Speech delivered by Rev. Elder Troy Perry, MCC Founder
On the occasion of receiving Cuba's CENESEX Award
at the 10th Cuban Gala Against Homophobia at the Karl Marx Theater
Havana, Cuba, 12 May 2017

“Wonderful, wonderfully Cuba!

I want Introduce Phillip, my husband. We will be celebrating our 32th Anniversary in two weeks!

Thank you CENESEX for this incredible honor!

I always wanted to travel to Cuba. My mother had a wonderful photograph of my father in the 1930s sitting in a big wicker chair in Miami waiting for the boat to take him to Cuba. My father was a tobacco farmer and he wanted to know how the Cuban farmers grow the Gold Standard of tobacco. I always wanted to come to Cuba.

When I was invited to a meeting at the White House in 1977, a first, as a part of a group of 12 gay and lesbian leaders to meet with the Carter administration, I insisted that a heterosexual mother be a part of our delegation. Because, I knew that if we had a mother with a gay or lesbian child, she would be a tiger in the room as we talked about our civil rights. I got my wish as the President of Parents and Friends of Lesbians and Gays (PFLAG) entered the room.

I wanted a heterosexual ally with us!

How thankful I am for all of the heterosexual allies we have around the world. Would all the heterosexuals come out of the closet right now and stand up. Let's give them a big hand.

In 2005, I read an article in the Los Angeles Times that told me of a young woman who was fighting for the rights of lesbian, gay, bi, trans, and queer people, who is an AIDS activist, and who is the transgender activist who suggested to her government that they legalize the right of the trans community to have reassignment surgery and have the government pay for it.

That became law in 2008 in Cuba because of her hard work.

I thought then, it would be great if I could meet her sometimes.

Our church made it possible for me to go to Cuba. Our delegation was invited to Cuba by the National Council of Cuban Churches, the Evangelical Seminary, and the Federation of Baptist Churches to speak to those organizations. My first view of the Cuban people came in Matanzas.
Would all of you from that wonderful city please stand. Thank you!

And, there was [also] going to be a march against homophobia and transphobia. What more could I ask for?

Well, there was one other thing that I wanted. It was to meet Mariela Castro Espín.

I browbeat Rev. Elder Margarita Sánchez De León and Rev. Elder Héctor Gutiérrez, who had already been to Cuba, to make sure that we got to meet her.

I was thrilled when our group got to attend the CENESEX conference. Dr. Castro Espín treated us as honored guests.

You are so fortunate to have a member of the National Assembly of the Republic of Cuba, a heterosexual ally and natural born leader, who has help change attitudes of the Cuban people to the needs of our community.

In the USA, she is known as the mother of lesbian, gay, bi, and transgender rights of your country. You don't have to be lesbian, gay, bi or trans to see discrimination for what it is! Thank you, Mariela.

I stand before you tonight a 77-year-old proud gay man. I want to say to you, I don't care what you're going through, it does get better!

I was sexually, and physically abused as a teenager, and was so afraid, I ran away from home. I could not bring myself to tell my mother what had happened to me.

The church I was raised in and loved excommunicated me. The Pentecostal school I was attending gave these parting words to me: "You were not worthy to be educated by Christians."

My wife left me. Yes, I was heterosexually-married because my church told me that would cure me of my homosexuality. I have two sons by that marriage. My wife disappeared with my two children and it took me 17 years before I found one of them.

Yes, there is a price be paid sometimes for being a part of the LGBTQ community. But I know a truth: "God did not create me so God could have someone to sit around and hate!"

Things do get better!

In the early days of our movement in America, after I found the Metropolitan Community Churches, and became an LGBTQ activist, I had people try to murder me, I was slapped in the face, and spit on.
The FBI kept files on me. Twenty-one Metropolitan Community Churches were burned down and desecrated. Eight Metropolitan Community Church pastors were murdered, and all of that happened in my Country!

But my life has only gotten better! "There is no greater revenge than coming out of the closet!"

While we have marriage equality in my country, you can have a wedding on Saturday, go to work on Monday, and still be fired from your job in about 30 of our American states.

Thank you, Cuba, for your health system that will pay for reassignment surgery for transgender people; while under the new government in my country, states are debating whether to let the transgender community use public toilets.

Thank you CENESEX for your 10 year fight against Transphobia and Homophobia.

To all of you here, remember, it will get better!

Thank you, again, you wonderful Cubans!”