

**2009 REPORT OF THE ELDER  
TO THE U.S. CHURCHES OF REGION 6  
Submitted by Rev. Elder Darlene Garner  
April/May 2009**

One of the most frequent questions asked of me when I speak with others about my ministry is, "What does an Elder do?" My immediate response is usually limited to saying something like, "Well, Elders are the spiritual leaders of the global MCC movement. We support our churches as they tear down walls and build up hope around the world." Not surprisingly, another question quickly follows. "Okay, but what do YOU do?" "I support the MCC leaders and churches from Bakersfield to Brazil." "Right. But what do you ACTUALLY do?" Well, the truth is that these are not simple questions!

I have decided that, rather than have the people of Region 6 wonder about what I actually do from day to day, this year's Report to the Regional Conference hopefully will allow you to see where, with whom, what, and how I do what I do. It will then give you a brief overview of the relevant 2008 and 2009 MCC budget allocations that fund the ministry of the Region 6 Office. This report is specifically about my work within and for the benefit of the U.S. portion of Region 6. I am preparing a separate report that will focus on and be for the benefit of the Latin American portion of Region 6.

**Where does the Elder work?**

For the past five years, I have lived in Guadalajara, Jalisco (Mexico) and work from a room in my home.

The geographical area of Region 6 does, indeed, spread from Bakersfield CA (USA) to the Nation of Brazil. Within this area, there are currently 39 official MCC groups, including 28 fully affiliated churches and 11 recognized groups that are in the process of affiliating. The MCC ministry sites are located in Arizona, southern California, Nevada, New Mexico, and southern Texas in the United States; and in nine countries in Latin America.

- Argentina – 1 group in the process of affiliating
- Brazil – 2 churches; 4 groups in the process of affiliating
- Chile – 1 church; 1 group in the process of affiliating
- Colombia – 1 group in the process of affiliating
- El Salvador – 1 group in the process of affiliating
- Mexico – 1 church; 1 group in the process of affiliating
- Nicaragua – 1 church
- United States – 21 churches
  - Arizona – 2 churches
  - California – 10 churches
  - Nevada – 1 church
  - New Mexico – 2 churches
  - Texas – 7 churches
- Uruguay – 1 church
- Venezuela – 2 groups in the process of affiliating

In addition to working with the churches and recognized groups that are in the process of affiliating, the Office of the Regional Elder is also in active dialogue with people in Belize, Colombia, Mexico, Panama, and Peru about the possibilities of expanding MCC's ministry into new territories.

Region 6 also has two authorized para-church ministries -- FireSeeds and EXCEL Retreat Ministries. FireSeeds is led by Lilly Chu of Resurrection MCC. FireSeeds does work in Africa, especially Uganda, assisting local people with such things as building construction, volunteering in an orphanage, etc. EXCEL Retreat Ministries is led by Jerry Reitz, also a member of Resurrection MCC. EXCEL offers lay-led weekend retreats that are designed to support the spiritual development of MCC's laity.

### **With whom does the Elder work?**

According to Exodus 18: 13-23, Moses' father-in law Jethro once said to him:

*"The task is too heavy for you; you cannot do it alone... You should look for able men and women among all the people, those who love God, are trustworthy, and hate dishonest gain... Let them sit as judges for the people at all times; let them bring every important case to you, but decide every minor case themselves. So it will be easier for you, and they will bear the burden with you. If you do this, and God so commands you, then you will be able to endure and all the people will go to their home in peace.*

Following the wisdom of Jethro, I see myself as the Leader of Leaders. Each leader forms and works with a team of people to ensure that the tasks of the region's ministry are done and that the people we serve will experience fulfillment in their ministries.

I work on a daily basis with a 3-person staff team. The four of us work very closely together, doing almost all of our work in the three languages of Region 6 (English, Portuguese, and Spanish). The members of the **Region 6 Staff Team** are:

- ❖ **Vickey Gibbs**, based in Houston, Texas (USA). Vickey is my Confidential Assistant and works on a full-time basis. She coordinates all of my meetings, manages all regional communications, provides direct support to the churches that participate in the Small Church Initiative, monitors all of my areas of responsibility for budget compliance, provides pastoral support to lay and clergy leaders throughout the region, manages the region's tri-lingual web site [www.mccregion6.net](http://www.mccregion6.net) and the People of African Descent web site [www.mccpad.org](http://www.mccpad.org), and in numerous other ways supports me in all that I do.
- ❖ **Rev. Hector Gutiérrez**, based in Guadalajara, Jalisco (México). Hector is the full-time Director of Latin American Church and Leadership Development. He provides guidance and support to all of the Latin American groups that are in the process of affiliating, leads the Spanish and Portuguese Cluster Teams, consults with Spanish-speaking ministries throughout MCC, translates all MCC-wide communications and many MCC resources into Spanish, and supports the translation of MCC communications and resources into Portuguese. Hector also provides direction and support to all of the people in Latin America and the Spanish-speaking Caribbean who are seeking ordination in MCC.
- ❖ **Rev. Cristiano Valério**, based in Sao Paulo, S.P. (Brazil). Cris is the very part-time Coordinator of Church Development in Brazil. He is the primary point-of-contact with

Portuguese-speaking people who are inquiring about MCC, the front-line source of support for all of the groups in Brazil, and the manager of the separate web site that was specifically created for MCC in Brazil.

**Within Region 6** - We have much cause to celebrate the ministry of the churches of Region 6! I have been serving as your Elder since January 2003. Here are some of the changes that I have seen since then.

- Almost all of our churches are involved in ministry to the poor and the ill. We feed the hungry through our food banks and feeding programs; we minister to the poor by providing school children with games, toys, and school supplies; we tend to the ill through our hospital and home visits and our HIV/AIDS education, prevention, and support services. The world is, indeed, a better place because of the ministry of the people and the churches of Region 6!
- In 2008, at least 2,422 people worshiped each week in a Region 6 church in the U.S. This represents an increase of 359 people (17%) in church each week than in 2003 and 52 more people than in 2007.
- Compared to 2003, by the end of 2008 our Region's churches had experienced an overall 17% increase in weekly worship attendance.
- Compared to 2007, by the end of 2008 our Region's churches had an overall 2% increase in weekly worship attendance.
- Almost a third of MCC's 17 largest churches (those that have a weekly worship attendance of 200 or more) are located in Region 6 (**MCC/ICM Los Angeles, MCC San Antonio, MCC San Diego, MCC Austin at Freedom Oaks, and Resurrection MCC**).
- **MCC San Antonio** attracted 84% more people to worship in 2008 than it had in 2003 and 15% more last year than the year before.
- Even in the midst of today's global economic challenges, financial giving to our churches was \$302,768 (23%) more in 2008 than it had been in 2007 and over \$600,000 more than it had been in 2003.

| Even as I give thanks to God for the bounteous fruits of the harvest that are enjoyed by our churches, I must acknowledge that our churches in the U.S. have had and continue to have our challenges, struggles, and concerns.

- Of the Region's 11 U.S. small churches (those with an average worship attendance of fewer than 50), only **Sunrise MCC** enjoyed more people attending worship in 2008 than had attended in 2003.
- In none of the Region's small churches was the attendance greater in 2008 than it had been in 2007.
- Among our six mid-size churches in the U.S. (those with an average worship of between 50 and 199), the attendance is 2% less than it was in 2003 and 6% less than in 2007.
- Churches of all sizes are challenged by facilities, increasing prices, needing the right staff mix, offering ministry that is relevant to rapidly-changing demographic communities, and a myriad of other things.

Caring for and supporting the region's churches, groups in the process of affiliating, special ministries, leaders, and inquiring minds in more than 20 countries is much more than even the Staff Team and I can manage alone. At the beginning of this year, we introduced a new infrastructure for the region, consisting of 5 Cluster Teams and a Core Team. The focus of each Cluster Team is on creating connections between the churches in the cluster, with the goal of building stronger relationships; identifying needs that churches may have for resourcing as well

as pastoral care with the goal of providing focused resources; and to provide learning opportunities with the goal of church growth and vitality. The leaders of each Cluster Team work collaboratively together and form the Core Team that works with me to strengthen the ministries of the churches in our Region.

**Western Cluster Team** (southern California and Nevada (USA))

Team Leader: **Rev. Dr. Bob Goss** (MCC in the Valley)

Members: **Rev. Onetta Brooks** (Christ Chapel MCC), **Rev. Tim Hamilton** (MCC/ICM Los Angeles), and **Ms. Jude Litzenberger** (MCC San Diego)

**Central Cluster Team** (Arizona, New Mexico, and El Paso, Texas (USA))

Team Leader: **Rev. Judith Maynard** (MCC Albuquerque)

Members: **Rev. John Gill** (Gentle Shepherd MCC), **Ms. Diana Herrington** (Victory Garden MCC), and **Rev. William Knight** (Water of Life MCC)

**Eastern Cluster Team** (Texas, except El Paso, Texas (USA))

Team Leader: **Rev. Karen Thompson** (MCC Austin at Freedom Oaks)

Members: **Mr. Desmer Benson** (MCC San Antonio), **Rev. Mick Hinson** (MCC San Antonio), and **Rev. Mona Lopez** (Resurrection MCC)

**Portuguese Cluster Team** (Brazil)

Team Leader: **Rev. Cristiano Valério** (ICM Sao Paulo)

Members: **Mr. Cicero Igor** (ICM Fortaleza), **Mr. Marcos Martins** (ICM Belo Horizonte, and **Ms. Eliana Vivela** (ICM Vitória)

**Spanish Cluster Team** (Latin America and USA)

Team Leader: **Rev. Hector Gutiérrez**

Members: **Rev. Alex Escoto** (MCC/ICM Los Angeles), **Rev. Araceli Ezzatti** (Diaconía Cristiana en la Diversidad ICM), **Rev. Alberto Nájera** (ICM Paz y Alegría), and **Mr. Pablo Stratta Texeira** (Diaconía Cristiana en la Diversidad ICM)

**Beyond Region 6** – Many parts of my MCC-wide work allow me to work with teams of people from throughout MCC. The work of the Bylaws Review Team and of the Judiciary Review Team began in January 2008 and is expected to end by June 2009. The People of African Descent Advisory Council is a body with which I consult on matters related to people of African descent in MCC. (The names presented **in bold type** are those of the Team members who are part of Region 6.)

**Bylaws Review Team Members:** Rev. Michael Cooper, Ms. Judy Dale, Rev. Ron LaRocque, Rev. Robyn Provis, and Ms. Leah Sloan

**Judiciary Review Team Members:** Rev. Kharma Amos, Ms. Paulette Armstead, Rev. Robert Clark, Rev. Terri Echelbarger, **Rev. John Gill**, **Ms. Jude Litzenberger**, Rev. Jim Merritt, Mr. Ray Nutter, Rev. Gale Rawson, and Rev. Clay Witt

**People of African Descent Advisory Council Members:** Rev. Delores Berry, Rev. Belva Boone, **Ms. Vickey Gibbs**, Rev. Candy Holmes, Mr. Barry Hundley, **Ms. Ellen Denise Junious**, **Rev. Tracye Ruffin**, Rev. Roland Stringfellow, and Rev. Doretha Williams-Flournoy

**Board of Elders:** Rev. Elder Nancy Wilson (Moderator), **Rev. Elder Darlene Garner** (Vice-Moderator and Region 6), Rev. Elder Ken Martin (Region 1), Rev. Elder Arlene Ackerman (Region 3), Rev. Elder Glenna Shepherd (Region 4), Rev. Elder Diane Fisher (Region 5), and Rev. Elder Lillie Brock (Region 7).

| The MCC Board of Elders meets at least once a month by conference call and usually has two face-to-face meetings each year. This is my second year serving as the Vice-Moderator of MCC, which means that I am part of monthly virtual meetings with the Leadership Team (Moderator, Vice-Moderator, Chair of the Board of Administration, and Executive Director) and monthly virtual meetings of the Board of Administration. I am also the Leader of the Elders' Congruence Team, which assists with the development and monitoring of the MCC budget. As a member of the Board of Elders, I also represent MCC at the Clergy Call for Justice that is sponsored by the Human Rights Campaign and includes an opportunity for all participants to lobby with members of the U.S. Congress.

| **What does the Elder do and how is it done?**

**An Elder provides pastoral care for clergy and other church leaders and spiritual leadership for, support to, and resourcing of local churches** through in-person visits when necessary and whenever possible through telephone calls, email communications, and virtual "visits" with groups in all parts of the region and beyond via the internet, usually using Skype. Skype is a free internet-based communication program that allows the user to make regular and video calls to other Skype users for free. Users can also make local, long distance, and international phone calls to landline and cell phones at very, very little cost. I use Skype as my office phone and also use it to participate in actual meetings with churches and teams without anyone having to incur travel costs. I strongly encourage you to consider downloading Skype as a way for us to stay in touch. Go to [www.skype.com](http://www.skype.com).

From January 2008 through March 2009, I was able to be physically present for worship with the following churches and congregations:

- Preached before Refiner's Fire UCC in Long Beach CA (USA) and City of Refuge UCC in San Francisco CA (USA);
- Worshipped with MCC Toronto (Canada, Region 5) at the Memorial Service of Rev. Elder Jeri Ann Harvey and for Sunday worship; preached before MCC St. Louis (Region 2); worshipped with New Covenant MCC in Laurel, MD (USA, Region 3); and worshipped regularly at Templo San Bernardo Roman Catholic Church in Guadalajara, Jalisco (Mexico); and
- Worshipped with and/or preached before eleven Region 6 congregations (**MCC Las Vegas, Water of Life MCC, Gentle Shepherd MCC, MCC El Paso, Christ Chapel MCC, MCC/ICM Los Angeles, MCC in the Valley, Good Samaritan MCC** in the United States and **ICM Sao Paulo (Brazil), ICM Belo Horizonte (Brazil), and ICM Casa de Luz (Mexico)** in Latin America).

The Elder also fulfills certain ecclesial functions, including presiding at ordinations and services of affiliation:

- Preached the affiliation service of A Church for All MCC in Sacramento CA (USA, Region 1);
- Preached the affiliation services of **ICM Sao Paulo** and **ICM Belo Horizonte** in Brazil;

- Preached the ordination services for **Rev. Victor Bracuto** in Buenos Aires (Argentina), **Rev. Cristiano Valério** in Sao Paulo (Brazil); and
- Presided at the ordination service for Rev. Candy Holmes in Laurel MD (USA, Region 3).

When a church is undergoing a pastoral transition, the Elder leads the congregation in a workshop on church transitions, appoints and supports an Interim Pastor, trains and consults with the Pastoral Search Committee, and consults with the Board of Directors/Servants. A combination of on-site resourcing and support for churches undergoing a pastoral transition has been provided to:

- **MCC Austin at Freedom Oaks**, from the appointment of Rev. Robyn Provis to serve as the Interim Pastor through the election of **Rev. Karen Thompson** to serve as the Called Pastor.
- **Water of Life MCC**, including the appointment of **Rev. William Knight** to serve as the Interim Pastor;
- **Gentle Shepherd MCC**, including the appointment of **Rev. John Gill** to serve as the Interim Pastor;
- **MCC El Paso**, including the appointment of **Rev. Kati Houts** to serve as the Interim Pastor;
- **MCC of Corpus Christi**, including the appointment of **Rev. Carol Lowe** to serve as the Interim Pastor;
- **Christ Chapel MCC**, including the appointment of **Rev. Onetta Brooks** to serve as the Interim Pastor;
- MCC United in Tulsa OK (USA, Region 7); and for
- MCC Sydney in Sydney NSW (Australia, Region 1).

Rev. Elder Diane Fisher leads the MCC Small Church Initiative (SCI). Through involvement with SCI, small churches receive support as they assess their current realities and make informed decisions about their futures. So far, I have recommended seven Region 6 churches for participation in SCI: **Central Texas MCC from the Heart, Victory Garden MCC, MCC of the Harvest, MCC Corpus Christi, Resurrection Beach MCC, Harbor MCC, and Heartland MCC**. Three of the seven churches (**Central Texas MCC, Victory Garden MCC, and Harbor MCC**) have regularly participated for six months and have already begun to see very positive results.

I want to acknowledge here that **Harbor MCC** in Galveston, Texas (USA) has recently made the very difficult decision to close their doors. Like so many other churches on Galveston Island, they found it impossible to recover from the devastating impact of Hurricane Ike. I celebrate and give thanks to God for the ministry to the community that was offered by **Rev. Pat Farnan and the people of Harbor MCC!**

Rev. Elder Lillie Brock coordinates the MCC Focus 8 Project. This project is designed for those churches that are among the 4<sup>th</sup> quartile in terms of church income and/or attendance. Participating churches are selected by the Board of Elders and include **Resurrection MCC and MCC Austin at Freedom Oaks**. The Focus 8 churches work with Rev. Elder Brock to identify particular development goals and key strategies, then are supported by all of the Elders in whatever ways are indicated by the church's goals and strategies. My role in the Focus 8 Project is to consult with the Focus 8 churches on strategies related to diversity/inclusivity and governance.

At the request of **MCC in the Valley**, I offered a day-long face-to-face training for all of the Boards of Directors of the churches in the Western Cluster. It was attended by over 50 people from nine churches (**MCC in the Valley, Sunrise MCC, Resurrection Beach MCC, Christ Chapel MCC, MCC/ICM Los Angeles, MCC of the Coachella Valley, MCC San Diego, and Heartland MCC**). **MCC San Antonio** is hosting me on 30 May so that I can offer a similar training for the Boards of Directors of the churches in the Eastern Cluster.

In July 2008, **Rev. Hector Gutierrez** and I traveled to Brazil and offered a 3-day Leadership Training Institute that was attended by 44 people. It also included a one-day gathering for those who are preparing for ordination in MCC.

**In addition to each of the Elders being available to support one another in caring for and supporting the churches within our regions, each member of the Board of Elders also directs or supports particular MCC-wide efforts.** The MCC-wide efforts for which I have responsibility include, but are definitely not limited to:

- Providing oversight of MCC governance matters (includes reviewing and interpreting local church Bylaws for all Regions; consulting with local churches on preparation of their Bylaws; overseeing all Regional Conference business meetings; overseeing the General Conference business meeting; leading the Bylaws Review Team; consulting with other Elders on church closings; and serving as consultant to the Structure Review Team and the Elders Nominating Committee);
- Providing oversight of the MCC judiciary process (includes managing the judiciary process and leading the Judiciary Review Team); and
- Providing support to and/or oversight of MCC's effort with regard to cultural/racial diversity (includes supporting the MCC/Fellowship Collaboration Team's efforts; working with local churches on diversity issues; leading the People of African Descent Advisory Council; convening the MCC Conference for People of African Descent, Friends, and Allies; serving on the HRC Diversity & Inclusivity Council; participating in The Fellowship's annual events and in events sponsored by the National Black Justice Coalition; and attempting to ensure that appointed and elected MCC-wide bodies reflect MCC's cultural, racial, and national diversity)

### **How is the ministry of the Region 6 Office funded?**

Please don't go to sleep on this part! ☺ It is really important for you to see how my office is functioning as stewards of MCC's financial resources.

The ministry of Region 6 is funded primarily through the general MCC budget. The 2008 MCC expense budget was funded at a level of \$3,414,149; the amount of \$364,528 (10.7%) was contributed by the churches in Region 6 to support the global ministry of MCC through their monthly tithe payments. Approximately \$133,702 was allocated directly for the ministry of Region 6.

Actual expenses incurred by Region 6 in 2008 were \$173,254.83. Of this amount \$120,680.10 was expended for ministry within the U.S. portion of the region and includes the salary and benefits paid to the Regional Elder and Confidential Assistant. \$58,492.55 was expended for ministry in the Latin America portion of the region; this amount includes the stipends paid to Rev. Hector Gutierrez and Rev. Cristiano Valério, modest scholarships for two seminarians (\$200 each per semester), and the pass-through of donations received from churches and individuals

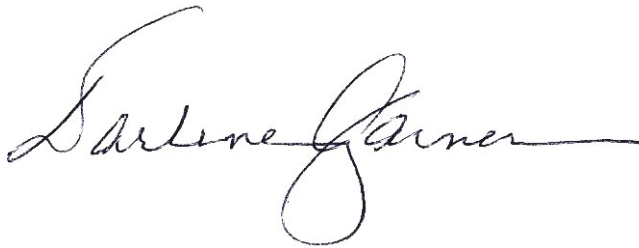
to benefit particular ministry sites in Latin America for such things as space rental, travel to Latin America, and other forms of direct support. A total of \$31,165 was donated by churches and individuals throughout MCC during 2008 to the benefit of ministry within Latin America.

For 2009, the MCC expense budget is approximately \$2,450,000. The amount allocated for ministry within Region 6 has been reduced from the previous year to approximately \$171,862, including salaries and benefits, and \$46,427 for the benefit of ministry within Latin America, including stipends and pass-through of donations.

**Congratulations! You made it to the end of the report.**

In closing, I want to thank you for the opportunity to serve among you in this capacity for the last six years. I take great joy in the accomplishments of each one of our churches, sharing your concerns as you face the challenges and praying daily that God will continue gracing you with the strength you need for today and with the hope that will lead you into tomorrow!

Peace,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Darlene Garner". The signature is written in black ink and is positioned below the word "Peace,".