to work towards a world of justice where, indeed, everyone has enough.

**Wars cease.** To live toward the world yet to come, we are called to actively engage our church and its resources toward peace on earth, at all levels of human society. As Christians we are called to bring a peaceful end to the wars of this world, between nations and states, but also between religions, tribes, families, and individuals. This work can be political, but it starts with individuals living in peace with each other.

**Harmony.** Here we express our understanding that we live in the hope and expectation of God's presence within the fullness of God's creation. By this we mean not just the absence of war, conflict, separation, and injustice, but something greater. This harmony for which we are created is God's *Shalom*, God's deeper peace, that is expressed in the last chapter of the New Testament, where God is seen in the midst of a new creation and all tears are consoled (Revelation 21). It is the hope and promise that one day the lion will lie with the lamb, that there will be no death or mourning, no crying and no pain. It is a new creation for the whole of creation.

**We affirm Your charge to all of humanity to care for the land, sea, and air.**

**Land, sea, and air.** In Genesis 1:26, a priestly Hebrew writer records how humanity was charged with the care of the earth, the sea, and the sky.

These three zones of creation are not brought together randomly. The waters of disordered chaos (Hebrew: *tohu wabohu*) are crafted into a good world by the establishment of a sky (expanse or firmament) in the midst of the chaotic sea on the second day, and by gathering the sea waters apart from the dry land on the third day. On the fifth day, God filled the waters and the sky with creatures. And, on the sixth day, God filled the dry land with animals and humans, at which point, we are charged with the responsibility of caring for this good order.
In MCC we affirm that justice includes care for God's creation, and that all of Adam and Eve's children are commissioned with this awesome task.

**Therefore, we will actively resist systems and structures which are destroying Your creation.**

This point flows from the previous one about land, sea, and sky. While we are charged with protecting God's good order of creation, "disordered chaos" also has its champions in the form of technologies, sources of energy, toxic and carbon-intensive pollution, and acts of environmental vandalism that damage the climate. These problems would be much less difficult to overcome were it not for private interests and economic factors: profit-driven economies and corporations with powerful lobbies that stand to gain greatly in the short term from the continued abuse and exploitation of the world's goodness and abundance.

In the current ecological crisis, it is prophetic that it was the violence and injustice of Adam and Eve's offspring that lead to God's good creation returning to chaos again at the time of the great flood (Genesis 6-9). Biblical theologian Gerhard von Rad describes the event as follows: "The heavenly sea, which is above the firmament, empties downward through latticed windows ... when the heavenly ocean breaks forth upon the Earth below, and the primeval sea which is beneath the earth, which is restrained by God, now freed from its bonds, gushes up through the yawning chasms onto the earth, then there is a destruction of the entire cosmic system."²

The priestly author would certainly not deny the incredible creative and transformative power of chaos, but illustrates how human violence and greed can unleash its destructive potential. Injustice then leads to fragmentation, which is seen in increased anxiety, scarcity, increased fear, superficial connections, and skewed views of the world, others, and ourselves.

As a church, our prophetic calling is not merely to care for the creation in individual acts of care, but to stand in opposition to any unjust, systemic power that seeks to gain from the destruction of our environment, and to seek the transformation and ultimate redemption of those systems.

**With all of creation we worship You—every tribe, every language, every people, every nation.**

**Worship.** As a church we are invited to come and worship. In this sentence we address different kinds of worship. We mean both the moment when we gather in community and when we are individually before God to sing, pray, and listen for what the Spirit is saying. These moments of worship in our congregations and meetings shall be indeed places and times where all can participate: every tribe, every language, every people, every nation. Our worship will be inclusive, open to all who want to join in.

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We also know that for the Christian life, worship is not reserved for only special holy places or times, separated from the rest of our experience. All of our life, from the rising of the sun to the place where it sets (Psalm 113:3) is meant to be worshipful. Eberhard Jüngel, a German Theologian (b. 1934), describes this worship as the music of the future that includes all creation: "It is the welcome of the new human being, no longer under the power of death. What music this must be! Not written for flutes and violins, trumpets, organ, or bass, but for the whole of creation—for every sighing creature. The entire world joins in, great and small, and even in tears, truly rejoices. Consequently, even the silent things and the hard bricks hum and buzz along. A new human being is present, mysterious and far ahead of all of us, but still present."3

Every tribe, every language, every people, every nation. This phrase is inspired by similar phrases in the book of Revelation (e.g., 5:9), in which people from the whole created order come to worship the slain yet triumphant Lamb who is seated on the throne. This great crowd is a symbol of the Church which exists throughout the whole creation. Whenever Revelation emphasizes this holistic created order, it uses sets of four. This may be to evoke the four directions of the compass: c.f. the four living creatures around the throne in Revelation 4:6-8.

In historical Christian thought, this evokes the "catholicity" of the church, referred to in the Nicene Creed. *Kat’holos*, in Greek, means "according to the whole." Some theological traditions reflect that unless the Church is one, holy, catholic and apostolic, it is not being the Church. This would imply that the Church is uncatholic and therefore incomplete when it only represents one identity, such as an ethnic group, a sexual orientation, or a social class.

The Commission chose these words because they challenge us as a church. Other languages confuse us when we are used to hearing our own. Cultural practices confront us, especially when it is easy for dominant cultures to exaggerate cultural injustices. For instance, it is easy to find ourselves deeply concerned about the oppression of women in in some cultural settings when those women have actually suffered more from colonialism than they ever have from traditional cultural gender roles.

In many ways, the language of tribe, language, people, and nation points to our disparate identities. An identity is a conceptual picture one adopts which they believe is "identical" with the Self; it is a self-image which endures in all contexts and roles in which a person may be found. Identity can be the source of conflict; identity politics can be a road to sectarianism and internal conflict when people promote the goals of their own identity-group above the common good.

Queer theologians warn us that identities are often exploited by regimes of biopower. Rather than who we truly are, they frequently serve as labels under which human beings can be collected, managed, and manipulated for the purposes of nation building and consumerism. Many identities are, in fact, founded upon cultural injustices.

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on things toxic to human flourishing. People can find an identity in a designer clothing logo or a popular band, implying that entertainment and conspicuous consumption are at the core of who they are as a person. Others might find an identity in a form of national or cultural heritage with roots in the legacy of nationalism or racial superiority. Still others may pride themselves in being a loving husband and father, expressing this in traditional male gender roles which reinforce the oppression, submission, and passivity of women. And, sometimes women have responded by identifying with the submissive and passive roles they have been assigned. Are we saying that these too are prone to redemption, or that God can take what is good in these identities and renew them into the image of Christ?

The boldness of this statement should not be underestimated. We believe with the book of Revelation that ALL of the created order is subject to redemption. God can speak through language barriers that divide, and can transform cultures that oppress. Fashionistas, groupies, patriarchs, supremacists, and nationalists, along with activists, worshippers, artists, and rebels will ultimately be united in the worship of the Lamb who sits upon the throne.

Within the church, the practice "putting on Christ" in Baptism provides the remedy for divisions caused by national, religious, and gender identities. In Christ these divisions are transformed (Galatians 3:27-28; Colossians 3:11). Baptism signifies our death to earthly systems of identity and our resurrection in Christ (Galatians 2:20).

We know You by many names, Triune God, beyond comprehension, revealed to us in Jesus Christ, who invites us to the feast.

We know you by many names. Throughout the scriptures, God is revealed by many images and names: Elohim, Yahweh, El Elyon, El Shaddai. But God is also revealed in names like Rock, Redeemer, Strength, and Fortress. In the Gospels, God is revealed in Jesus Christ, whose name Jesus (Hebrew Yeshua) means "Yahweh saves" or "Yahweh delivers." When we foster genuine relations with our neighbors, taking the time to truly listen to each other's stories, we hear of encounters with God under a host of other names as well. Our interactions with other religious traditions and the stories shared by members and friends of MCC confirm that God continues to show up in unexpected places.

Triune God. At the foundation of Christian theology lies the Trinity, the paradoxical Tri-Unity of three Persons (traditionally called Father, Son, and Holy Spirit) who share all things in common in their nature and activity (e.g., co-creating, co-redeeming, co-sustaining). Yet, they are distinct from one another as revealed in their unique relationships: the First Person without origin, the Second Person begotten, and the Third Person proceeding. MCC springs from a long tradition within the Church that has encountered the Divine in Jesus Christ and the movement of the Holy Spirit. It is by Jesus' own example and the Spirit of adoption that we, too, are able to approach God as Abba, Father, Mother, and Source of us all.

Beyond comprehension. Though we recognize God's activity in our world and throughout all of creation, we confess that in our limited understanding, we cannot take in the fullness of who God is. But this doesn't stop us from exploring our relationship with God, both personally and in community, as members of the Church. We resist the easy response that suggests that in our ignorance we can say
nothing at all. And, we hold our descriptions of God in tension with the reality that all that we can say falls short of a full and accurate description.

**Revealed to us in Jesus Christ.** MCC locates itself within the trajectory of the Christian Church. The heart of the Christian faith is the revelation of Jesus Christ, the visible image of the invisible God (Colossians 1:15). Jesus told his first disciples that to see and know him is to see and know the Creator (John 14:7-11). In seeing Jesus's earthly activities, we come to know the will and activity of God in the world.

By affirming the revelation of God through Jesus Christ, we are not suggesting that we have a corner on truth or exclusive access to God. Our congregations include many members and friends that claim multiple identities. They find spiritual value in other traditions and expressions of spirituality in addition to the Christian faith.

MCC also has a long history of inter-religious cooperation. From our very first worship service we have drawn Jewish brothers and sisters. In our first years we supported their efforts to form Metropolitan Community Temples where Jews could worship God according to the tenets of their faith, even as we continued to share spaces and cooperate on social issues. We continue similar work today with Muslims in East Asia and are presented with such opportunities in local communities throughout the world. Even as we respect and affirm our partners, our own identity remains firmly grounded in the revelation of Jesus Christ.

**Who invites us to the feast.** We return to the point from which we began: the table set before us by Jesus Christ. In our diversity, we find unity as friends invited to the table.

Our communion takes many forms. We remember the words recorded in scripture from the Last Supper. Here, we also look to the wedding feast recorded in Revelation 19.

MCC’s tradition is that the feast be celebrated at every worship service. We do this to welcome those who have been barred from participating in Holy Communion in other churches within the Body of Christ. We also do it to keep ourselves ever in mind of the promise that Jesus Christ attached to this meal.
Historical Texts that have Shaped MCC Identity
Introduction

In the formulation of a new MCC Statement of Faith, the Commission has made a very clear and purposeful decision to recognize and honor the foundations upon which MCC was started and grounded.

Encouraging, discouraging, or challenging as it may be, our history is our history. It is viewed from many perspectives; and, it is important to preserve the founding material of this denomination's communal faith journey for generations to come.

We recognize these expressions of faith as some of the pebbles and mortar that construct the building blocks of the shared history and evolution of the MCC movement. These expressions have served important roles in the development of this diverse, multicultural, and multigenerational movement. They contribute to our heritage, and we have been resolute in our determination to include them in this document so that they will not be lost. We have included them for further background, knowledge, and awareness.

The documents in the following sections are arranged in concentric circles.

We suggest that the historic creeds play a central role in the larger Christian tradition of which MCC is a part.

Next we locate our identity in documents that have been produced by MCC. These include past versions of our Statement of Faith. We have also included sermons, books, and songs that have been important in our gatherings.

We offer a list of further readings that we hope will supplement our understandings of theology and help us to further situate MCC within the shared history of the Church.

Finally, we have listed additional faith statements that congregations within MCC have reported using as a part of their worship.

As we recognize and honor the foundations of this community of faith, we understand that this includes art, poetry, dance, and more, which have not, and could not yet, be fully included in this companion document at this time. This is not an exhaustive list, yet one which seeks to show the influences in the history and formation of MCC. Here are other chapters that help to undergird this statement of faith and provide anchors to which we can refer as we continue our forward movement.
The Historic Creeds

The Apostles' Creed (end of second century CE)

This early creed of the church at Rome was used for baptism. It is still used by many Western churches today and was adopted by name in the MCC Statement of Faith beginning in 1972 or 1973.

Presented here is the *Textus Receptus* version of the creed from c. 700 CE.

I believe in God the Father almighty, creator of heaven and earth;

And in Jesus Christ, His only Son, our Lord, Who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, dead and buried. He descended to hell, on the third day rose again from the dead, ascended to heaven, sits at the right hand of the God the Father almighty, thence He will come to judge the living and the dead;

I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy catholic Church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body [*carnis*], and the life everlasting. Amen.

The Nicene Creed (381 CE)

Traditionally, the Nicene Creed is accepted as having been agreed upon by the 150 bishops gathered at Council of Constantinople (381 CE). It is not recorded in the documents associated with that council, but rather is found quoted in the documents of the Council of Chalcedon (451 CE).

This creed is recognized by the Eastern Orthodox Church, the Roman Catholic Church, and all major Protestant churches. It is the culmination of decades of theological reflection and debate on the nature of the Trinity. Both the Orthodox and Roman Catholic traditions recite it as part of the Eucharistic celebration.

The Nicene Creed was first referenced by name in the MCC Statement of Faith adopted in 1972 or 1973.

We believe in one God, the Father All Governing [*pantokratora*], creator [*poiētēn*] of heaven and earth, of all things visible and invisible;

And in one Lord Jesus Christ, the only-begotten Son of God, begotten from the Father before all time [*pro pantōn tōn aiōnōn*], Light from Light, true God from true God, begotten not created [*poiēthenta*], of the same essence [reality] as the Father [*homoousion tō patri*], through Whom all things came into being, Who for us men and because of our salvation came down from heaven, and was incarnate by the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary and became human [*enanthrōpēsanta*]. He was crucified for us under Pontius Pilate, and suffered and was buried, and rose on the third day, according to the Scriptures, and ascended to heaven, and sits on the

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right hand of the Father, and will come again with glory to judge the living and the dead. His Kingdom shall have no end [telos].

And in the Holy Spirit, the Lord and life-giver, Who proceeds from the Father [and the Son],\(^5\) Who is worshipped and glorified together with the Father and the Son, Who spoke through the prophets; and in one, holy, catholic, and apostolic Church. We confess one baptism for the remission of sins. We look forward to the resurrection of the dead and the life of the world to come. Amen.\(^6\)

The Definition of Chalcedon (451 CE)

Adopted by the Fourth Ecumenical Council, the Chalcedonian Definition proclaims both the full divinity and full humanity of Jesus Christ. Rather than providing a positive statement, the definition provides four negative definitions that provide boundaries for what can and cannot be said about how the two natures interact in the one person of Jesus Christ.

Though the Chalcedonian Definition has never been formally mentioned in the MCC Statement of Faith, its teachings are core to how we have traditionally understood Jesus Christ as fully God and fully human.

Following, then, the holy fathers, we unite in teaching all [people] to confess the one and only Son, our Lord Jesus Christ. This selfsame one is perfect [teleion] both in deity [theotēti] and also in human-ness [anthrōpotēti]; this selfsame one is also actually [alēthōs] God and actually man, with a rational soul [psychēs logikēs] and body. He is of the same reality as God [homoousion tō patri] as far as his deity is concerned and of the same reality as we are ourselves [homoousion hēmin] as far as his human-ness is concerned; thus like us in all respects, sin only excepted.

Before time began [pro aiōnōn] he was begotten of the Father, in respect to his deity, and now in these "last days" for us and on behalf of our salvation, this selfsame one was born of Mary the virgin, who is God-bearer [theotokos] in respect of his human-ness [anthrōpotēta].

[We also teach] that we apprehend [gnōridzomenon] this one and only Christ—Son, Lord, only-begotten—in two natures [duo physisin]; [and we do this] without confusing the two natures [asunkutōs], without transmuting one nature into the other [atreptōs], without dividing them into separate categories [adiairetōs], without contrasting them according to area of function [achōristōs]. The distinctiveness of each nature is not nullified by the union. Instead, the "properties" [idiotētos] of each nature are conserved and both natures concur [suntrechousēs] in one "person" [prosōpon] and in one hypostasis. They are not divided or cut into two persons [prosōpa], but are together the one and only and only-begotten Logos of God, the Lord Jesus

\(^5\) In the Roman Catholic tradition, the words "and the Son" (in Latin, filioque) are inserted here. The additional wording was added to the Latin version of the creed at the Third Council of Toledo in 589 CE, but is not a part of the original wording.

\(^6\) *Creeds of the Churches: A reader in Christian Doctrine, from the Bible to the Present*, 33.
Christ. Thus have the prophets of Old testified; thus the Lord Jesus Christ himself taught us; thus the Symbol of the Fathers [the Nicene Creed] has handed down [paradedōke] to us.7

The Athanasian Creed (c. 500 CE)

The Athanasian Creed was developed some time in the late fifth or earlier sixth century. Contrary to the name it historically bears, it was not written by Athanasius, a bishop of Alexandria who championed the divinity of Christ at the First Ecumenical Council in Nicaea in 325 CE. The original document is written not in Greek, but in Latin, and addresses theological issues that were not part of the deliberations of the First Ecumenical Council. It is included in the Book of Hours of the Eastern Orthodox Church and Eastern Rite Catholics, but is not formally used in services. The creed is recognized by Roman Catholics and several Protestant traditions, and is often used on Trinity Sunday in the Western tradition.

The Athanasian Creed was mentioned for a brief period in the early days of the MCC Statement of Faith. Reference was adopted in 1973, but was removed shortly afterward when objections were raised to its strict definitions of proper faith and its warning that anyone who did not assent to it would not be saved.

Whoever desires to be saved must above all things hold the Catholic faith. Unless a man keeps it in its entirety inviolate, he will assuredly perish eternally.

Now this is the Catholic faith, that we worship one God in Trinity and Trinity in unity, without either confusing the persons or dividing the substance. For the Father’s person is one, the Son’s another, the Holy Spirit’s another; but the Godhead of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit is one, their glory is equal, their majesty coeternal.

Such as the Father is, such is the Son, such also the Holy Spirit. The Father is increate, the Son increate, the Holy Spirit increate. The Father is infinite, the Son infinite, the Holy Spirit infinite. The Father is eternal, the son eternal, the Holy Spirit eternal. Yet there are not three eternals, but one eternal; just as there are not three increates or three infinites, but one increate and one infinite. In the same way the Father is almighty, the Son almighty, the Holy Spirit almighty; yet there are not three almighties, but one almighty.

Thus the Father is God, the Son God, the Holy Spirit God; and yet there are not three Gods, but there is one God. Thus the Father is Lord, the Son Lord, the Holy Spirit Lord; and yet there are not three Lords, but there is one Lord. Because just as we are obliged by Christian truth to acknowledge each person separately both God and Lord, so we are forbidden by the Catholic religion to speak of three Gods or Lords.

The Father is from none, not made nor created nor begotten. The Son is from the Father alone, not made nor created but begotten. The Holy Spirit is from the Father and the Son,8 not made

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7 Ibid., 35-36.
8 In the version included in the Eastern Orthodox Book of Hours, the Filioque (i.e., the phrase “from the Son”) is absent.
nor created nor begotten but proceeding. So there is one Father, not three Fathers; one Son, not three Sons; one Holy Spirit, not three Holy Spirits. And in this trinity there is nothing before or after, nothing greater or less, but all three persons are coeternal with each other and coequal. Thus in all things, as has been stated above, both Trinity in unity and unity in Trinity must be worshipped. So he who desires to be saved should think thus of the Trinity.

It is necessary, however, to eternal salvation that he should also faithfully believe in the Incarnation of our Lord Jesus Christ. Now the right faith is that we should believe and confess that our Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, is equally both God and man.

He is God from the Father's substance, begotten before time; and he is man from this mother's substance, born in time. Perfect God, perfect man composed of a rational soul and human flesh, equal to the Father in respect of his divinity, less than the Father in respect of his humanity.

Who, although he is God and man, is nevertheless not two but one Christ. He is one, however, not by the transformation of his divinity into flesh, but by the taking up of his humanity into God; one certainly not by confusion of substance but by oneness of person. For just as rational soul and flesh are a single man, so God and man are a single Christ.

Who suffered for our salvation, descended to hell, rose from the dead, ascended to heaven, sat down at the Father's right hand, whence he will come to judge living and dead: at whose coming all men will rise again with their bodies, and will render an account of their deeds; and those who have behaved well will go to eternal life, those who have behaved badly to eternal fire.

This is the Catholic faith. Unless a man believes it faithfully and steadfastly, he will not be able to be saved.⁹

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**Historical MCC Documents**

**MCC Doctrine, Sacraments, Rites (1970)**

Adopted at General Conference I in Los Angeles (25-27 September 1970), the first MCC Statement of Faith was written by Reverend Elder "Papa" John Hose and Reverend Elder Richard Ploen.

**Article IV**

**DOCTRINE:**

Christianity is the revelation of God in Jesus Christ, and is the Religion set forth in the Scriptures. The Old Testament foretells Him, the New Testament presents Him and the Christian Church proclaims Him in every age and in every land.

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⁹ *Creeds of the Churches: A reader in Christian Doctrine, from the Bible to the Present*, 705-06.
The UNIVERSAL FELLOWSHIP OF METROPOLITAN COMMUNITY CHURCHES, founded in the interest of offering a church home to all who confess and believe, moves in the mainstream of Christianity.

Our Faith is based upon the principles outlined in the Apostolic Creeds ............

A. WE BELIEVE:

1. In one God, omnipotent, omnipresent, He being the Creator of all life which has spirituality, the prime mover and Spirit of the Universe.

2. That the Bible is the divinely inspired Word of God, containing God's revelation of Himself to mankind through the Law and the Prophets, and finally completely, and ultimately through His presence on earth in the being of His Son, Jesus Christ.

3. That Jesus...the Christ...historically recorded as dwelling in Asia Minor some 2,000 years before this writing, is God's most divine Son, as well as being the son of man, born of woman. And that by total subservience to God, the Father, has demonstrated once and forever that all men are likewise children of God, being spiritually made of His image.

4. That the Holy Spirit is the working arm of God, available to, and working through all who are willing to place their welfare in His keeping. That the Holy Spirit is the manifestation of God's love and interest in all men, and given the opportunity, making His presence felt in their lives.

B. WE FURTHER BELIEVE THAT:

1. All men are justified to God through Faith.

2. Further, we are saved from loneliness, despair, and degradation through God's gift of grace, as witnessed by our Master's words when He said, "Today shalt thou be with me in Paradise." Such grace is not earned but is a pure gift from a God of pure love. We further commend the Fellowship of the Faithful to a life of prayer, seeking genuine forgiveness for unkind, thoughtless and unloving acts and deeds.

       To this end, we enjoin the brethren assembled together to express through Christian witness, a personal commitment to lead Godly and Christ-like lives, approaching His throne in an attitude of prayer, seeking regeneration and rebirth.

C. SACRAMENTS:

The Church shall embrace two Holy Sacraments:

1. Baptism by water and the Spirit, as exemplified by Christ as the hands of John the Baptist. This baptism shall be a sign of the dedication of each life to God and His
service. Through the words and acts of this baptism, the words, "God's own child" shall be stamped upon the recipient.

2. Holy Communion (or the Mass), which is the partaking of bread and wine symbolizing the broken body and spilt blood of Jesus Christ.

All who believe, confess and repent, and seek God's love after examining their own conscience may freely participate in the communal meal, signifying their desire to be received into His Fellowship, and be saved by His sacrifice.

MCC Doctrine, Sacraments (1973)

Adopted at General Conference IV in Atlanta (7-11 August 1973), this iteration of the MCC Statement of Faith took on a new shape with the introduction of inclusive language. Revered Elder Freda Smith championed the cause. Each change in reference to both God and humanity was introduced during the business meeting. The observant reader may also note that this iteration of the Statement of Faith includes reference to the Athanasian Creed, which is printed above.

Article III

DOCTRINE, SACRAMENTS AND RITES:

A. DOCTRINE: Christianity is the revelation of God in Jesus Christ and is the religion set forth in the Scriptures. The Old Testament foretells Him, the New Testament presents Him and the Christian Church proclaims Him in every age and in every land.

Founded in the interest of offering a church home to all who confess and believe, the UNIVERSAL FELLOWSHIP OF METROPOLITAN COMMUNITY CHURCHES moves in the mainstream of Christianity.

Our Faith is based upon the principles outlined in the Apostolic Creeds: Apostles’, Nicene and Athanasian.

We believe:

1. In one triune God, of one substance, in the persons of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, omnipotent, omnipresent, God being the Creator of all, the prime mover and Spirit of the Universe.

2. That the Bible is the divinely inspired Word of God, showing forth God to every person through the law and prophets, and finally completely, and ultimately through His presence on earth in the being of His Son, Jesus Christ.

3. That Jesus...The Christ...historically recorded as living some 2,000 years before this writing, is the Father's most divine Son, as well as being the Son of Man, born of Woman. And that by total

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10 The story is recounted in Chapter 7 of Troy D. Perry, Don't Be Afraid Anymore: The Story of the Reverend Troy Perry and the Metropolitan Community Churches (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1990), 113-17.
subservience to God, the Father, Jesus has demonstrated once and forever that all people are likewise Children of God, being spiritually made of 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 Master. Such grace is not earned, but is a pure gift from God of pure love. We further commend the Fellowship 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.

B. SACRAMENTS: The Church shall embrace two Holy Sacraments:

1. Baptism by water and the Spirit, as recorded in the Scriptures, shall be a sign of the dedication of each life to God and God's service. Through the words and acts of this sacrament, the recipient is identified as God's own Child.

2. Holy Communion is the partaking of blessed bread and wine in accordance with our Lord's words: "This is my body...this is my blood." (Matthew 26:26-28)

   All who believe, confess, repent, and seek God's love through Christ, after examining their own consciences, may freely participate in the communal meal, signifying their desire to be received into His Fellowship, and be saved by His sacrifice.

MCC Doctrine, Sacraments (1990)

The version of the Statement of Faith we propose to replace is in Article III.A of Bylaws as approved in 2013 at General Conference XXIII in Chicago, IL (USA). We do not know the year this version was adopted. However, the text can be found in the 1990 release of Don't Be Afraid Anymore: The Story of Reverend Troy Perry and the Metropolitan Community Churches. More information about that book is found below.

A. DOCTRINE: Christianity is the revelation of God in Jesus Christ and is the religion set forth in the Scriptures. Jesus Christ is foretold in the Old Testament, presented in the New Testament, and proclaimed by the Christian Church in every age and in every land.

Founded in the interest of offering a church home to all who confess and believe, the Universal Fellowship of Metropolitan Community Churches moves in the mainstream of Christianity.
Our faith is based upon the principles outlined in the historic creeds: Apostles and Nicene.

We believe:

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.

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.

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.

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.

Every person is justified by grace to God through faith in Jesus Christ.

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.

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.

B. SACRAMENTS: This Church embraces two holy Sacraments:

BAPTISM by water and the Spirit, as recorded in the Scriptures, shall be a sign of the dedication of each life to God and God's service. Through the words and acts of this sacrament, the recipient is identified as God's own Child.

HOLY COMMUNION is the partaking of blessed bread and fruit of the vine in accordance with the words of Jesus, our Sovereign: This is my body...this is my blood. (Matthew 26:26-28). All who believe, confess and repent and seek God's love through Christ, after examining their consciences, may freely participate in the communal meal, signifying their desire to be received into community with Jesus Christ; to be saved by Jesus Christ's sacrifice; to participate in Jesus Christ's resurrection; and to commit their lives anew to the service of Jesus Christ.11

Other Historic MCC Documents

A Three-Pronged Gospel (6 October 1968)
Beginning the service, I told our gathering what Metropolitan Community Church was going to be, and told them I would preach what God had told me to preach, a three-pronged Gospel:

**SALVATION**—God so loved the world that God sent Jesus to tell us that whoever believes shall not perish but have everlasting life; and "whoever" included me as a gay male, unconditionally, because salvation is free—no church can take it away.

**COMMUNITY**—for those who have no families who care about them, or who find themselves alone or friendless, the church will be a family.

**CHRISTIAN SOCIAL ACTION**—We would stand up for all our rights, secular and religious, and we would start fighting the many forms of tyranny that oppressed us.12

At the Crossroads (3 September 1972)
At General Conference III in Los Angeles, California (USA) Reverend Elder Jim Sandmire preached a sermon that decisively changed the direction of MCC. Below is an excerpt as told by Reverend Elder Troy Perry:

"One of the most attractive doctrines of our early Fellowship ... was that we were building a refuge—a refuge for people of all Christian faiths who had been unable to worship comfortably in other established churches. In so doing, we said that Metropolitan Community Church would endure only so long as it was needed and not any longer.

"Now, I know a lot of us believe that means M.C.C. is simply in business until such a time as the churches of our childhood decide to open their doors to those of us who are gay—which assumes that the more they become willing to accept us as whole and healthy Christians, the less M.C.C. will need to remain in existence. In my opinion, that is incorrect.

"Dissolution of M.C.C. under any circumstances would be a terrible tragedy, particularly if God has truly called us to be an authentic voice of our time."

... "I believe we are the new establishment church... I believe we are a new expression of the Gospel. I believe God has called us to be a guide for other churches which need to be shown the way toward a rediscovery of Jesus' love."

... "But ... I fear we have allowed ourselves to become complacent, satisfied with our own situation now that we have a grand building here in L.A., and so many other fine churches in the Fellowship. Have we become too satisfied? Are we becoming less than dedicated to the outreach God has called upon us to accomplish?"

12 Ibid., 38.
"My concern is that although most of us are gay, we are in danger of becoming a pale reprint of all the self-righteous, do-nothing churches we came from. The irony is that as we seem to become less active in pursuit of gay and lesbian rights, several of the denominations we fled years ago are attempting to change their direction in order to view the humanity of homosexuals with a more positive attitude.

"Therefore, if the Fellowship is to continue as a meaningful religious experience, we need to make these essential assumptions: our theology needs to remain basic, centered on the love of God, with genuine expressions of goodness and responsibility to others. An earlier example of what I mean was set nearly two thousand years ago by Jesus—who consorted with outcasts, championed the weak, and raised the humble.

"Jesus believed religion should serve to bring all people close to God, and to one another in spiritual love. If Metropolitan Community Church is here to stay, I urge an end to middle-class introversion and the beginning of a greater commitment to opening the Fellowship to more young people, to more heterosexuals, more minority groups, and a lot more on the distaff side!"

... "We should not be too concerned," he said, "that different churches in our Fellowship may adopt varying spiritual trappings. Devotion need not be a wholly rigid ritual.

"The love of God, need for a Savior, the sacrifice of Christ, salvation through the grace of God, the value of Christian life, renewal of our spirit in baptism, Holy Communion, honest prayer, these are the minimum all must believe. No more should be required.

"Our religious services should remain open, participative, and particularly attentive to the needs of individual congregations. An exciting thing is that we are not bound by anything other than devotion to God, divine scriptures, and the Holy Spirit. The result, constantly restated in vital and living ways, can be an ecumenical faith grounded in what we have been taught by Jesus Christ."

..."I believe God would desire that we stop talking about going out of business and start actually being the new prophetic voice to the world!"

..."A church like Metropolitan Community Church has never before existed anywhere on the earth"

"If it is God's will ... we shall be available to spiritual manifestations. If it is God's will that Metropolitan Community Church shall continue to grow and go forward, then all gifts of the Holy Spirit that identify the church will be ours. ... Amen." 13

**Purple Grass (1972)**

*Revered Elder Freda Smith first preached "Purple Grass" in 1972 to the MCC congregation in Sacramento where she pastored. The sermon was well received and seemed to make an impact on the* | Purple Grass (1972) | Revered Elder Freda Smith first preached "Purple Grass" in 1972 to the MCC congregation in Sacramento where she pastored. The sermon was well received and seemed to make an impact on the | This excerpt has been abridged. To read the full story, see ibid., 49-56. | 32 |
congregation’s engagement and commitment. Later that year, Reverend Elder "Papa" John Hose—who had been on the committee to license Freda at General Conference III—asked her to preach to the MCC congregation in San Diego. Freda had been spiritually moved by the Sacramento congregation’s response to the sermon, so she preached it to Papa John's congregation. Again, in MCC San Diego, the impact was overwhelming. Later, she preached the sermon at MCC LA (now Founder's MCC) at the request of Reverend Lee Carlton. Again, the MCC LA people responded with overwhelming commitment and enthusiasm. Freda began receiving letters from people who had heard the message.

After she was elected an elder at General Conference VI in Atlanta in 1973, Freda's presence was requested throughout MCC when churches were chartered, pastors installed, and congregations desired an elder’s presence. Everywhere she went she was asked to preach "Purple Grass" in addition to her other messages. (In the early days of MCC, elders' visits to individual churches typically involved a weekend Spiritual Renewal with multiple messages). Over time, in her 20 years as an elder, Freda was named liaison elder to every individual District in the United States, to both Districts of Canada, to Great Britain, and to Australia. By request, she preached "Purple Grass" in every one.

The sermon is always delivered extemporaneously, changing with each delivery. The version presented below is a transcription from her delivery at General Conference XXII in 2005 in Calgary, Alberta (Canada). 14


I want you to do something. I want you to turn and look to people around you. Look very, very closely at people around you. Really observe them. Really observe them. Now say, "You’re in the right place. You’re in the right place today." Now tell me did you see anybody who looked like you? Do you know you’re unique? Do you know that there is no one anywhere, anytime, on earth, this age, any other age, ever, ever, ever that is exactly like you? Did you know that? That God deals in variation? Everything that God makes is unique. And God loves it. It’s God’s plan. It’s God’s plan. You know, even if you have an identical twin, you still would not be the same. Because your experiences are different. Your souls are different. We have to understand what the soul is. As I stand before you here today, there is not a cell in my body that was there when I entered UFMCC. Physiologically everything has been changed: all my muscles, all my tendons. Say, "Yes, she looks different." Yes, she does. It’s all gone. It’s been thrown away. But my soul is still here. My soul is where I hold my experiences, my loves, my desires, my appetites. My soul that God gave me. And that I have continued in growing in God to become the person that I am today.

I’d like to share a bit of my soul with you this morning. I grew up in rural Idaho, outside Pocatello, Idaho, Mink Creek Road. My great grandmother was a Nazarene preacher. She used to take me on her lap and she used to sing me a song. To some of you it’s familiar. Some of you haven't heard it, that's all right. It's been well over a hundred years since it was written. It's called "The Ninety and Nine." It goes like this. I can't sing as my great grandmother could, but it goes like this:

14 A DVD copy of the sermon can be requested through Freda's website: http://revelderfredasmithmcc.com/.
There were ninety and nine that safely lay
In the shelter of the fold.
But one was lost in the hills astray,
Far off from the gates of gold.
Away in the desert alone and bare.
Away from the tender Shepherd's care.
Away from the tender Shepherd's care.

"Lord, Thou hast here Thy ninety and nine;
Are we not enough for Thee?"
But the Shepherd made answer: "This one of Mine
Has wandered away from Me;
And although the road be rocky and steep,
I go to the mountains to find My sheep,
I go to the desert to find My sheep."

And none of the ransomed ever knew
How deep were the waters crossed;
Nor how dark was the night that the Shepherd went through
Ere He found His sheep that was lost.
But out in the desert He heard a cry,
Lost and helpless, ready to die;
Lost and helpless and ready to die.

"Lord, whence are the blood stains all the way
That mark out the mountain track?"
"They were shed for one who has gone astray
Ere the Shepherd could bring him back."
"Christ, why are your hands so bleeding and torn?"
"They're pierced tonight by many a thorn;
Pierced tonight by many a thorn."

Then all through the mountains, thunder riven
Across the stormy deep,
There arose a glad cry to the gates of Heaven,
"Rejoice! I have found My sheep!"
And the angels echoed around the throne,
"Rejoice, for God brings back God's own!
Rejoice, for Christ brings back God's own!"\(^{15}\)

Now those of you who know me, I don't claim to know a lot in this world. I know that God loves me, that Christ died for me, that Troy Perry raised up a church so I could go to church in truth. But having been raised in rural Idaho, I do know a little bit about sheep. Rural Idaho is a little bit like Scotland and a little bit like Australia. We know a lot about sheep. In fact, we used to say, "I'm from Idaho and I'm going baaaaaaack." If you've ever been around sheep, you know the sheep are not independent thinkers. They

\(^{15}\) "The Ninety and Nine." Words: Elizabeth C. Clephane, 1868.
just follow what they want. Now if you have a sheep and it goes off the edge of a cliff, you're probably going to lose the whole flock, just like in the United States, California drivers in the fog.

So, many years ago I was preparing a sermon for my church in Sacramento and I was praying as all of we pastor's do, "God help me to open up the scripture. Help me make it relevant, help me speak to the hearts." And I was dealing with the scripture in Luke the 15th chapter. You can also find it in Matthew the 18th chapter. It's the story of the ninety and nine. And the one that goes astray and how the shepherd leaves the ninety and nine and finds that sheep, and then there is more rejoicing in heaven over that one sheep than over all of the others who never went astray.

And, of course, my great-grandmother's song was there too, so I'm praying and all of a sudden my knowledge about sheep, I thought, O my goodness, how did that sheep get lost? Why didn't it just go on with the rest? Huh? Maybe that little sheep was different. "How could that one sheep be different?" I asked. Well...in its appetite!

You know, no matter how close you are to someone, have you ever gone to a smorgasbord or a buffet with someone that you think you have everything in common and watch what they pick up to eat? God only makes the appetite and beyond explanation they give the people the greatest buffet and they can go and pick that stuff up...I don't know why.

It's the soul...the appetite is in the soul.

So, I thought, well, maybe this little sheep had a different appetite. And then I thought, what could be different?

Henry David Thoreau wrote an essay called, "The Purple Grasses." Thoreau wrote that among the green grass it may look as if everything is green, but there are purple grasses. And I thought, well, maybe when God created this little sheep, God created this little sheep with an appetite for purple grass.

I thought about that and then being of the generation that you can see that I am... I thought about the little sheep's mother because when I was going to school, no matter how a little creature turned out, they always looked at the mother. The mother was too close. The mother was too protective. The mother was too distant. The mother was too cold.

Of course, we know now that little creatures are not born with blank slates, that their life is written on them. They are born with a soul. They are born with a personality and, yes, mothers influence little creatures, but little creatures influence mothers. It is a relationship. It is a relationship.

So I thought about this little mother looking at her little sheep and thinking, O dear... Don't be different, little sheep! Please, please, don't be different. And the little sheep thinking, How do you not be different? Looking at the other little sheep. How do you not be different?

You know something... When God created us...It is impossible for us to be truly lost. It is impossible for us to truly tell a lie. You may not agree...you may think, Well, Freda, I can lie. You can never, never, never know when I'm lying to you. Well, maybe I couldn't. But you cannot lie, the way that God created you,
without doing violence to your body. That's the secret to a lie detector test. You were not created to lie. Jesus said, "You shall know the truth and the truth will set you free."

Even Sigmund Freud, the parent of all psychology, said people can't lie...they may try to lie...they may train their voice. But the truth is going to be trying to come out. It will be tapped out with their feet...with their fingers...they may even speak it out loud... A Freudian slip isn't just something you wear, you know.

How do you not be different? How do you not be different?

It wasn't long before all of the other little sheep were looking at him and saying, "Watch out for that one! There's something peculiar about that one. Have you seen the way it holds its little shank?"

Mom was so worried. She took her little sheep to a sheep shrink. She said, "Doctor, I am worried about my little sheep." And the doctor said, "What's the matter with your little sheep?" "Well...it's got an appetite for purple grass." The doctor said, "Don't worry about that. It's just a stage it's going through. It'll grow out of it. It'll learn what's really good for it."

And the little sheep thought, *What you think is really good for me makes me sick.*

Well, the little sheep got older. Had an older, wiser friend. The older, wiser friend came to the little sheep one day and said, "Little sheep, you should not, you should not eat purple grass." And the little sheep asked, "Well, why not? I was born with an appetite for it. It's around. I'm not hurting anybody."

The older, wiser sheep said, "Well, you just don't understand. If you were older and wiser like I am, you'd have studied ethics. And if you studied ethics, you would definitely study the words of Immanuel Kant. And if you studied the words of Immanuel Kant you would know about the categorical imperative. (He was a pretty bright sheep. *Categorical* means "across the board"...across the board it's true. This categorical imperative, you must do it. This is what you must do categorically. The categorical imperative, the second part reads that you must always act so that the principle of your action could be made a universal principle.) "Little sheep... if every one of us sheep went out and tried to eat purple grass there wouldn't be enough to go around. We'd all starve to death, and you would be the end of the sheep race."

Little sheep says, "I can't argue with Immanuel Kant but I can argue with you. It seems to me that the principle is if everyone just did what was natural to them, there would be plenty enough of everything to go around, and we would live in a happier place."

The little sheep went out and was doing pretty good until one day, one day there it was: the flock moralist.

"Little sheep, you should not eat purple grass."

"Why not? I was born with an appetite for it. It's around if you look for it. Doesn't hurt anybody."

"Little sheep, the Good Shepherd does not want you to eat purple grass."
"The Good Shepherd doesn't want me to eat purple grass? Are you sure, is that true?"

And the flock moralist said, "Of course it's true. Who do you think I am? I stand behind the pulpit every Sunday morning. I'm on radio. I'm on TV. Of course, I know the Good Shepherd doesn't want you to eat purple grass."

The sheep said, "Well, OK. I won't."

You know just sometimes in that sheep's life, the only one that that little sheep felt that they could turn to was the Good Shepherd. The only one that was truly there was the Good Shepherd. So the sheep said, "Well if the Good Shepherd doesn't want me to eat purple grass, I won't eat purple grass. I won't even think about eating purple grass. I won't even think about thinking about thinking about eating purple grass."

Have you ever tried to not to think about not thinking about something? It was all that little sheep could think about, was not thinking about what it wasn't going to think about.

Don't obsess with not thinking about how hungry you are when you're hungry. Surrounded by green grass eaters, blatantly eating green grass all over the place.

*Well, I'm not even going to think about thinking about it...* Until one day when they accidentally (didn't see it coming), looked at purple grass, so good... The little sheep said, "Well I'm not going to do that again." A little bit later, a little bit more purple grass, then a little bit more, and then a little bit more, and then one day...

*WHO CARES? WHO CARES what the Good Shepherd thinks anyway? Probably isn't a good shepherd, probably just something that flock made up to keep me in line and who needs that flock?*

And then off into the highways and the byways and the hedges and everywhere there was purple grass. And the little sheep did not live happily ever after. Because something was wrong, something was wrong. You know, just as that little sheep was born with an appetite for purple grass, that little sheep was born with a hole place in its soul for the Good Shepherd. A theologian [Paul Tillich] says that it is the ground of our being, faith is the ground of our being. Hebrews 11:1 says: "Faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen."

All of a sudden, that little sheep had to go without that center of its being. *Who ever saw the Good Shepherd? Who ever touched the Good Shepherd? That probably isn't the Good Shepherd. But who ever saw truth? Who ever saw justice? Maybe might does make right after all.*

I know right what that little sheep thought, because when as I was going to school many years ago, I was right there. I've been told that the Good Shepherd, if the Good Shepherd really knew me, did not want me. And I was questioning everything. I was questioning everything. I was such a nihilist. I had a friend who brought a Jules Feiffer cartoon to me one day. Jules Feiffer is an American cartoonist. It had four parts. The first part: a little girl goes to her momma and daddy, says, "Momma and Daddy, is there a Santa Claus?" And Momma and Daddy says, "Yes, there is a Santa Claus." She didn't believe Momma and
Daddy. Second frame: she wrote to the newspaper. "Dear Newspaper, is there a Santa Claus?" And the newspaper wrote back, "Yes Virginia, there is a Santa Claus." She didn't believe the newspaper. She wrote all the way to the North Pole. She wrote, "Dear Santa, do you really exist?" Last frame: Santa wrote back, "Dear Virginia, does anything really exist?" Sent her a book on metaphysics instead of the doll she really wanted for Christmas.

Then look, the last days were falling. And there were ninety and nine safely lay in the shelter of the fold, just one was lost, and it goes astray, far off beyond the gates of gold, out in the desert alone and bare. Away from the tender Shepherd's care, away from the tender Shepherd's care.

"Lord, Thou hast here Thy ninety and nine, are we not enough for Thee?"

"God, we've been here all the time. You're not worried about that one, are you? Let me tell you about that one. You know that one never fit in...never fit in, don't worry about that one."

The Shepherd making answer, "Other sheep have I that are not of this fold. To them I must go, and them I must bring, that there be one flock and one Shepherd."

"Lord, Thou hast here Thy ninety and nine, are we not enough for Thee?"

Ninety and nine are never enough for God, 99 percent. God's perfect number is 10, 100, 1000, when God calls you, God wants all of you. God wants everything inside of you. God's not going to be happy with 99 percent. Take everything and lay it on the altar, let God use it.

"Lord, Thou hast here Thy ninety and nine, are we not enough for Thee?" But the Shepherd made answer, "This one of mine has wandered away from me, and although the road be rocky and deep, I go to the desert to find my sheep. I go to the mountains to find my sheep."

And none of the ransomed, none of the ransomed, ever knew how deep (listen to me church), how deep were the waters crossed, or how dark was the night the Shepherd went through ere he found that lamb that was lost.

Can there be too many dark nights? Can there be too many deep waters? Can there be too many experiences? Can there be anything that would separate you from the God who loves you?

None of the rest of the ransomed ever knew the length that the shepherd would go. None of the ransomed ever knew how deep were the waters crossed, nor how dark was the night that the shepherd went through ere he found that lamb that was lost. But out in the desert he heard a cry, lost and helpless, ready to die. Lost and helpless, ready to die.

Some dark place. Maybe some bar in Calgary, Alberta; or in South Africa; or Australia; or in South America; or Mexico; or anywhere in Europe. Any place dark. Anywhere which would be the last place that anyone would expect the Good Shepherd.

And I imagine that little lamb looking up, and seeing him coming through the dark, the Good Shepherd, calling, "Behold, I stand at your door and I knock. And, if anyone hear my voice and will open the door, I
will come in." And the little sheep just looking, of all places, and saying, "Go away! Please, just go away! You don't want me."

The Good Shepherd making answer, "I have loved you with an everlasting love. All who come to me, I will in nowise cast out."

"You just don't understand. You just don't understand. You don't want me!"

The Good Shepherd making answer, "Who told you? Who told you I didn't want you?"

"The flock moralist. The one who stood behind the pulpit every Sunday morning. The one on radio. The one on TV. That one told me you didn't want me."

And Jesus making answer, "All who ever came before me are thieves and robbers and they have scattered my sheep. And I have come that they should have life and have it abundantly. Come home."

Little sheep said, "Well, you still don't understand. I was born with an appetite for purple grass."

And the Shepherd says, "I know that. I was there when you were formed. Before you came forth from your mother's womb, I knew you. In my Heavenly Parent's house there are many mansions. God does not turn out God's creation on an assembly line. Everyone is unique. Everyone individual. In my Heavenly Parent's house there are many mansions. If it were not so, I would have told you. I would have told you. Come home."

Now I've come to the part of the sermon where only you can go, and so I'm going to ask you to close your eyes. I'm going to ask you to go into your soul. Forget the people around you. I want you to go into your soul, where everything is still there. You have not lost a thing from your soul in all of your life. And I want you to find that place in time when the Good Shepherd was the most real to you. Find that place, there may be more than one. Find that place when the Good Shepherd was the most real to you.

When you get to that place, hear this: The Good Shepherd has never left that place. The Good Shepherd has never left that place. Come home, come home. Ye who are weary, come home. Softly and tenderly Jesus is calling. Let go and let God. Let go and let God. Let God fill that hollow place. Come home.

Then up from the mountains, thunder riven, across the stormy deep, there arose a great cry to the gates of Heaven, "Rejoice, I have found my sheep!" And the angels are echoing right now around the throne, "Rejoice, for Christ brings back God's own! Rejoice, for Christ brings back God's own!"

MCC/NCC – And the Ecclesiology Issue (1987)

In the 1980s, MCC applied for membership in the National Council of Churches of Christ/USA (NCC). Reverend Elder Nancy Wilson, who served at that time as MCC's chief ecumenical officer, prepared the following document as a part of a series of consultations exploring MCC's application.
A BACKGROUND PAPER: CONSULTATION III, 19 SEPTEMBER 1987
Atlanta, Georgia
"MCC/NCC – And the Ecclesiology Issue"
14 August 1987
"The Context for MCC’s Approach to Ecclesiology: Questioning the Issue."
Reverend Elder Nancy Wilson

Background Information

At the November 1983 meeting of the Governing Board action was taken to "develop a process whereby the National Council of the Churches of Christ/USA and the Universal Fellowship of Metropolitan Community Churches can remain in study and conversation together."

President Philip Cousin named a committee at the May 1984 Governing Board Meeting to begin to develop such a process for presentation to the November 1984 Governing Board Meeting. The following recommendation was presented and approved by the November 1984 Governing Board Meeting:

"That the process of study and learning continue throughout the 1985-87 triennium, shepherded by a Steering Committee of 5-6 persons drawn from the membership of the Governing Board and representatives of the UFMCC. In the fall of the year, for a day and a half in conjunction with the meeting of the Governing Board, a consultation will be held on one of the three concerns identified by the Governing Board in November 1983 as needing additional attention: Christian unity and ecclesiology, biblical interpretation, and human sexuality. Each consultation would involve a different group of Board members with members of the UFMCC, bringing together a group small enough to be manageable and large enough to represent the ecclesial diversity of the NCCC. ... that the denominations name the persons to these consultations, allowing the Steering Committee to round out the delegation to assure the desired ecclesial diversity."

These Consultations were held:

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<th>Consultation</th>
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<tr>
<td>Consultation II</td>
<td>Human Sexuality</td>
<td>7-8 Nov. 1986</td>
<td>Chicago, IL</td>
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<tr>
<td>Consultation III</td>
<td>Ecclesiology</td>
<td>19 Sept. 1987</td>
<td>Atlanta, GA</td>
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The application for membership in the National Council of Churches of the Universal Fellowship of Metropolitan Community Churches has raised many substantive ecumenical issues for both of us. Early on, someone in the NCCC said that one of our areas of contention was "ecclesiology," i.e., in what sense is, or is not MCC "church," in the sense that other churches in the Council are "church"? This brought up unresolved internal NCCC issues concerning how NCCC communions view one another as church. Obviously there is a plurality of ecclesiologies
within the NCCC. The question for us is, is MCC so unique in its ecclesiology, or so different that
ecclesiology can be rightly identified as an area of serious disagreement with member
communions of the NCCC?

While I do think that the NCCC has deep and pervasive ecclesiological issues, many of which are
being courageously explored in bilateral ecumenical dialogues, and of course in the BEM effort,
which we in MCC have participated in, that continue to be a part of the creative tension of its
internal life, I believe that the ecclesiological "issue" vis-a-vis MCC is bogus and really a smoke-
screen. This paper is an attempt to explain why I believe that to be the case.

The issue is not whether MCC is a church legally, doctrinally or institutionally. That is
indisputable fact according to the NCC's own definitions and criteria for membership: On that
basis the NCCC's own Constituent Membership Committee voted unanimously, in March 1982,
that the UFMCC was eligible for membership. The issue is whether or not we are a "legitimate"
church based on our primary outreach to homosexuals. Other churches with the NCC, by their
own admission, also reach out to homosexuals. Some also have theological/ethical positions
about homosexuality that do not substantially differ from UFMCC. Is it then a matter of a
"primary" focus of reaching out to homosexuals that is the issue or is it the percentage of
homosexuals in the church? What would then be a "legitimate" percentage?

One Governing Board Member of the NCCC said "You cannot organize a church around
homosexuality." I think that is probably a very true statement. And it is not true that UFMCC is
"organized" around homosexuality. The question is, is the UFMCC organized around legitimizing
a kind of behavior? Or is it a church reaching out to a kind of people? This is the crux of the
issue that is mislabeled "ecclesiology." We may really be back to "theological Anthropology."
Are gays and lesbians a kind of people, or only a kind of behavior? And is homosexuality per se
unacceptable in a Christian context? Inevitably, that is the question we return to.

Gay men and lesbians are not reducible to homosexual behavior. To do that is to engage in
homophobia. Persons who are not gay or lesbian sometimes engage in homosexual behavior
for a variety of reasons (signifying the biological bisexual potential of the majority of human
beings). However, only about 10-20% ever identify as gay or lesbian.

I believe that gay men and lesbians constitute a kind of people, a unique kind of ethnic group
that have always existed (with a history) and that exist everywhere (with cross-cultural
variations). Today more and more of the history of my people, and our universality, is
demonstrable.

If we (as gay men and lesbians) are only identifiable by homosexual sexual behavior, it would
indeed have been difficult (maybe impossible) to form a church around that behavior. It would
not be church, then, but perhaps some sort of "cult homosexuality." I think that is an
uninformed misimpression that some folks in the NCCC have of UFMCC. This is always dispelled
once people come to understand that we see ourselves as a Christian Church with an outreach
to a certain kind of people. If we are a people (one of whose characteristics is an inclination
towards homoerotic attraction and homosexual behavior); a people who have a common
culture, history, struggles, needs, dialects, roles—then it is not hard to understand how our
people might need a church.

The reduction of gay men and lesbians to homosexual behavior is an insidious tool of
homophobic oppression. Often times ethnic minorities are hypersexualized and become the
object of sexual projection by the dominant culture. In addition, since a primary characteristic
of our "ethni" is our sexual orientation, this method of oppression is compounded. To some
critics of our movement, it seems as though gay men and lesbians are "merely" fighting for the
right to choose a particular kind of sexual partner. While that is true in part, the nature of our
oppression is much deeper than that. And the consequences of homophobic oppression are
much more far reaching than deprivation of sexual expression. The fact is, that historically, gay
men and lesbians have been murdered by the millions just for being gay or lesbian—or for
being suspected of being gay or lesbians, or associated with gays or lesbians, whether or not we
ever had sex with anyone. Homophobia, like racism or sexism has deep psychic/political roots
in human history that defy simplistic, reductionist analysis. The trivialization of our oppression
is itself a painful part of the experience of every gay person.

One of the unique characteristics of our oppression that gets overlooked by trivialization is the
experience of being "different" from members of one's family, most, of whom are likely not to
be gay or lesbian. Exclusion from primary social units (especially family and church) in overt or
subtle ways continues to constitute much of the greatest pain for gay men and lesbians.

I remember a difficult moment for me that captured the issue of trivialization. On the eve of the
first vote on our eligibility for membership in the NCC (Nov. 83) I met with the then NCCC
President, James Armstrong. He told me about his trip to Egypt to visit Pope Shenuda, the
Coptic Pope of Egypt, who was then under house arrest. "That's real oppression," he said to me.
The implication was, of course that gay men and lesbians are merely "inconvenienced" by
having to be "discreet" about our sexual proclivities. Surely a small price to pay, he implied.
When I attempted, once more, to communicate that the cost of homophobia is enormous—gays
and lesbians and to their heterosexual family members and friends; that it is a life threatening
problem (even more so today because of aids); that homophobia kills people, relationships,
families, hurts churches, wastes time and gifts, he could not hear me.

The comparison of oppressions by persons who experience neither of them is an odious and
divisive tactic. I felt deeply stung that someone of Bishop Armstrong's reputation could stoop to
that tactic, and, in essence, blame MCC for the "trouble" the NCCC was having with our
application. In speaking for others leaders of the council, he told me our application might very
well destroy the Council. Incredulous, I told him I seriously doubted that we had the power to
do that; nor did I think many people would choose to side with MCC over and against the
present unity (imperfect as it may be) of the Council. Of course, I had no way of knowing Bishop
Armstrong's own state of mind at the time (he resigned as President just weeks later).

His trivialization only makes sense if homosexual behavior per se is the issue, rather than gay
and lesbian people as people, being the issue. How do I know that we are a people, and not just
a category of persons who happen to engage in homosexual behavior?
1) There is now historical documentation of the history of gay men and lesbians, particularly in Western and Native cultures (see Boswell, Jonathan Katz, Judy Grahn). Ancient mythology and history is filled with the lives of gay men and lesbians, and with gay/lesbian themes.

2) There are now cross cultural studies of homosexual behavior that indicate a universal presence of gays and lesbians. The forms of homosexual culture vary depending on many factors, such as sexism, racism, urbanization, religious forms, etc. However, there are basic cultured variations that are emerging. There is an underground gay saying, "We are everywhere." We’ve always known that, now we are proving it.

3) I "came out" into an emerging open gay community 16 years ago. This community (in Boston, Mass.) nurtured me, helped me learn how to live as a lesbian in a hostile culture; it formed newspapers, social organizations, social services and counseling clinics, restaurants and bars, identifiable "ethnic" neighborhoods, professional alliances, cultural events, holidays, churches and synagogues. It was and is a culture that has mores, (that are in flux and change always, as with the dominant culture), folk heroes, political aspirations, our own music, art, humor, and dialects. It takes more than a casual connection by way of a kind of sexual behavior to create this intensely intentional kind of community. It is about heart, soul, blood and "kind." It is "ethni." It takes a deep sense of identifying, caring, commitment, love and passion to build a community in the midst of hostility. In building a church in the midst of this, MCC is as American as apple pie, and H. Richard Niebuhr's Social Sources of Denominationalism. The fact of that "social source" of our denominationalism is so American, it is sometimes a bit hard for us to translate cross culturally; but the pre-existence of gay and lesbian communities everywhere, and the attitude of the church everywhere is the seed of our growth worldwide.

4) As MCC has expanded worldwide we've discovered that we are everywhere. Even in the most remote parts of the world there is something of a gay or lesbian culture. It may be underground, or highly integrated into the dominant culture, but it is always there. And if the Church is there, it is negative about our people.

Knowing we are a people is one issue. What are the particularities of our peoplehood?

The complexities about gay and lesbian people as a people include the following:

1) Most gay men and lesbians can successfully mask or hide their identity and remain "in the closet." While the closet provides at least an illusion of safety in a culture unsafe for gay men or lesbians, it is also a tool of oppression. Closet-dwelling exacerbates feelings of low self-esteem, guilt, etc. In addition, it is emotionally costly and daily stressful to mask a part of one's identity. It causes people to become chronically depressed, fatigued, and they are more vulnerable to self-destructing behavior. It is not possible to overstate the cumulative effects of this problem in our community. It kills people, it damages and wounds them.
These facts weaken the immune system—and the reason that gays and lesbians are more vulnerable to diseases of the immune system (AIDS, lupus, Epstein's disease).

2) The alternative is to "come out." In the last 20 years there have come to be safer and more acceptable ways to do this. But openly gay people are still a small minority. In recent memory, the only ways to be openly gay were to be ghettoized in one of a very few professions or trades, or to be a street gay person. If you are gay you pay - by staying in the closet or by coming out.

3) It is Judy Grahn's book, Another Mother Tongue, that postulates the most convincing theory of the role of gay men and lesbians in human cultures. It seems to be the case that in "primitive" ancient, non-westernized cultures, gay men and lesbians have an honored, valued role. We were (are) seen as "double" people - having the characteristics of both sexes, and able to "transmit" messages across gender lines. We are seen as "transpersons," and are associated with the color for spiritual power/ transformation: the color purple. Her documentation of gay men and lesbians historically as shamans, holy people, and cultural religious leaders is thorough and overwhelming. In Western patriarchal culture gay men and lesbians have been devalued and persecuted, being seen as "half" people (not quite a real man, not quite a real woman). Even so, gay men and lesbians have taken on role functions of a spiritual nature - particularly in the arts and the church (though often closeted). All of us who are gay or lesbian know that if all the gay men and lesbians who are present active spiritual leaders in our denomination and nations came out – there would be a great gasp at the disproportionate representation. In every generation we have known that and have known the insults, threats, deprivation and persecution.

4) At our first consultation, Robin Scroggs made the point that when Paul in the New Testament speaks of homosexual behavior he is speaking of pederasty. Scroggs went on to say that that is because that was the only form of homosexual behavior that existed - that there were no adult-adult homosexual relations in ancient Greece or Rome. This argument was an argument from silence on the subject: I violently disagreed with him for these reasons:

1) Any argument from silence is suspect - because something is not written about does not mean it didn't happen. It may simply mean that those who were so engaged had no reason, right or permission to write about it. That adult-adult relations were taboo.

2) Lesbian adult-adult relations are written about - His argument neglected women's relations.

3) The form of homosexual behavior is created by what the dominant culture will permit. Pederasty was "permitted" because boys are more feminine and the adult male could feel less threatened about his maleness if he were having sex with a young male. It wasn't as "queer" as adult-adult relations. A modern similar
example is in Muslim cultures where young male prostitutes must cross dress so that the adult male who picks them up can say that he thought they were female. In some cultures homosexuality is tolerated if it mimics heterosexuality. In cultures where sexism is being addressed, gay men and lesbians are more free to adopt our own ways of being.

4) I know there were gay men and lesbians in Greek Roman times in my heart and spirit—to erase us from history is like genocide.

Back to ecclesiology; I would like to defer to Reverend Phil Speranza who has framed the following four (4) questions for consideration:

1) With respect to what some are apparently calling the "ecclesiological question," the following matters come to mind.

A. Even if it were true that the UFMCC were founded "on a behavior," (which is certainly not the case, ut infra), how would that differ in any essential or fundamental way from denominations owing their foundation and distinct identify to race and/or ethnic heritage, e.g.:

1. the historical Black churches in the NCC
2. the division of American Lutherans into distinct synods which are in effect denominations, on the basis of national origin
3. the Korean Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A.
4. the absolutely uncanonical separation of Eastern Orthodox believers into separate jurisdictions based on nationality.

B. Given that the UFMCC differs from some other denominations in insisting that the Scriptures rightly interpreted do not condemn either homosexuality or homosexual persons or homosexual genital expression as always and necessarily sinful in se, the fact remains that this view of this particular ethical/moral issue does not invalidate the plain statements in MCC By-laws concerning the reason for our existence, viz.:

1. that our first objective is "to bind together churches for the purposes of sharing in the worship of God in the Christian tradition, and to make God's will dominant in the lives of all people, individually and collectively, as set forth in the Holy Scriptures" (Article II.A) and
2. that the UFMCC is "founded in the interest of offering a church home to ALL who confess and believe" (Article III.A, emphasis added).

Therefore, in what way can our governing documents be in any way interpreted to say that MCC is founded on a "behavior"? Further, are the NCC prepared to say that we are doctrinally wrong to take Jesus exactly and precisely at His word when, in Matthew 11:28, John 3:16, and John 6:37, Jesus invites all persons, without qualification or distinction as to sexual orientation, age, race, gender, etc., to come to Him?
2. Again given that the UFMCC differs from some other denominations with respect to the ethical/moral/exegetical issue of homosexuality, the fact remains that the denominations presently members of the NCC differ from one another on other ethical/moral issues, e.g.:

   A. abortion
   B. capital punishment
   C. masturbation
   D. divorce

I would like to point out that if the Eastern Orthodox members are to be consistent with the Sacred Canons, they must say openly that:

   A. abortion is sinful and is to be punished by excommunication (Canon II of St. Basil the Great; Canon XXI of St. John the Faster)
   B. masturbation is sinful and is to be punished with excommunication for forty days (Canon VIII of St. John the Fast), and that clergy who masturbate are to be deposed (Canon X of St. John the Faster)
   C. St. John the Faster was criticized in his day for being too lenient in these matters.

Obviously, other denominations in the NCCC take a different view on these issues. Yet the NCC seems quite able to live relatively peacefully with these differences. Why, then, when the issue of homosexuality is in a sense far less important than the issue of abortion, can the NCC not live with the UFMCC in its midst?

3. If there are legitimate ecclesiological issues to be raised, there are some which apply very directly to denominations which are already part of the NCC.

   A. The Anglican and Eastern Orthodox churches teach and profess that Christ's Church necessarily includes the three-fold ministry of bishop, presbyter, and deacon; and that without bishops in apostolic succession there is no valid ministry and no valid Sacraments (or, more precisely, no valid Eucharist). In short they hold episcopacy to be the esse of the Church. Lutherans and others hold that episcopacy is not necessarily of the esse of the Church, but that it is of the bene esse of the Church. Presbyterians, American Baptists, and others reject episcopacy altogether. Touching as it does the very heart and center of the Church's life, the Eucharist, this difference is not "merely" one of polity; it hits on the nature of the Church.

   Therefore, the question arises: how is it that the NCC can live relatively comfortably with this profound ecclesiological difference while at the same time refusing us admission on the basis of an ecclesiological issue which, as we have demonstrated, does not in fact exist?
B. Again on the issue of ministry, some denominations ordain women; others (e.g., the Eastern Orthodox) do not and hold that women cannot validly be ordained. Therefore, the same question as stated immediately above arises.

C. According to the Sacred Canons, Eastern Orthodox believers are absolutely forbidden even to pray with non-Orthodox persons (Canon X and XLV of the Holy Apostles; Canon XXXII of the Council of Laodicea; both given ecumenical force by Canon I of the Fourth Ecumenical Council, Canon II of the Sixth Ecumenical Council, and Canon I of the Seventh Ecumenical Council). Indeed, Canon IX of St. Timothy of Alexandria forbids presbyters to conduct the Eucharistic Liturgy when heterodox are present; and Canon VI of the Council of Laodicea forbids admittance of the heterodox into Orthodox churches. Yet the Eastern Orthodox members of the NCC have participated in ecumenical prayer services with non-Orthodox, have invited non-Orthodox to attend Orthodox services, and have given non-Orthodox bread from the \textit{Litiya}. How is it, then, the ecclesiological issues raised by the Sacred Canons can be utterly ignored, while at the same time efforts are made to saddle the UFMCC with a non-existent ecclesiological issue?

4. It is evident to all that among the current members of the NCC there are deep and extremely serious differences on the theology and practice of the Sacrament of Baptism, and specifically on

   A. the question of baptismal regeneration
   B. the validity of baptism by any means other than immersion or according to Canon XLVII of the Holy Apostles and Canon I of St. Basil the Great, the validity of baptisms administered by non-Orthodox clergy or by laypersons
   C. whether or not infants and children below the age of reason may be validly baptized.

Given that Baptism touches on the nature of the Church and, more specifically, membership in the Body of Christ, how can the NCC live with these profound differences that touch on the essential life of the Church while refusing membership to the UFMCC, whose theology and practice of Baptism reflects that of at least some of the denominations in the NCC?

There are, of course, other questions concerning differences among NCC members with respect to Eucharistic theology and other aspects of sacramental theology. But neither time nor the continued interest of NCC members permits exploration of those questions. What the bottom line in all this seems to be is that

Given that there is no legitimate ecclesiological issue concerning the UFMCC’s foundation and \textit{raison d’être}; and
Given that within the NCC there are profound differences in sacramental theology, ecclesiology, moral theology, yet these differences do not prevent or preclude the several denominations from being members of the NCC together;
Therefore, why are the NCC continuing to refuse admission to a denomination which seeks membership and which meets all of the stated criteria for membership in the NCC?

**MCC Core Values (2005)**
Adopted at General Conference XXII in Calgary, Alberta (Canada).

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

**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.

**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.

**Justice**  
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.

**Books Produced by or about MCC**

*The Lord is My Shepherd and He Knows I'm Gay: The Autobiography of the Reverend Troy D. Perry* by Troy D. Perry.

In this 1972 book, Reverend Elder Troy Perry recounts his journey up through the founding of MCC. It pays particular attention to his protest and subsequent court case as examples of activism in the early days of MCC.

*Don't Be Afraid Anymore: The Story of Reverend Troy Perry and the Metropolitan Community Churches* by Troy D. Perry with Thomas L. P. Swicegood.

The 1992 sequel to *The Lord is My Shepherd and He Knows I'm Gay*, the book includes more details of Troy's early life, the founding of MCC, and the early years of the movement. Also included are the stories of several key figures in MCC history including Reverend Elder Freda Smith, Reverend June Norris, and Reverend Elder Jeri Ann Harvey. It also includes as appendices the historical MCC tract "Not a Sin, Not a Sickness: Homosexuality and the Bible" and the Doctrine (Statement of Faith), Sacraments, and Rites from the MCC Bylaws of the period.

This book explores the important work of the MCC to minister to people on the margins, told primarily from the point of view of the Reverend Elder Doctor Nancy Wilson. It includes sections that explore MCC’s involvement with the ecumenical movement and our ministry with LGBT folk, sex workers, prisoners, and HIV/AIDS patients. Nancy takes on the infamous "clobber passages" and provides them with helpful context. But she also moves beyond first generation gay liberation apologetics to offer queer readings of eunuchs, same-sex relationships, bodily hospitality, and sexuality and healing in scripture. Originally released in 1995, an abridged Millennium Edition followed in 2000. The text was revised and divided into two smaller volumes in 2013: Queering the Bible: Queer Folks, God, Jesus, and the Christian Scriptures and Queering the Church: 40 Years of the Queer Christian Movement.

Songs

Historic creeds and statements of faith are not the only texts that have shaped MCC. Included here is a list of songs that have been sung in MCC congregations throughout our history. Some hail from the Civil Rights Movement, while others were written as a part of early LGBT liberation theology.

As a new witness to "God’s all-inclusive love," the people of Metropolitan Community Churches have always sought to express that love in our worship. We didn’t usually find it in the hymns and songs of the churches in which many of us grew up. Before long, new and original hymn texts were being written by our members to address this need.

In 1981 the Fellowship voted to use inclusive language in worship when referring to God and God’s people. But again, the resources were not widely available at the time. A committee co-chaired by Dick Follett and Jim Mitulski produced the Trial Hymnal, a small collection of familiar hymns in loose-leaf format which were altered to express our commitment to inclusivity and an expanded theology of acceptance and liberation. Local churches were encouraged to add more hymns to the hymnal and this was done in several places by many people, including Delores Berry in Baltimore and elsewhere, Jim Mitulski, Karen Ziegler, Bob Crocker and Ruth Roper in New York, Steve Carson and Tom Sopko in Boston (to list only a few). More original texts were written during that time as well.

In 1989 Jim Mitulski and Dwayne Best launched the Hymnal Project, an unofficial effort to follow up on the Trial Hymnal and distribute a broad range of worship resources: both altered texts and original texts, tunes, and musical arrangements. More than a hundred churches in the Fellowship (and several outside) subscribed to the project.

Over the last 25 years, our own hymn writers and composers have produced new hymns and songs for our worship. As acceptance of the LGBTQI community has increased in some mainline churches, straight and gay hymn writers from those denominations have also given us new expressions of inclusivity, liberation, and acceptance. The ten hymns described here are only a fraction of the material now available to us. The work continues, with more resources becoming available each year.

"For those tears I died"

Copyright © 1969 Bud John Songs (ASCAP)
(Admin. At EMICMGPublishing.com)
Marsha Stevens wrote this song when she was sixteen. The words describe her inner turmoil around her lesbian identity, though she did not initially disclose this inspiration. She sang with a group called Children of the Day, and has been described in numerous Christian publications as "the mother of contemporary Christian music." When she came out as a lesbian, ten years after this song was published in *Hymns for the Family of God*, she was denounced by the Christian right. For years thereafter, churches would tear out the page with her song from their hymnals and mail them back to the publisher, and "For Those Tears I Died" was left out of future editions of the hymnal.

"I'm not afraid anymore"
Copyright © 1973 Michael Mank

Lay Elder Michael Mank's hymn declaring that the love of Jesus would free us from fear was a powerful statement in MCC's early days. First sung by the choir of MCC San Francisco at General Conference in 1972, the hymn became widely used, most prominently in response to the wave of arson attacks on our churches in the 1970s. Mank (1938-1992) was a founding member of MCC San Francisco and also one of the activist leaders in the California battle against the Briggs Initiative, which would have barred gay people from teaching in schools.

"Our God is like an eagle" (When Israel camped in Sinai)
Copyright © 1974 UFMCC

This hymn by the Reverend Laurence Bernier is one of the MCC standards that has been sung around the world. Bernier was the founding pastor of MCC Boston in the early 1970s when he wrote this text from themes in the Book of Exodus, a rich source of imagery for engaging in a liberation struggle. He also expressed a concern for gender parity which was just beginning to be written into the hymnody of that decade. The text is matched to the familiar hymn tune *Webb*, widely known in evangelical churches as "Stand up, stand up for Jesus."

"We are singing for our lives"
Copyright © 1979 Hereford Music

This song by Holly Near is an example of liberation music that is sung with religious fervor by people who are not always found in church. Near was one of several women performers who sang from her Methodist upbringing as well as from her feminist experience. She wrote this song – or, rather, as she has said, she *received* it – at a rally after the 1978 assassinations of activist Harvey Milk and Mayor George Moscone in San Francisco. Witnessing the turbulent protests that were taking place, Near wanted to see if music could bring peace that night. The song became a secular anthem for the LGBT civil rights movement, and in MCC we brought it into our churches as well.

"We are the Church Alive"
Copyright © 1980 Jack Hoggatt-St. John and David Pelletier

Like the people of God through every age, we have prophets in our midst. This hymn by the Reverends Jack Hoggatt-St. John and David Pelletier dates from 1980, and originally expressed our belief that we were providing a new example to the wider church and leaving the past sins of exclusion and

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condemnation behind. Yet, as that decade progressed and the enormity of the AIDS crisis engulfed us, the third stanza with its emphasis on healing and health became even more significant than originally conceived. This hymn received wider exposure outside our denomination when it was included in a book by feminist liberation theologian Letty Russell, *The Church with AIDS: Renewal in the Midst of Crisis* (1990).

"Children of the Rainbow Promise"
Copyright © 1984 Barry Wichmann

Artist and activist Gilbert Baker created the first rainbow flags for the LGBT civil rights movement in 1978, and the image was soon widely adopted. The Reverend Barry Wichmann, pastor of MCC Berkeley, incorporated the rainbow into his hymn with the added scriptural meaning that the rainbow was a sign of God's promises, specifically the inclusion of everyone in the church.

"Once we were not a people"
Copyright © 1987 J. Thomas Sopko

Tom Sopko, then a member of MCC Boston, wrote this hymn for a gay pride service in 1987. This is the first of the well-known MCC hymns to include the words *gay* and *lesbian*. The first line is the cry of an entire people bereft of acceptance and comfort, but then it continues: "God's people now are we." The hymn is an expansion and restatement of 1 Peter 2:9-10: "But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation. God's own people, in order that you may proclaim the mighty acts of God who called you out of darkness into a marvelous light. Once you were not a people, but now you are God's people; once you had not received mercy but now you have received mercy." It's a strong statement of affirmation and encouragement, calling those once rejected to stand with Christ, the cornerstone, in their full personhood as people of God.

"Joyful people, come and worship"
Copyright © 1987 June Norris

The Reverend June Norris (1922-2010) was the second woman and the first heterosexual to be ordained in MCC, in 1974. She had begun attending MCC Los Angeles several years earlier with her nephew and was immediately drawn to the presence of God that she felt there. Two years after her ordination, she lost her job at a Seventh-Day Adventist hospital for "associating with homosexuals" and was hired on staff at MCC LA. She went on to pastor congregations in Fayetteville, Raleigh, and Des Moines before her retirement in 1992. Her hymn expresses her joyous wonder at the amazing love of God for all people.

"The body of Christ, the bread of heaven"
Copyright © 1988 Steve Carson and Stephen Lee

Each week when our congregations gather, the sharing of Holy Communion is a central part of our worship. We come to God's table with our heads held high, assured that there is a place for us there, no matter what others might say. The Reverend Steve Carson wrote this text, one of the first MCC texts written for communion, while he was the pastor of MCC Boston, and the tune was composed by his parishioner Stephen Lee.
"Bring many names"
Copyright © 1989 Hope Publishing Company

Brian Wren is one of the most widely-published hymn writers in our time. His commitment to inclusive language, radical welcome, and social justice continues to this day in his numerous texts. This hymn, which describes some of God's many names, was very controversial when it was first written, and was originally rejected from a number of denominational hymnals. When it was taken up by MCC churches in the late 1980s, it was seen as an expansion of Larry Bernier's earlier text ("Our God is not a woman / Our God is not a man / Our God is both and neither...").

*Thanks to the LGBT Religious Archives Network ([lgbtran.org](http://lgbtran.org)) and Lynn Jordan of MCC San Francisco for biographical and historical information.*

**Further Readings**
In this section we have included both historical theological texts, as well as contemporary speeches, statements, and books that have played a role in forming MCC's identity.

**The Mystical Theology by Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite**
The basis of negative or apophatic theology. Dionysius teaches first the affirmation of the names of God given through scripture, followed by their negation, with the acknowledgement that God is more than any name can encapsulate. (For example: God is a rock. God is not a rock; God is beyond the concept of rock.) The Mystical Theology is a spiritual exercise that reminds us that God is bigger than any box and always far exceeds any labels we might try to apply.

"Canticle of the Sun" – Saint Francis
Originally written in Umbrian dialect of Italian by St. Francis of Assisi, this song celebrates the unity of all creation, and humanity's place in the cosmos, praising God in solidarity with the created order. The most famous English version of the song is the classical hymn, "All Creatures of our God and King." Pope Francis has more recently quoted the Canticle in the title of his social encyclical *Laudato Si*, and drawn on Franciscan spirituality to critique consumerism and environmental injustice.

**The Shorter and Longer Catechisms of Martin Luther**
At the time of the Reformation, a new emphasis was placed on every Christian coming to understand the teaching of the Christian Faith personally. Luther wrote a series of simple questions and answers which a child could understand, and any parent could use to instruct their children. He covered the Ten Commandments, the Apostle's Creed, the Lord's Prayer and the sacraments. The longer catechism was used to instruct parents and teachers, so they could teach the shorter catechism more confidently.

**Calvin's Institutes**
The Institutes are the first great work of Protestant Systematic Theology, rivaling Aquinas's *Summa Theologica* as the classical textbook of Christian thought. The first edition written in 1536 was addressed to King Francis I of France in defense of the Huguenots (French Protestants), who were being subjected to increasing persecution under his reign. Calvin sought to demonstrate that the Protestant churches were founded on orthodox beliefs, and did not reject civil authority. This incidental writing, however,
was quickly acclaimed as a new and original system of Christian thought, and demand arose for a more thorough edition. The final edition in 1559 was five times the length of the first edition, and its opening chapter, concerning the relationship between human and divine knowledge is famous as a profound statement of theological method from a humanist thinker in the early modern period.

**The 39 Articles**
Included in the Book of Common Prayer of the Anglican Communion, the 39 Articles are a response to certain practices of the Roman Catholic Church and formulations of Reformed theology in the 16th century. While not all articles are equally embraced, they are included as a reminder of MCC's history within the stream of denominations proceeding from the Protestant Reformation.

**John Wesley's Sermon #16**
In the eighteenth century, Wesley emerged as an Anglican minister who preached outdoors, and advocated a personal experience of Christ. His method for discipleship involved joining in small groups to practice holiness and social concern for issues such as abolition of slavery and prison reform. While he was not a professional theologian, his sermons are so logical, clear, and rhetorically powerful that they have become a standard work of theology, notable for their simplicity and piety. Perhaps the most famous is his sermon on the Means of Grace, in which he holds up the use of prayer, the scriptures, and the Lord's Supper as the primary channels through which God communicates grace to the human soul.

"Ain't I a Woman" by Sojourner Truth
One of the most famous feminist speeches in history was delivered at the Women's Convention in Akron, Ohio, on 29 May 1851 by a freed slave, preacher, abolitionist, and suffragist, named Isabella Baumfree or Sojourner Truth. The speech was published in the Anti-Slavery Bugle on 21 June 1853, but there are alternative versions of the text which are quite different. Some accounts suggest that the more privileged women at the convention did not want her to speak for fear that she would raise the controversial issue of abolition. But Truth cited her work as a slave, and her own muscular body, as evidence of physical and intellectual equality with men. She also challenged theological arguments against Women's Rights from the sin of Eve, or the "manhood of Christ." Her name is listed on the calendar of saints of the Episcopal and Lutheran Churches.

**The Barmen Declaration**
Written by Karl Barth and the confessing church in Nazi Germany in response to Adolph Hitler's national church. Its central doctrines concern the sin of idolatry and the sovereignty of Christ.

"Letter from the Birmingham Jail" by Reverend Doctor Martin Luther King, Jr.
Also known as "The Negro Is Your Brother," Martin Luther King, Jr. wrote this letter from his prison cell, advocating the practice of nonviolent civil disobedience as a response to racism. It contains his famous words, "Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere." In 1963, King had been arrested for his involvement in marches and sit-ins against segregation in Alabama. Eight white local clergymen had written a newspaper article, "A Call for Unity," opposing King's tactics, and accusing him of being an outsider stirring up trouble. King responded by defending civil disobedience on the grounds that laws may be unjust, that positive tension must be created to address such laws since freedom is never given
by the oppressor without a struggle, and because time alone doesn't bring progress apart from persistent action.

*A Theology of Liberation History, Politics, and Salvation* by Gustavo Gutiérrez
MCC has its roots in the Gay & Lesbian Liberation movement, which was greatly affected by Latin American liberation theology. This foundational text presents us with an analysis of those marginalized by extreme poverty.

*Embodyment: An Approach to Sexuality and Christian Theology* by James B. Nelson
Written by a heterosexual ordained minister in the United Church of Christ, *Embodyment* explores a variety of Christian topics related to human sexuality including marriage, fidelity, the sexual revolution, love, alienation, and of course embodiment. It is an exploratory text that uses the Incarnation of the Christian faith as its central reference point. Sin is used as a way to describe the denial of the body and sexuality, while grace is characterized as God's total acceptance of the human self, including embodiment and sexuality. It includes a chapter on gayness and homosexuality that argues for full inclusion of lesbian and gay people in the church based on the Gospel and same-sex sexuality as a form of communication that is directed at meaning and wholeness. *Embodyment* was highly influential on feminist theology in the 1980s and the book was used in many MCC congregations.

*Original Blessing: A Primer in Creation Spirituality Presented in Four Paths, Twenty-six Themes and Two Questions* by Matthew Fox.
Since its original publication in 1983, this book has encouraged many people in MCC to celebrate our spiritual diversity and to explore beyond the traditional fall/redemption model of spirituality. The fall/redemption model begins with sin and original sin, and ends with redemption. "Honoring all of creation as Original Blessing, Creation Spirituality integrates the wisdom of Eastern and Western spirituality and global indigenous cultures, with the emerging scientific understanding of the universe, and the passion of creativity." ([http://matthewfox.org/what-is-creation-spirituality/](http://matthewfox.org/what-is-creation-spirituality/))

*Take Back the Word: A Queer Reading of the Bible* edited by Robert E. Goss and Mona West.
Published in 2000, *Take Back the Word* was one of the first volumes of its kind to feature LGBT readings of scripture that claimed the positive message of the Bible for queer people of faith. Rather than focus on what the scriptures say about homosexuality, the contributors highlight key themes in biblical texts that speak to LGBT experience. As the title suggests, this anthology attempts to "take back" the Bible as a life-giving word for the LGBT community when historically it has been used as a weapon to condemn marginalized groups of people. The majority of the contributors were members or friends of MCC.

*The Queer Bible Commentary* edited by Deryn Guest, Robert E. Goss, Mona West, and Thomas Bohache.
Social location as a place from which to do biblical interpretation has been embraced since the 1960s in such types of biblical criticism as black, feminist, womanist, Asian, Latin@, and materialist, in order to look at the Bible through the lens of race, gender, class, and ethnicity. However, until the publication of *Take Back the Word* (see above), the social location of sexual orientation was not included in the various liberation hermeneutics. Following the success of that previous volume (which had its origin in a workshop at an MCC General Conference), the editors of that volume decided, in combination with two
other scholars, to compile a full-scale commentary from the perspective of LGBTQ people. Scholars from the academy and from MCC were approached to contribute essays on each book of the Bible. The result was a compelling volume which explores from diverse perspectives (both scholarly and grass roots) the ways in which we read the Bible differently because of our sexuality or gender identity. Some of the essays are traditional in their approach; other are more experimental. Each essay, in its own way, "queers" biblical interpretation in the sense of "disrupting" or "spoiling" prior interpretations which may have been used as a tool against LGBTQ people.

*Queering Christianity: Finding a Place at the Table for LGBTQI Christians* edited by Robert E. Shore-Goss, Thomas Bohache, Patrick S. Cheng, and Mona West.

This volume is composed of many diverse essays, all from members of MCC, both clergy and laity. Each essay approaches the theological task in a "queer" key by asking what kinds of theologizing we have done and are doing in MCC because of our experiences of oppression, marginalization, tolerance, and (tentative) welcome within Christianity. The four editors bring different perspectives; all are published theologians who are also MCC clergy and have served as pastors, professors, and denominational officials. The theme which inspired this collection is MCC’s practice of Open Communion, as articulated first by our founder, Rev. Elder Troy Perry, and now expressed every Sunday in MCCs around the world. The contributors see the theological task in MCC as welcoming more and more people of differing sexualities, gender identities, theologies, and erotic expressions to the "table" in order to talk about our experience of God more fully.

**Additional Faith Statements used by MCC Congregations**

The following statements and confessions were mentioned by respondents in the Church Practices survey in 2014. They are included here for reference, along with links to the pages where they can be found.

**The Confession of Inclusive Faith (A Christian Creed of Indonesia)**

*Used by three MCC congregations in Brazil, their Portuguese translation is provided first, followed by the English translation.*

**Credo Cristão da Indonésia**

Creio em Deus, Pai de todos, que deu a terra a todos os povos e a todos ama sem distinção. Creio em Jesus Cristo, que veio para nos dar coragem, para nos curar do pecado e libertar de toda a opressão. Creio no Espírito Santo, Deus vivo que está entre nós e age em todo o homem e em toda a mulher de boa vontade. Creio na Igreja, posta como um farol para todas as nações, e guiada pelo Espírito Santo a servir todos os povos. Creio nos direitos humanos, na solidariedade entre os povos, na força da não-violência. Creio que todos os homens e mulheres são igualmente humanos. Creio que só existe um direito igual para todos os seres humanos, e que eu não sou livre enquanto uma pessoa permanecer escrava. Creio na beleza, na simplicidade, no amor que abre os braços a todos, na paz sobre a terra.
Creio, sempre e apesar de tudo, numa nova humanidade e que Deus criará um novo céu e uma nova terra, onde florescerão o amor, a paz e a justiça. Amém.

**Affirmation of Peace and Justice**  
*(adapted from a creed from Indonesia)*

**All:** I believe in God, who is love and who has given the earth to all people.  
I believe in Jesus Christ, who came to heal us, and to free us from all forms of oppression.  
I believe in the Spirit of God, who works in and through all who are turned towards the truth.  
I believe in the community of faith, which is called to be at the service of all people.  
I believe in God's promise to finally destroy the power of sin in us all, and to establish the kingdom of justice and peace for all mankind.

**Group A:** I do not believe in the right of the strongest, nor the force of arms, nor the power of oppression.

**Group B:** I believe in human rights in the solidarity of all people, in the power of non-violence.

**Group A:** I do not believe in racism, in the power that comes from wealth and privilege, or in any established order that enslaves.

**Group B:** I believe that all men and women are equally human, that order based on violence and injustice is not order.

**Group A:** I do not believe that war and hunger are inevitable and peace unattainable.

**Group B:** I believe in beauty of simplicity, in love with open hands, in peace on earth.

**All:** I do not believe that suffering needs to be in vain, that death is the end, that the disfigurement of the world is what God intended. But I dare to believe, always and in spite of everything, in God's power to transform and transfigure, fulfilling the promise of a new heaven and a new earth where justice and peace will flourish.

**A New Creed (from the United Church of Canada)**

Two MCC churches, only one of which is located in Canada, report using this creed.

We are not alone,  
we live in God's world.

We believe in God:  
who has created and is creating,

---

17 Geoffrey Duncan, *Dare to dream: a prayer and worship anthology from around the world* (London: Fount, 1995), 50-51.
who has come in Jesus,
the Word made flesh,
to reconcile and make new,
who works in us and others
by the Spirit.

We trust in God.

We are called to be the Church:
to celebrate God’s presence,
to live with respect in Creation,
to love and serve others,
to seek justice and resist evil,
to proclaim Jesus, crucified and risen,
our judge and our hope.

In life, in death, in life beyond death,
God is with us.
We are not alone.

Thanks be to God.\textsuperscript{18}

\textbf{The Eight Points of Progressive Christianity (2003 version)}

One MCC congregation reports using the following text.

\textbf{By calling ourselves progressive, we mean that we are Christians who:}

1. Have found an approach to God through the life and teachings of Jesus;

2. Recognize the faithfulness of other people who have other names for the way to God's realm, and acknowledge that their ways are true for them, as our ways are true for us;

3. Understand the sharing of bread and wine in Jesus' name to be a representation of an ancient vision of God's feast for all peoples;

4. Invite all people to participate in our community and worship life without insisting that they become like us in order to be acceptable (including but not limited to):

\begin{itemize}
  \item believers and agnostics,
  \item conventional Christians and questioning skeptics,
  \item women and men,
  \item those of all sexual orientations and gender identities,
  \item those of all races and cultures,
  \item those of all classes and abilities,
\end{itemize}

\textsuperscript{18} http://www.united-church.ca/beliefs/creed
• those who hope for a better world and those who have lost hope,
• without imposing on them the necessity of becoming like us;

5. Know that the way we behave toward one another and toward other people is the fullest expression of what we believe;

6. Find more grace in the search for meaning than in absolute certainty, in the questions than in the answers;

7. Form ourselves into communities dedicated to equipping one another for the work we feel called to do: striving for peace and justice among all people, protecting and restoring the integrity of all God's creation, and bringing hope to those Jesus called the least of his sisters and brothers;

8. Who recognize that being followers of Jesus is costly, and entails selfless love, conscientious resistance to evil, and renunciation of privilege.19

United Church of Christ Statement of Faith
While only one MCC congregation reports using the UCC Statement of Faith, the statement was suggested in other input to the Commission through website feedback.

United Church of Christ Statement of Faith—original version
We believe in God, the Eternal Spirit, Father of our Lord Jesus Christ and our Father, and to his deeds we testify:

He calls the worlds into being, creates man in his own image and sets before him the ways of life and death.

He seeks in holy love to save all people from aimlessness and sin.

He judges men and nations by his righteous will declared through prophets and apostles.

In Jesus Christ, the man of Nazareth, our crucified and risen Lord, he has come to us and shared our common lot, conquering sin and death and reconciling the world to himself.

He bestows upon us his Holy Spirit, creating and renewing the church of Jesus Christ, binding in covenant faithful people of all ages, tongues, and races.

He calls us into his church to accept the cost and joy of discipleship, to be his servants in the service of men, to proclaim the gospel to all the world and resist the powers of evil, to share in Christ's baptism and eat at his table, to join him in his passion and victory.

He promises to all who trust him forgiveness of sins and fullness of grace, courage in the struggle for justice and peace, his presence in trial and rejoicing, and eternal life in his kingdom which has no end.

19 http://progressivechristianity.org/past-versions/. For the most recent version, see http://progressivechristianity.org/the-8-points/.
Blessing and honor, glory and power be unto him.

Amen.\textsuperscript{20}

**Seven Principles of Unitarian Universalism**

- 1st Principle: The inherent worth and dignity of every person;
- 2nd Principle: Justice, equity and compassion in human relations;
- 3rd Principle: Acceptance of one another and encouragement to spiritual growth in our congregations;
- 4th Principle: A free and responsible search for truth and meaning;
- 5th Principle: The right of conscience and the use of the democratic process within our congregations and in society at large;
- 6th Principle: The goal of world community with peace, liberty, and justice for all;
- 7th Principle: Respect for the interdependent web of all existence of which we are a part.\textsuperscript{21}

\textsuperscript{20} http://www.ucc.org/beliefs/statement-of-faith.html The page also contains a revised version of the UCC Statement of Faith and a liturgical form set up as a doxology.

\textsuperscript{21} http://www.uua.org/beliefs/principles/
Newsletters from the Commission on the MCC Statement of Faith
A Reflection on the Open Table
by Rev. Dr. Candace R. Shultis & Bryce E. Rich

It’s been a year since the Commission on the MCC Statement of Faith began its work. Once again we’d like to invite the wider MCC community to continue our conversation. To that end, we will be sharing some of our preliminary thoughts on various topics we’ve been discussing amongst ourselves, including, the Open Table, our thoughts about Jesus, MCC's unique mission within the Church, and our role as stewards of God’s creation.

This month we are discussing MCC's practice of an open invitation to the table in worship. This has been our practice since 6 October 1968, when Rev. Elder Troy D. Perry held MCC's first worship service in his home. In response to his invitation in The Advocate, 12 people from a variety of religious backgrounds gathered that day. Though the celebration of Holy Communion was not an integral part of Troy's Pentecostal background, by the movement of the Spirit, he offered the bread and cup to all who were present. MCC gatherings around the world have continued this practice of an open invitation ever since.

Traditional statements of belief often begin with lofty statements about God or our task as worshipers. But when we think about our very first experiences in MCC, what comes to mind is the Open Table. We believe that God invites everyone to taste and see. And we have seen the healing that takes place as people take part in the Lord’s Supper.

Because we come from so many religious backgrounds, including Catholic, Baptist, Pentecostal, Free Church, and many, many others, we are aware that people have varying beliefs about the Eucharist. These include memorialism, transubstantiation, consubstantiation, and real presence. However, in the midst of our differences, the Open Table has been the center of MCC worship from our very beginning.

Many of us know the pain of being turned away from the communion in other denominations. With this in mind, our founders decided to offer communion at every worship service. Countless individuals have reconnected with God's love through the invitation we extend to all people. People come alone, with their partners, and even in groups of friends.

At King of Peace MCC, we use the following reading once a month as a part of our communion service. We invite you to take a moment to read and reflect:

Come to this table
to meet the living God,
love indescribable and beyond our imagining
yet closer than our own breathing.

Come to this table
to meet the risen Christ
flesh of our flesh, bone of our bone,
God-with-us, embodied in our living.
Come to this table
to meet the life-giving Spirit,
interpreting our search for truth and justice,
breathing into us renewing power.

Come to find, to meet, to hold
the living, loving God
made new for us in bread and wine.\(^\text{22}\)

**Some Questions to Consider**

- *Is open table practice an important part of your worship experience?*
- *Do you remember how you felt when you first were invited to communion at an MCC?*
- *What words, phrases, or images come to mind as you think about your experiences of the Open Table?*

**A Reflection on the Question of Who and What We Are**

**by Rev. Dr. Karl Hand & Rev. Dr. Axel Schwaigert**

*We*, the Metropolitan Community Church, are currently rethinking and revisiting *our* statement of Faith. We are trying to formulate for our time what we believe. Yet, who is this "We" we are talking about, when we say the words: "We believe"? And what is this *Church* that comes together to say those words, however they will sound?

Revisiting and rethinking a statement of faith is also a time to revisit and rethink our identity as a church. It is a time when we wish to be careful about the words we use to describe our identity. The way we talk about something and someone -- the church and the people -- shapes the reality in which we live. We learned this first-hand when we began to use inclusive language to talk about gender and sexuality many years ago.

Finding new ways of talking about our faith also means asking how we think and talk about our church. Through our newsletter, the Commission on the Statement of Faith is not trying to give answers, but to ask the question:

\[\text{Who are we, and what are we?}\]

The word *church* is a translation of a Hebrew word, *qahal* or "assembly," which was used to refer to the gathering of the liberated children of Israel after they had left slavery in Egypt. In the Gospel of Matthew, Jesus refers to the community of people who followed him using the Greek word *ekklesia*,

which translates qahal. When the apostles spread the message of Jesus throughout the world, the communities that formed kept using the word ekklesia, or the Latin equivalent ecclesia. Our Ibero-American churches still say iglesia and igreja.

There are many ways to talk about the reality, the nature, and the structure of the church. There are categories of academic theologies that talk about the church militant, the struggling, fighting church here on earth, that is composed of all kinds of people, all of us sinners, but also all saints. The same theologies also talk about the church triumphant that is already in joy and jubilation in the presence of the love of God, beloved and redeemed. There is the language of the Bible that sees the church as the Body of Christ, or as we sometimes say in worship: "We are the Hands and Feet of Christ." We are sisters and brothers, with a common task.

MCC isn't the universal church, or the "one, true" church -- we are only one part of it. But when we meet every week in local congregations around the world, and when we come together in our networks and conferences, we are a manifestation of that reality.

Some ways we talk about the church are the names we were given or have given ourselves through our history: The church for gays, the church with AIDS, a human rights church, a church for all. Today, we are trying to "Be MCC."

There are also ways to talk about the church as the organisation we live in: Some think of us as the local church, or congregations where we worship, celebrate, and grieve. We are also a worldwide, ecumenical church that bridges the boundaries of language, culture, countries, and colours. Some see us as a grassroots movement that has moved away and beyond all those images and concepts. Are we all of these, or none, or more?

We also have a firm tradition and core value, that this church is built on the Priesthood of all Believers, that we all are equals in our journey of faith. "There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus" (Galatians 3:28).

The Commission on the MCC Statement of Faith would like to hear what you, the people that live and make up this MCC, think concerning who and what we are. In this way, we will begin to understand what we mean, when we say: "We believe...."

Some Questions to Consider

- What is MCC for you? How do you experience it? Locally? More broadly?
- What words, phrases, or images come to mind to describe Metropolitan Community Church?
A Reflection on MCC Mission and Liturgy
by Rev. Elder Héctor Gutiérrez & Rev. Dr. Candace R. Shultis

In MCC, we are living a unique time of reflection, analysis, approach, transition and deep action, guided by the Spirit of God who continues calling us to "Be MCC" in the world. We came to be part of this family that is MCC from different and varied traditions, stories and histories, but no doubt with the strong conviction that the same mission holds us together: proclaiming the radically inclusive message of the Gospel.

Jesus, as he was leaving His disciples, gave them and us what we call the Great Commission: "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations." (Matthew 28:19a) When we were founded, Rev. Elder Troy D. Perry declared that we preach a three-pronged gospel: Christian Salvation, Christian Community, and Christian Social Action.

Our current MCC Statement of Faith states, in part:

"Founded in the interest of offering a church home to all who confess and believe...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 Scriptures, and edification through the teaching and preaching of the Word."

Mission and worship are at the heart of who we are. Those who have had the blessing to visit some of our local churches in various corners of the world can with certainty say that there is something deep that makes us MCC. But at the same time, each of our local congregations is unique. Even in one local church, there can be three types of worship services, each completely different from one another.

In our personal history, we all keep something within ourselves about how the Spirit inspired us in our first contact with MCC. Personally, I, Héctor, can say that it was the richness of liturgy yet at the same time a sense of worship that is free, innovative, inclusive, and alive that captured my spirit and my excitement of wanting to be a part of MCC. Because my background is a Latin American tradition well rooted in Liberation Theology, I could experience, in the worship services of MCC, that same richness of the traditions of my communities as well as feel free to live into the manifestation of my faith. Faith and life, for me, are two faces of the same reality.

We also have a willingness and openness to transform our worship spaces for different activities. These might include sacred music, dance, drag and a whole host of endeavors only limited by our imaginations. Maybe we are so comfortable with this and it looks so normal to us, that we miss the opportunity to think about it.

Our worship is one part of our community life, and a manifestation of our mission for transformation and radical inclusion.

One of MCC's greatest strengths is above all the living experience of the priesthood of all believers. In MCC, all persons can preside over worship and each can share from their own experience of faith.
Some Questions to Consider

- How does your experience with worship within MCC relate to your understanding of MCC’s mission?
- Do you experience a connection with mission when you worship? If so, how? If not, why not?
- Do you have a specific rite or liturgy used in worship in your experience of MCC that you would like to share?

What's Up With Sin? (We Don't Like Sin)

by Rev. Kelby Harrison, PhD & Bryce E. Rich

This month's newsletter is co-written by a guest contributor from the MCC Theologies Team, Kelby Harrison.

When the Commission of the MCC Statement of Faith first met, we sent out a survey to Friends and Members of MCC to ask for your thoughts about a revised MCC Statement of Faith. You may wish to read the full report on your responses.

In one question we asked:

- What topics do you feel strongly SHOULD NOT be included in a revised MCC Statement of Faith?

![Bar chart showing the top 10 topics that respondents feel strongly SHOULD NOT be included in a revised MCC Statement of Faith]

- 42% - The Virgin Mary
- 36% - Sin (hamartiology)
- 33% - There are no topics I feel strongly should not be included.
- 30% - Last things (eschatology)
- 24% - Biblical authority
- 18% - Salvation (soteriology)
- 17% - The Trinity
- 12% - Religious pluralism
- 10% - Christian living
- 7% - The earth as God’s creation
Thirty-six percent (36%) of respondents told us that the topic of sin should not be included in MCC’s revised Statement of Faith.

This opposition to sin makes perfect sense. The word and the concept of sin have been used against LGBT people, egregiously, sometimes to the point of death. And still in a religion based on a personal relationship with God, we need ways to articulate and account for feeling distant in that relationship. We need language that strengthens our spiritual resolve, not language that has been used to crush our spirits and our love.

Looking at the world around us, it’s clear that things aren’t always great. MCC congregations often have a disproportionate number of people who have suffered greatly. Sometimes this is due to our sexuality, gender identity or gender expression, though not always. Many are unemployed or under-employed, feel alone in dealing with chronic illness, or lack many things that others take for granted. Closer to home, I (Bryce) am very much aware of my own shortcomings: an almost compulsive need to go it alone, shortness of temper, a tendency to medicate my feelings with food... What about these things?

Shying completely away from discussion of sin can be harmful. How can we speak prophetically or practice social justice without being able to name systemic inequalities such as racism, sexism, classism, ableism, ageism, and heterosexism? How can we be healed if we refuse to admit our own shortcomings?

Perhaps part of the difference in opinion is our definition of sin. The Greek understanding of sin (hamartia) was missing the mark. This idea is more complicated than it seems at first glance.

A sinner must have knowledge of moral righteousness, a target if you will, and have knowledge of its bull's-eye. Over the history of Christianity that target along with its bull's-eye has often been referred to as God's law.

At some points in their history, our Jewish siblings conceived of sin as largely communal, with one member able to pollute the whole group. Christians have often emphasized personal sin—our salvation was in our own hands. Although among those of the Holiness movement, communal sin still has an important role.

Since early Christianity, the concept of "sin" has developed into many targets, most hanging on a backdrop (in the Western tradition) of "original sin." Are we to understand sin as vice; as brokenness from God, ourselves, or others; as willful disobedience of God? Is sin dependent on our intentions, weakness to temptation, or just inevitable in life? Is our ultimate relationship to God dependent upon God's grace or embedded in our deeds?

Contemporary Christian theologians have articulated modern sins: racism, social injustice, debt, even un-medicated depression. Marriage equality has been denounced as sin.

The theological stigma of the LGBTQ community is so often that of "sinner." How do we choose to reclaim our belovedness and grace in the face of this? How do we still understand our moral shortcomings in Christian terms?
The current MCC Statement of Faith includes the following words:

We are saved from loneliness, despair and degradation through God's gift of grace...
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.

Perhaps this is a place from which to continue our conversation.

The MCC Theologies Team has also created a new chapter for our *Holy Conversations* 2 resource that we invite you to use with others in your local MCC to talk about sin.

**Some Questions to Consider**

We'd like to hear about your experiences. Join the conversation on our Facebook page, or send your private reply to us through the MCC website. See links below.

This month, we're particularly interested in the following questions:

- *Read through quote above from the current MCC Statement of Faith. What thoughts and feelings do you have about the current formulation?*

- *When have you felt shamed by the language of sin? Does this language hold any positive value for you?*

- *We invite you to use the Holy Conversation on sin that we've linked to above. Are there any observations from your group’s discussion that (maintaining personal confidentiality) you would care to share with the Commission?*

**Additional Resources**

The MCC Theologies Team has developed a new chapter in the popular *Holy Conversations* series for congregations and small groups to explore the topic of Sin. Follow these thinks:

- *Holy Conversations: Introduction*

- *Holy Conversations: Guidelines for Dialogue*

- *Holy Conversations 2: Sin*

"Amazing Grace! How Sweet the Sound That Saved a Soul Like Me."
by Rev. Dr. Candace R. Shultis & Rev. Karl Hand, PhD

"It is by grace that you have been saved, though faith -
and even that is not of yourselves, but the gift of God." Ephesians 2: 8
Growing up in the United Methodist Church, I (Candace) sat between my Mom and Dad every Sunday for worship. There were always a few hymns that they both seemed to sing louder than others and "Amazing Grace!" was one of them. In fact, for me, one of the greatest gifts I know I have received from my parents, Sunday school teachers and ordinary members of that church is the knowledge that God's grace is abundant and it is a gift.

While we do not like to talk about or maybe even think about sin, Paul states, "...since all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God; they are now justified by God's grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus..." (Romans 3: 24) It seems to me that we need to have a sense of our own sinfulness, our own separation from God, our own failure to hit the mark of love, in order to fully experience God's grace.

The current MCC Statement of Faith reads in part: "Every person is justified by grace to God through faith in Jesus Christ. ... Such grace is not earned, but is a pure gift from a God of pure love."

But what is grace?

It's sometimes too easy to picture grace as a knee-jerk reaction by God to sin. The opening chapters of the Bible present a different story. There, we see a God who acts graciously from the outset, and is not blindsided by human failure.

In Genesis 1:1, God has no need to create a world, but instead, created one simply for the pleasure and joy the creation would provide (Genesis 1:31), and to display God's glory through it (see Psalm 19:1). God has graciously made and sustains this natural environment where humanity and all creatures could flourish. The sheer graciousness of the world we live in reminds us with every heartbeat and every new day that God's grace towards us endures forever.

For me (Candace), it is knowing beyond a shadow of a doubt that God loves me and desires to be in relationship with me, a relationship that impacts every area of my life and my relationships with others. I will never forget the early evening many years ago when I was standing in line at a grocery store with my bread and milk. It was the line for folks who had only a few items, so it was over toward the end of the checkout lines. As I looked over all of the people in all of the other lines, I had this incredible experience of 'knowing' that God loved all of these other people as much as God loved me. It was like, using a good John Wesley phrase, 'my heart was strangely warmed.' This feeling came out of nowhere and it changed my life.

The author of 1 John wrote: "No one has ever seen God; if we love one another, God lives in us, and God's love is perfected in us." (I John 4:12) So, while grace is a gift, it is a gift that we live out as we love one another. God's gift of grace is a gift of forgiveness. And we are called to live out that gift of forgiveness in all of our relationships. Not an easy thing to be sure.

I write this on the cusp of Good Friday. So I also know that whereas grace is a gift freely given, it is not a gift given without cost. It's just that we don't have to pay the cost: Jesus did that for me and for you on the cross. "Abba, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing." (Luke 23:34)
As Christian LGBT people, we who have experienced God's grace have a gift to share with the world. Just as the earth shook when the tomb was opened on Easter morning, so, too, can we shake the world with the Good News that God's love and grace conquers sin and fear.

Some Questions to Consider

- Can you remember the time you realized that God's love and grace were meant for you?
- What was the experience like?
- What impact has it had on your life?

Lessons Learned
by Bryce E. Rich

This edition of our newsletter is longer than others. But we promise you it's worth your time.

The Commission on the MCC Statement of Faith met face-to-face in June. During our time together we discussed the many messages we've received from around the world. In this note we'd like to share some lessons we've learned in this process.

We Can Do Better with Communications
Sometimes we forget to tell you what we've been up to. The Commission has been meeting monthly for a year and a half. It took us a while to get our own newsletter started.

We've not been able to visit many churches or network gatherings. So we'll be working to get the word out to more of you, including a series of webinars. Be sure you are subscribed to our newsletter for announcements. (Use the link at the bottom of this email.)

If you'd like us to participate in a network gathering or conference call, let us know! We might be close enough to come, but if not, we'd welcome the chance to talk with on a conference call or via Skype.

From Now On, We Promise to Steer Clear of "Click Bait"
In at least one instance, our attempt at catchy titles to entice folks to read our newsletter (also known as "click bait") left some of you with false impressions about our work. We'll be working hard to engage you without misleading those of you who might scan our headline, but don't necessarily have time to read the full content of a newsletter.

We've Been Learning about MCC's History
We've reached out to MCC Elders like Troy Perry, Nancy Wilson, Freda Smith, Don Eastman, and Lee Carlton to better understand the way that the original Statement of Faith was written and how it has changed over time. We've also read many of MCC's historical documents.
We've Been Consulting with Outside Experts
During our first face-to-face meeting last year in Chicago, we also consulted with theologians, Bible scholars, liturgists, and graduate students from Chicago Theological Seminary and the University of Chicago Divinity School. These scholars have helped us to think more deeply about MCC, the larger Church, and the world.

We've Taken a Snapshot of MCC Practices and Beliefs around the World
Last year we conducted two surveys: one of individual MCC members and friends, and the other of MCC congregations around the world.

We asked a series of questions about people's experiences of the current Statement of Faith. Did you know we had one? How do you use it? What do you like about it? What causes you problems or concerns?

Some of you have expressed concern that the results of the survey would dictate what is included or excluded from MCC’s Statement of Faith. Others suggested that particular responses might serve as mandates for the Commission. Neither of these is actually the case.

The surveys are a part of the larger Descriptive Theologies Project launched by the MCC Theologies Team. They are descriptive because they help us to see what MCC members and congregations believe and how they actually work around the world. Our goal is to get a sense not only for what churches and individuals like, but also where we struggle. This helps us to identify areas that may require further teaching and conversation.

While the surveys provide us with an interesting snapshot of MCC, we know the results are not perfect.
Though we sent an invitation to every MCC congregation to participate, only 25% of our churches responded. Likewise, we sent out an invitation to over 7,000 friends and members of MCC to participate in the survey of individual values and beliefs. The response rate was about 12%.

Many people didn’t know about the survey. Others were not able to participate for a variety of reasons. So while responses to the surveys provide useful information about a segment of MCC, they serve more as a diagnostic than a democratic process for determining the content of the revised Statement of Faith.

We've Been Building Our Mailing Lists
Everyone who provided a valid email address when responding to a survey was automatically subscribed to our newsletter. But we've deliberately targeted our communications to those who have subscribed to our mailing list.

You can help us reach more people by forwarding this message using the link at the bottom.

We will also be sharing more with MCC Headline News, but we will also keep asking people to subscribe to our newsletter. Our goal is to provide the information you need without sending too much to your mailbox.
We've Been Reflecting on Inclusivity
Accepting one another without requiring that everyone believes a certain teaching or holds a particular point of view has been one of MCC's greatest strengths. The Commission has no intention of changing that.

In our earliest days, MCC shared about God, Gays, and the Gospel. Over time we've embraced many different sexualities, gender identities, and gender expressions. And this is still a work in progress.

MCC was born out of the pain of exclusion and a need to share God's love with people in the margins. And yet we are not an exclusively gay church. Our congregations include not only LGBT people, but also members for whom questions about sexuality simply aren't what draw them to MCC.

In the past we might have labeled straight members of MCC as "Allies," but even this is no longer the case. An entire generation of children has come of age in MCC with new questions. Others have found relief from judgmentalism and narrow thinking they experience in other churches.

So while we are still very much a church concerned with the integration of spirituality and sexuality, we are also constantly challenged to expand our self-understanding in ways that are more and more inclusive.

We Seek Unity in our Diversity
A few of you have expressed fears that the Commission might produce a new Statement of Faith that would make it impossible for you to stay with MCC. We hear you. And we are committed to the same openness and inclusivity that MCC has valued throughout our history.

Some have expressed fears that a new Statement of Faith will demand that we give up cherished beliefs. Others are worried that we'll try to enforce a standard orthodoxy. We won't be proposing either of these extremes.

From our beginnings, MCC has included people who don't agree on lots of theological issues. Yet our diversity has often proven to be one of our greatest strengths.

In MCC, we invite all people to participate in Holy Communion at God's table. We baptize in a variety of ways. We understand the Atonement (or the work of Jesus Christ to reconcile the world to God) in a variety of ways, just as our Christian forebears have over the last two thousand years. We acknowledge that each human being is created in the image of God. And many of us have come to see God's grace as it shines into places where it is least expected.

We have fought the temptation to demand allegiance to one particular Christian tradition, and we hold individual conscience as one of our highest values. We're all on this journey together.

We Thank You for Your Comments and Prayers. We Ask You to Continue.
Many of you responded to our initial survey. You've replied to our newsletters. You've sent messages through the MCC website and through Facebook. And you've shared your ideas and your concerns in
person. Your comments have been very helpful to us in understanding more deeply what we are charged to do. We encourage you to keep on sharing with us!

We are also grateful for the prayers that many of you have offered on behalf of our work. And we ask that you continue to remember us.

**Wonderful Words of Life: Your Word is a Light to My Path**  
by Rev. Cathy Alexander & Rev. Karl Hand, PhD

Stories are some of the most powerful things we can share. It's our life stories that give us a sense of identity. We don't know someone until we hear their story. We don't feel a part of a community until we share stories with other members, and usually, it's the understanding of those stories that make us want to join communities.

In MCC, our story has often been one of overcoming rejection and loneliness, and finding community. In fact, we are part of a bigger story than this, a story that begins with the Spirit of God hovering over the waters of chaos, creating a world, setting apart the people of Israel as God's special people, freeing them from captivity in Egypt and in Babylon, and then through Jesus the Messiah, bringing the Good News to the whole world.

The credits have not yet rolled on this greatest story. It's not just a story that we remember. We are a part of it.

Our world presents us with many different stories. One such story is the story of Empire, of one nation fulfilling its manifest destiny to have control over the world. Another story tells of technological progress, that eventually industry and science will create a utopia. Others put faith in the story of "The American Dream," that working hard and buying property will create happiness—and this story of middle-class, suburban bliss has spread beyond America into many lands.

*But we stand at a crossroads.* The stories of Empire, Technological Utopias, and Suburban Dreams are not compatible with the story we are called to.

We are people who have adopted instead the story of the Bible: the story of Creation, Community, Liberation, and Reconciliation.

In this story, we meet with God, we hear God speak, and we remind ourselves of who we really are.

Since this story is so central to our identity and our purpose, it is no surprise how painful it can be when the Bible is weaponized, and especially when it is used against us or those we love. Sometimes we are caught in the cross-fire between a fundamentalism which worships the book, and a liberalism which rejects it.
We’ve a story to tell the nations. Sacred texts range from poetry to wisdom to history to teaching to heartfelt story and mystery are enduring. All at once they can inspire, challenge, comfort, enrage, and soothe. Hebrews 10:16 notes:

This is the promise that I will make to them after those days, says the Lord: 'I will put my teachings in their hearts and write them in their minds.

The scriptures witness to the goodness, love, and justice of the Creator. Since sacred texts like the bible have been used to convict, condemn, and marginalize people, it is important to study, to realize their full context, and view them through the lens of the entire body of scriptures.

These texts contain our story too as a people who seek justice, mercy, and God’s enduring love. And God still has more to say to us.

Since we are a denomination moving towards common goal and purpose, yet with many theologies, there are also a variety of convictions regarding sacred texts. Many believe that God, as a living and active God, continues to speak to all of us as beloved.

Sacred writings continue as God continues to inspire, challenge, teach and tell of covenant relationship with the Creator. We co-create our lives, our world, and our continuing story with the great God of our understanding.

Some questions that the Commission on the MCC Statement of Faith has been asking about scripture and sacred text include:

- What is the role of scripture in worship and in spiritual formation?
- What authority does the Bible hold in theological reflection?
- Are other texts also sacred, and if so, what is their place?

Some Questions to Consider

- How do you define/identify "sacred text"?
- What has been your experience with sacred texts and their use?
- What place do sacred texts have in your faith? In your relationship with God?
Living the Trinity
by Bryce E. Rich & Rev. Karl Hand, PhD

MCC's very first Statement of Faith includes the line:

"Our faith is based on the principles outlined in the Apostolic Creeds."

By 1975 we had reworded this line to name the Apostles' Creed and the Nicene Creed. These short statements of faith, written in the second and fourth centuries respectively, teach the basics of the Christian faith. Core to both creeds is the Trinity: God in Three Persons, traditionally Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

In those early days, the founders of MCC made a bold decision. Rather than reject the teachings of the churches that had rejected them, they would reclaim and embrace these cherished beliefs. This was a bold, prophetic action:

MCC would not be excluded from the church.

These vital Christian teachings nurtured us from a movement born out of desperation into a church with a powerful calling.

But what exactly is the Trinity? If you are part of an MCC group that follows the liturgical calendar, someone in your congregation may attempt an explanation in a sermon once a year on Trinity Sunday.

Three in One, One in Three... Mathematically it makes no sense.

Many have suggested that attempts to understand the Trinity on rational grounds will always lead to its rejection. They suggest this truth is beyond human understanding. And this is partially true. There is another problem that we often face in the contemporary church:

We cannot understand the meaning of the creeds in isolation from the story of God's activity in the world.

One function of our life together in the church is to share our common Christian faith with newcomers to our communities. The historic creeds preserve a shorthand account of the many questions that arose in the early church and the responses worked out through examination of the scriptures and reflecting on the experiences of early followers of Jesus.

- They remind us that our good God made the entire world, and that this material universe, including our bodies, is good.

- They tell us that rather than reject material creation, God entered the world in a human body as Jesus Christ. They outline his birth, his death, and his resurrection.

- They remind us of God's Holy Spirit who has spoken and continues to speak through human beings. This Spirit is a gift to the Church that continues to move among us today.
While the early Christians lived in a time when some of the most popular philosophies rejected the material world in favor of a totally spiritual reality, our own culture tends toward the exact opposite. Today we hear that basic reality is material, and everything can be reduced to a physical, economic, or consumer reality. This ideology has created a highly consumerist culture, fueled by a globalized economy of exploitation and protected by militaristic empires.

The Trinity presents a radically different view: Basic reality is not a *material* thing, but a *relational* thing. Before there was a universe, there was a passionate love at the heart of the Godhead, the love of Three Persons in community.

The Trinity offers an antidote to the prevailing worldview of our time. If basic reality is relational, then the purpose of creation, the mission of the church, and the meaning of life are to be found in loving relationships. As Christians, our highest calling is to love God, love one another, love our neighbor, love the stranger, and love the enemy and the persecutor. Jesus' love-commandment turns out to be a profoundly Trinitarian approach to ethics. This is part of the uniqueness of the Christian faith. As a movement, we are calling people to be reconciled to communion with the Triune God, who is love and seeks a loving relationship with all people.

**Some Questions to Consider**

- Does your own religious experience place much emphasis on the Trinity?
- Does your MCC community use one or more of the historic creeds in worship?
- How might thinking about the Trinity as a relational community help you see God?

**Inclusion and Identity**

*by Bryce E. Rich*

Two years ago when we first surveyed members and friends of MCC, we heard many different points of view. Some urged us to use inclusive language that makes room for many different gender identities. Others advised us to steer clear of overly exclusive statements that privilege one teaching over another in matters where Christian traditions are diverse. But the overall message was loud and clear:

The new Statement of Faith should be *inclusive*.

Inclusion is in MCC's very DNA. In sermons, membership classes, and introductory conversations, we often retell the story of the gathering in Revered Elder Troy Perry's living room on 6 October 1968 that launched MCC. As Troy recounts:

*Twelve people showed up in the living room of my home. And I always tell people, there were nine friends and three strangers, one person of color, one Jew, and one heterosexual couple. It was a view of things to come for the Metropolitan Community Churches.*

1
Our inclusivity has taken many forms. In 1972 Reverend Elder Freda Smith became the first woman to be licensed as clergy in MCC. The following year at General Conference IV in 1973 in Atlanta, Georgia (USA), Freda led the effort to make MCC’s bylaws gender inclusive. Before the conference had ended she was also elected as MCC’s first woman elder. In 2005, the delegates of General Conference XXII in Calgary, Alberta (Canada) adopted the MCC Core Values that begin with these words:

**Inclusion.** Love is our greatest moral value and resisting exclusion is a primary focus of our ministry. We want to continue to be conduits of faith where everyone is included in the family of God and where all parts of our being are welcomed at God’s table.²

Though commonly referred to in its early days (and even now) as the "gay church," MCC is much more. Our gatherings include the full rainbow of LGBTQIA identities, many straight allies, and a generation of children with all new questions. In addition to sexuality, our denomination is an experiment in what it means to be a people of many national, racial, and ethnic identities, as well as different socio-economic backgrounds. From our early days we have been an international denomination, and we continue to answer the call of people around the world who hear of us and want to "Be MCC."

Our inclusive stance leaves room for many worship styles, interpretations of scripture, sexual ethics, and even matters crucial to our faith like how the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ "work" for the salvation of humanity and the world. Our congregations strive to be safe spaces where people can ask tough questions and learn to live in the tension of not having all the answers. These are also ways we express our commitment to inclusion.

*But inclusion into what?*

Over the course of our work, the Commission has received some suggestions that this might be the time to change the focus of the MCC Statement of Faith. Proposals for a new center have included human rights advocacy, a less Christ-centered statement in the hopes of greater theological diversity, a more open-ended understanding of Deity to replace Trinitarian thought, or spirituality more broadly conceived. In each case, the commitment to radical inclusion has been a fundamental concern.

The new Statement of Faith begins and ends with the invitation to the Open Table. While our theological understandings of what happens there are diverse, Holy Communion remains the central symbol of our shared faith. It is the very core of our communal identity, and the practice through which we most universally show our commitment to inclusion.

As a part of our commitment to inclusion, we also recognize that there are multiple spiritual and religious paths. While the invitation is always open, we are not in the business of forcing anyone to join us. MCC has a long history of acknowledging religious diversity while maintaining our own commitment to historic Christian belief. A few examples from our history are instructive.

**MCC and Interfaith Cooperation**
As Troy’s account recalls, the first MCC worship service included one Jew. Before long, MCC Los Angeles included several more Jewish congregants. These men and women, estranged from their own religious communities, found respite in MCC. While welcomed into the life of the congregation, they were unable to participate fully as members. Rather than proselytize, Troy chose to honor their devotion to Judaism and encouraged the group to start their own congregation:

*Obviously, I’m not Jewish, and I didn’t know much about Judaism or starting a synagogue, but I told them, ”No matter what you do, make sure you make it really Jewish.”*  

In July 1972, MCC Los Angeles and the newly formed Metropolitan Community Temple celebrated an interfaith service together, and MCC Los Angeles continued afterwards to host the new congregation. Years later, when MCC Los Angeles was damaged during the 1994 Northridge earthquake, the renamed Beth Chayim Chadashim (House of New Life) offered hospitality in return, opening their doors to MCC.

On the American East Coast, MCC Miami encouraged and supported the formation of Congregation Etz Chaim (Tree of Life) in 1974. And in Washington, DC, the local MCC aided in the organization of Metropolitan Community Temple Mishpocheh (Family) in 1975. Before either group had its own building, the MCC congregation helped to arrange space for MCT Mishpocheh with their own hosts, the First Congregational Church. MCC DC and the renamed Bet Mishpachah share a long and fruitful cooperation in the planning of the annual LGBT Pride service in DC that endures even today in a broader network of partnerships. MCC continues similar interfaith cooperation today with Muslims in East Asia, and we embrace opportunities for interfaith cooperation in local communities throughout the world.

Even as we respect and affirm our partners, our own identity remains firmly grounded in the revelation of Jesus Christ. Working with our neighbors of different religious traditions, we identify opportunities for collaboration on common interests while acknowledging and celebrating our religious distinctives. In this way, our interfaith work is an outgrowth of our continuing commitment to inclusion, grounded in our Christian identity.

**Some Questions to Consider**

- What are the identities that are important for you? (e.g., lesbian, trans, active, passive, Black, Latina, German)

- What is meaningful to you in these identities?

- How have you changed over your life? Are there new identities you have grown into?
Appendix I – Mandates to the Commission on the MCC Statement of Faith

Authorizing Motion of the 2013 General Conference
"Move to authorize the Moderator and Governing Board to appoint a special task force to review, renew, and update our MCC Statement of Faith. This task force will include representatives from the Council of Elders and from the Theologies Team, as well as those representing the theological, cultural, and global diversity of MCC. It will also seek consultation from resources inside and outside of MCC. The document they bring forth will need to be approved by two-thirds of the Clergy House and of the Lay House of the General Conference of MCC, at the soonest, by General Conference 2016."

Charter of the Commission on the MCC Statement of Faith from the Governing Board

Purpose and Expected Outcomes of the Commission
1. The purpose of the Commission on the MCC Statement of Faith is to make recommendations for revisions of the current Statement of Faith to be presented by the Governing Board to the General Conference for consideration.
2. Complete a comprehensive review to:
   a. Assess the current Statement of Faith.
   b. Consider previous processes of theological reflection in MCC.
   c. Study changes and trends in the larger religious landscape.
3. Engage in consultation with the Council of Elders to gain their wisdom and insight as spiritual and pastoral leaders of MCC.
4. Seek consultation from resources inside and outside of MCC.
5. Facilitate a grass-roots dialogue to gain input and feedback on the review of the current Statement of Faith and recommendations for revisions.

Members of the Commission:
The members of the commission, including the Chair, will be appointed by the Moderator and approved by the Governing Board by 18 December 2013. The Commission Members will:

1. Include representatives from the Council of Elders and Theologies Team.
2. Represent the theological, cultural, and global diversity of MCC.
3. Hold a term of office from the time of their appointment through the consideration of their proposed revisions to the Statement of Faith by the General Conference.

Process and Timeline of the Commission
1. A process and timeline for achievement of the Commission's purpose and expected outcomes shall be developed by the Commission in consultation with the Moderator and approved by the Governing Board by 1 March 2014.
2. The comprehensive review of the current Statement of Faith shall be complete by 31 December 2014.
3. The recommendations for revisions to the MCC Statement of Faith shall be complete by 31 January 2016.

**Mutual accountabilities with the Governing Board**
1. The Office of the Moderator will maintain and be the point of contact for communication with the Chairperson of the Commission.
2. The Chairperson of the Commission will submit periodic progress reports on the process and timeline to the Moderator as scheduled.

**Resources for the Commission on the MCC Statement of Faith**
1. The Office of the Moderator will be a primary resource to the Commission.
2. Staff support will be provided to the Commission per the terms negotiated by the Moderator and Chairperson of the Commission.
3. It is expected that most meetings of the Commission will be virtual; however, its initial meeting will be face-to-face. Additional face-to-face meetings may be added as allowed by the budget.
4. A budget for the 2014 and 2015 calendar years will be developed by the Moderator and Chairperson subject to the approval of the Governing Board.
Appendix II – Commission Members

Reverend Elder Doctor Candace Shultis is a former Governing Board member, pastor of one of MCC’s largest churches, King of Peace MCC in St. Petersburg, Florida. She has a D. Min from Wesley Theological Seminary.

Reverend Elder Doctor Candace Shultis, Chair; St. Petersburg, Florida (USA), grew up in Kingston, NY and Pittsfield, MA. She earned her baccalaureate degree from the University of Massachusetts (Amherst), B.B.A., in 1973, her master’s and her doctorate at Wesley Theological Seminary, Washington, DC, M.Div., 1980 and D. Min., 2004. From November, 1973 through August, 1976, she served as a disbursing officer in the United States Marine Corps. During that time, she attended Foundry United Methodist Church, sang in the choir and was a part of the prayer and healing ministry. She first attended the Metropolitan Community Church of Washington, DC in 1979.

Candace served as the Associate Pastor of MCC Washington from 1983 until 1995 when she was elected Pastor. She was called and elected to be the Pastor at King of Peace MCC, St. Petersburg, FL in December, 2007.

Candace has served in a number of denominational capacities including Assistant District Coordinator, as a member and then chair of the Clergy Credentials and Concerns Committee and most recently as a member of the Governing Board of the denomination. She has preached in churches and at events from New Haven, CT to Sydney, Australia.

Candace has a passion for preaching and very much enjoys working with the terrific staff and congregation of King of Peace! She and her partner of 22 years, Barbara, also enjoy the company of their two dachshunds: Wendy and Mister Redd.

Reverend Elder Héctor Gutiérrez is an Elder in MCC, and leads MCC’s Iberoamerica ministry, and is a doctoral candidate with emphasis on Christology. He will represent the Elders on this Commission.

Reverend Elder Héctor Gutiérrez; Guadalajara, Jalisco (Mexico), has been a member of MCC since 2002. He has served as the Interim Pastor at ICM (MCC) Casa de Luz, Monterrey, Mexico; and as the Church Development Officer in Latin America.

Reverend Gutiérrez has spent most of his career as a professor at universities and seminaries in Mexico. He provides pastoral support, wisdom, and advice for MCC groups, missions and churches in Iberoamerica. He also conducts workshops on a variety of topics for MCC’s ministry in Iberoamerica and beyond.

Reverend Gutiérrez’s pastoral presence and open spirit help him not only to hear but empathize with marginalized sisters and brothers across Iberoamerica. His ability to communicate complex theological concepts and God’s unconditional love has allowed him to rapidly develop new groups in different countries.
**Bryce E. Rich is doctoral candidate at the University of Chicago Divinity School. Bryce is an MCC lay person who also has ties to the Orthodox Church. He is the Chair of MCC's Theologies Team, and will represent them on the Commission.**

**Bryce E. Rich; Chicago, Illinois (USA),** is a PhD Candidate in Theology at The University of Chicago Divinity School, where his research focuses on the intersection of Eastern Orthodoxy and queer theory. He received his Master of Arts in Religion from Lancaster Theological Seminary, in Lancaster, Pennsylvania, and his Bachelor of Arts in Russian & Eastern Studies from the University of Kentucky. His other academic interests include liturgical theology, theological anthropology, mimetic theory, and the uses of technology in education and worship.

Before concentrating on his religious training, Bryce worked for a US nonprofit in Russia, living in Moscow and Siberia. His spiritual journey began in the Southern Baptist church, but has included time in the Charismatic, Episcopal, and Mennonite traditions, as well as membership with MCC congregations and finally reception into the Eastern Orthodox Church. Bryce’s academic website can be found at http://www.brycerich.com.

**Reverend Cathy Alexander is a graduate of Wesley Theological Seminary, a Network leader, a member of the MCC Washington, DC staff, and a leader in MCC's PAD movement. She recently completed a term as chair of the Governing Board Nominating Committee.**

**Reverend Cathy Alexander; Washington, DC (USA),** serves MCC of Washington DC as the Associate Pastor as well as the Network Co-Leader for the Eastern Network. Cathy has a passion for living worship, music, theology and learning. She is actively involved with MCC at both the local and denominational levels from leadership retreats to serving on denominational teams, most recently as chair of the MCC Governing Board Nominating Committee. She is a graduate with honors from Wesley Theological Seminary in Washington, DC, and has served as a contributor to the MCC Theologies Team Holy Conversations. Cathy enjoys singing, small group conversations, playing the guitar and traveling.

**Reverend Doctor Axel Schwaigert is the founding pastor of MCC in Stuttgart, Germany, and has a D.Min. from Episcopal Divinity School. Axel has been a member of the Theologies Team from its beginning in 2006.**

**Reverend Doctor Axel Schwaigert; Stuttgart, Baden-Württemberg (Germany),** received his Diplom in Evangelisch Theologie (Diploma in Protestant Theology) from the School of Theological Studies at Tubingen (Germany) and studied inter-religious dialogue at Temple University in Philadelphia, PA. He began his pastoral training in 1998 at MCC Bournemouth (UK). In 2000 he launched the new Salz der Erde MCC Stuttgart (Germany) during Gay Pride. After 10 years of building this new congregation in surroundings not familiar with independent churches, Axel went on to earn his Doctor of Ministry degree at Episcopal Divinity School in Cambridge, MA (USA).

In his secular life, Axel works as a funeral director. He loves singing, dancing, and acting on stage in musicals, which he sometimes dares at a community theater of the US Forces in Stuttgart.
Reverend Karl Hand, PhD is an Australian and pastor of Crave MCC in Sydney. He served on the REVM faculty in The Philippines, and holds a PhD from Charles Sturt University with a specialization in New Testament Studies.

Reverend Karl Hand, PhD; Leichhardt, New South Wales (Australia), is an ordained minister in Metropolitan Community Church, and the founding pastor of Crave MCC in Sydney, Australia.

Karl has an Evangelical theology, a Pentecostal spirituality, and a Liberationist hermeneutic. He enjoys provocative and playful readings of the scripture which trigger spiritual transformation and cognitive growth. He has taught Exegesis and Greek courses at Uniting Theological College as well as Australian Catholic University, and the University of Newcastle. He holds two master's degrees in theology and philosophy, and a PhD.

The Commission on the MCC Statement of Faith is also served with staff support by Linda Brenner-Beckstead.

Linda L. Brenner-Beckstead is an Associate Director for the Office of the Moderator and oversees communication strategy and brand management. Previously, Linda served as Rev. Dr. Nancy Wilson's assistant and Project Manager for the International Task Force. Before joining the MCC staff, Linda was an award-winning high school journalism teacher for over two decades, and served as an educational director in a psychiatric boarding school for one year. Linda holds a Master of Arts degree in Curriculum and Instruction, with a minor in English, from the University of Nebraska-Lincoln. She has served as a contributor to the MCC Theologies Team's Holy Conversations chapter on "Testimonies about Ministry," in addition to articles and presentations about teaching strategies. Linda attributes her spiritual growth to her first church at MCC Omaha. Later, as a Heartland Network Co-Leader, she discovered how MCC's compelling story made a difference in lives globally. Linda and her wife, Susie Brenner, have a touring music/storytelling ministry, and are expanding their work to include ministering to the homeless.
Appendix III – Other Contributors

The Commission on the MCC Statement of Faith would like to thank the additional contributors to this Companion Guide.

Select Descriptions under the Category of Further Readings

Reverend Doctor Tom Bohache joined MCC in 1981, when he was 25 years old. He became clergy in 1988 and has served as a pastor to congregations in California, Virginia, Delaware, and New Jersey. He has been involved in MCC’s clergy education since the early 1990s. He is co-editor of and contributor to *The Queer Bible Commentary* (SCM, 2006) and *Queering Christianity* (Praeger, 2014), as well as the author of his own full-length book *Christology from the Margins* (SCM, 2008). In 2007, he received his D.Min. in feminist liberation theologies from the Episcopal Divinity School.

Reverend Elder Darlene Garner is an African, Cherokee, and Irish lesbian Christian woman from Columbus, Ohio (USA). From a National Baptist and Episcopal spiritual heritage, Darlene joined MCC in 1976 and was ordained in 1988. She has been pastor of churches in Baltimore, Maryland and Fairfax, Virginia (USA) and in Cape Town, Western Cape (South Africa). On the MCC Board of Elders since 1993, she currently serves as the Director of the MCC Office of Emerging Ministries. Darlene has been Executive Director of the Philadelphia Mayor’s Commission on Sexual Minorities and a member of the Commission on Human Relations; co-founder of the National Coalition of Black Lesbians and Gays; chair of the first International Conference for Gay and Lesbian People of Color; and President of the Board of Northern Virginia AIDS Ministry. She attended Ohio State University, Samaritan College, and Lancaster Theological Seminary. Garner and her wife Reverend Candy Holmes live in Bowie, Maryland (USA).

Reverend Dr. Kelby Harrison was ordained as an MCC minister on December 15, 2013. After having completed her Ph.D. in ethics, gender and sexuality from Northwestern University (2010), she was the post-doctoral fellow in Social Ethics at Union Theological Seminary, where she taught Christian ethics, philosophy of religion, and LGBT social ethics. Kelby trained as a hospital chaplain at UCLA – Santa Monica Medical Center. She is the author of the book *Sexual Deceit: The Ethics of Passing* (Lexington Press) and co-editor of the anthology *Passing/Out: Identity Veiled and Revealed* (Ashgate) She currently resides in Los Angeles, California and is the proud parent of two toy poodle pups: Anzu and Sakura.

Reverend Elder Mona L. West earned a Ph.D. in Hebrew Bible/Old Testament from Southern Seminary in Louisville, Kentucky (USA) and has taught biblical studies at several colleges, universities, and seminaries throughout the United States. She also holds a Certificate in Spiritual Formation from Columbia Seminary in Decatur, Georgia. Originally ordained in the Southern Baptist denomination in 1987, Mona transferred her ordination credentials to MCC in 1992 and served as the Academic Dean for Samaritan Institute, the school that trained clergy for MCC. She has also held several pastoral positions in MCC, including the 3,000-member Cathedral of Hope in Dallas, TX. Currently she is the Director of Formation and Leadership Development (OFLD) for MCC and was affirmed as an Elder in MCC in 2012. She writes and speaks about spirituality and queer biblical studies and is a contributing editor of three books: *Take Back the Word: A Queer Reading of the Bible* (Pilgrim Press, 2000), *The Queer Bible Commentary* (SCM, 2006), and *Queering Christianity: Finding a Place at the Table for LGBTQI Christians* (Praeger, 2014).
**Song Descriptions**

**The Reverend Elder Jim Mitulski** is the interim pastor of MCC of the Rockies in Denver, Colorado (USA). He was ordained in 1983, and has served MCC, Disciples of Christ, and United Church of Christ churches in New York City, San Francisco, Los Angeles, Berkeley, and Dallas. He has a B.A. from Columbia University, an M.Div. from Pacific School of Religion, a Doctor of Sacred Theology from the Starr King School for the Ministry, and was a Merrill Fellow at Harvard Divinity School. He was appointed co-chair with Dick Follett of MCC's first official hymnal (the *Trial Hymnal*) in 1980. He was Executive Editor of the Hymnal Project (1989-1993), which produced inclusive language worship materials that were used by more than 100 MCC churches in the 80s and 90s.

**Dwayne Best** is a graduate of Vassar College. He was Managing Editor of the Hymnal Project (1989-1993). He curates the hymn website *Conjubilant with Song* ([http://conjubilant.blogspot.com/](http://conjubilant.blogspot.com/)), which has presented much of the original Hymnal Project material to a wider audience, and has written and presented educational programs on hymnody for his Episcopal parish in Connecticut.

Jim and Dwayne are both lifelong hymn enthusiasts and members of the Hymn Society of the United States and Canada. They presented a hymn festival of selections by lesbian and gay hymn writers and composers to that organization's annual conference in 2011. The festival was later expanded into a chapter on MCC and hymnody co-authored by Jim Mitulski and Baptist minister Nancy Hall in *Queering Christianity: Finding a Place at the Table for LGBTQI Christians* (Praeger, 2013).