

## THE FUTURE OF MCC REGION ONE

Friday, September 26, 2008  
Honolulu, HI

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In The Extreme Future, global futurist, James Canton, urges us to see the future as a “designable event” which we can actually influence and predicts that the future will be kind only to those who are prepared, aware and unafraid of change.

Right now, I believe the future of MCC Region One will depend largely upon how well we manage the following five things.

Human and Financial Resources. One of our greatest challenges has been securing qualified leadership for the churches in Region One. We have made tremendous progress but it is difficult when fewer than one-fourth of the churches in the entire Region offer full-time compensation.

We have to be CREATIVE even though this usually takes longer than usual PSC process. Along with that one of our goals for next year will be an emphasis on lay leadership development.

We continue to struggle with the issue of financial resources.

We have to revisit a number of things including conferences...

Stewardship education/development will be another emphasis next year. Resources for these emphases already exist. We need to find the best delivery system for our Region.

Geography. How do you manage a Region that includes South Dakota and India and everything in between? There are several issues relating to the vastness and diversity of Region One which we must address effectively. We have made four specific efforts which I believe are important to continue in order to engage and include the different constituencies of Region One. First, we continued and expanded the Sub-Regional Gatherings. The response has been tremendous and we will continue to refine these gatherings as a resource for fellowship, learning, sharing and worship. Second, we have responded to the two most comprehensive needs expressed by our churches in Australia/Aotearoa/New Zealand by (1) holding the Region One Conference in Hawaii in September instead of somewhere like Scottsdale in July, and (2) scheduling a comprehensive clergy development event (REVM) in Sydney in November, 2008. Third, we have focused considerable attention on re-engaging and strengthening our two churches in the Philippines. This has included affiliating MCC Quezon City and ordaining their pastor. Fourth, I have attempted to visit as many churches as possible. To date, I have visited 26 of the 32 churches in Region One and by the end of the year I believe I will have visited all but three.

The Small Church Dilemma. The new structure adopted in 2001 set criteria which must be met by 2013 in order to be an MCC church. If this criteria were applied today over two-thirds of churches in Region One would not qualify. This may mean there are

instances in which a group is not viable and sustainable and may need to close. A few groups have already reached that conclusion. However, I have been impressed by the vitality of some smaller groups and by their importance in their cities and areas. They may be in need of guidance and resourcing and help creating a strategic plan to move forward. At our most recent meeting the Board of Elders addressed this reality by supporting Reverend Elder Diane Fisher in expanding her Small Church Initiative and making it available to all Regions. Stedney Phillips is being trained to implement the Initiative in Region One and we will have a minimum of ten churches involved by the end of this year.

The Asia Pacific Initiative. Region One includes all of Asia. Last year we established the Region One Asia Pacific Initiative to begin an informed, intentional conversation about how MCC will be present in Asia. The API Steering Team consists of Reverend Dr. Jonipher Kwong, Stedney Phillips and Reverend Ed Paul. Response to the Initiative has far exceeded our expectations and we are moving forward in several areas. With significant funds raised apart from the MCC budget we have presented both MCC churches in the Philippines with their first computer, established a \$5,000 scholarship fund to support MCC students at the Union Theological Seminary in the Philippines and presented the seminary with another \$1,500 applied to the tuition and books of our Pastoral Leader in Makati City enrolled there now, visited an LGBT Christian group in Pakistan with whom we are currently in affiliation conversations, begun the process of awarding two \$1,500 vocational training grants to lesbian members of the Pakistani group, and last weekend I visited Free Community Church in Singapore, an independent Christian church serving the LBGT community with a membership of around 160 who are interested in a partnership with us in the work we have begun in Asia.

My Altitude Problem. Because of the size of our Region, and because we are expanding within it, and as I have increased the number and depth of relationships with churches and individuals, and as initiatives and strategies have increased, expectation and demands have increased proportionally. The catch 22 is that, because of all these things, I need more and more to be able to function as the spiritual and visionary leader of the Region—which I refer to as flying at 30,000 feet—while all these same things tend to increase the amount of time I spend involved at a daily operational level—which I refer to as flying at 5,000 feet; so that I almost never get up to the 30,000 foot level where I think I can be most effective for the future of the Region. All of the Elders together have discussed this concern and we know that in large part it results from our having adopted a structure in 2001 which was never fully implemented. It was designed to include a significant level of staff support which never materialized. Two things give me hope that this can improve : (1) the denomination has responded in a timely way to this concern by creating two new full-time staff positions, one in the area of clergy development and one in congregational development (they are posted now) which we believe will help greatly, and (2) Stedney and I have done a lot of strategizing around this. Some of you have noticed that in the last year she has taken on more responsibility beyond just administrative assistance and more in the area of project management—like the Small Church Initiative—and is clearly capable in these areas. She has also expressed a desire to do more work with the local churches. This is happening at a time when some of her administrative load—like making

all my travel arrangements—is being shifted to another person. So, even if we are unable to add any other staff at the Regional level, Stedney is ready and willing to assume more of that operational level work.

There is no reason to think That Region One—like the rest of the world--will not continue to be impacted by those trends Nancy cited this morning. But if we choose, we can be those who are prepared and aware and unafraid of change. In our local churches and when we are together like this it is clear Region One is made up of a lot of extraordinarily gifted and committed people doing ministry in often difficult and challenging conditions.

I see our future as one in which we continue to build and strengthen the Region as our primary connection to all of MCC and as a source of encouragement and support for all who are in it.