

**Metropolitan Community Churches**  
**Dwelling Together in Unity: MCC's Approach to Ecumenical and Inter-Religious Relationships (updated January, 2011)**

**Guiding Scripture from the Board of Elders Strategic Plan Development**

*"<sup>26</sup>Take a good look, friends, at who you were when you got called into this life. I don't see many of "the brightest and the best" among you, not many influential, not many from high-society families. <sup>27</sup>Isn't it obvious that God deliberately chose people that the culture overlooks and exploits and abuses, <sup>28</sup>chose these "nobodies" to expose the hollow pretensions of the "somebodies"? <sup>29</sup>That makes it quite clear that none of you can get by with blowing your own horn before God. <sup>30</sup>Everything that we have--right thinking and right living, a clean slate and a fresh start--comes from God by way of Jesus Christ. <sup>31</sup>That's why we have the saying, "If you're going to blow a horn, blow a trumpet for God." I Corinthians 1:26-31 (The Message)*

Purpose:

*MCC's Statement of Direction challenges us "to proclaim a spirituality that is liberating and sufficiently profound to address the issues of our chaotic and complicated world." Leadership and participation in ecumenical and inter-religious work is a critical component in fulfilling this call. As ecumenical/inter-religious partners, we unite across denominational and religious lines to advocate an inclusive and genuine respect for the sacred worth of all people; to reduce human suffering; and to establish justice, peace and equality in the world.*

**Ecumenical Inter-religious Guiding Scriptures**

*"Behold, how good and how pleasant it is ... to dwell together in unity!" Psalm 133:1*

*"...what does God require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?" Micah 6:8*

God has been up to something unique with MCC since our beginnings. We are an inclusive and diverse church for **all** people. We do welcome, affirm and celebrate the goodness and worth of LGBTI (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Intersex) people and the Queer community. And yet, we are still more. We are about "Tearing Down Walls and Building up Hope." We are about aligning with the ongoing work of the Holy Spirit in the world. Neither the church nor the human family is complete without our story of suffering and redemption. We must share our stories and hear the stories yet to be told.

We affirm that Metropolitan Community Church is a Christian Church. The Christian scriptures are central to our worship life. We honor and seek to follow the healing and compassionate example of Jesus, whom we call Christ. We claim our Christian identity and respect others' religious identities. We believe that we are all children of God, and can work together for justice reducing human suffering and promoting human dignity. We are compelled to work for justice for all creation, for example including

environmental protection, peace, and the end to poverty, racism, and oppression for LGBTI people.

From our beginnings, ecumenism and inter-religious work has been core to our history and mission. The work done by previous generations of MCC ecumenists has laid the foundation for what we will build in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. We are inspired and ready to propel this ministry of opportunity into the global village. Our goal is to make key contributions in the area of ecumenism in the broadest and most inclusive sense.

We also believe that much of this work involves recognizing the economic reality of our world. Globalization has resulted in large economic imbalances in wealth throughout the world. For example, *“Wealth and income has become so much more concentrated both in rich countries and among the rich in poor countries that the United Nations now estimates that the 15 richest individuals are worth more than the combined gross domestic products of all of sub-Saharan Africa.”*<sup>1</sup> *“But it is both the breathtaking rate of globalization in the last two decades and the clear and multifaceted inequities and disruptions it has produced, not only between the rich nations and the poor nations but also within nations both poor and rich, that demands a searching examination of the workings of the new global machine, or as William Greider calls, ‘modern capitalism driven by the imperatives of global industrial revolution.’”*<sup>2</sup>

How do we continue to lift up the cause of economic justice and address inequalities in all areas of the world? How do we continue to stand in solidarity with those impacted by HIV/AIDS, particularly in places where access to medical care is limited or not available? What does God expect of us as ecumenical and inter-religious partners?

There is a need to articulate a theology of Ecumenical and Inter-religious work for MCC. It must take place in the context of a new era of creating open, safe, respectful theological conversations which can support our “unfinished call in an unfinished world.”<sup>3</sup> God our Creator has equipped us to do this good work, and we are at our best when we acknowledge and work for the dignity of all people. God is calling us to *do something*, and we need partners in order to do it effectively. Ours is a shared world, and we must care for it and minister within it collaboratively. “In the margins we are blessed.”<sup>4</sup>

MCC has an ecumenical calling to reformation of the whole Christian Church. The Church universal has been wounded by the separation of spirituality and sexuality. We are called to help heal the church’s historical disconnect of body and spirit, which has contributed to the sins of exclusion, racism, sexism and homophobia. Our testimony and the embodiment of a new inclusive community can help heal the larger Christian community.

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<sup>1</sup> Ian Douglas et al, *Waging Reconciliation: God Mission in a Time of Globalization and Crisis* (NY: Church Publishing Incorporated, 2002), 87

<sup>2</sup> Richard W. Gillett, *The New Globalization: Reclaiming the Lost Ground of our Christian Social Tradition*. (Cleveland: Pilgrim Press, 2005)

<sup>3</sup> Theme of the installation of Rev. Elder Nancy Wilson, October 2005

<sup>4</sup> MCC’s Statement of Purpose

MCC has much to learn from our Christian colleagues and friends. There are churches, on a local and denominational level open to partnering with MCC in ways that will change the world, the Church and individual lives. We must be willing and open to accept those invitations, and where there is not yet an invitation, to knock at the door. MCC churches globally must be trained to engage with churches in their communities, and refuse to be isolated.

In addition to ecumenical work, there is much to be done across religious traditions, regardless of what one believes about the source and nature of revelation, or what text one calls sacred. We are connected by our humanity, concern for each other and a desire to establish peace and equality in our world. Our various religious traditions can support these worthy endeavors. As we claim our rightful place in the human family, we must do so with an attitude of humility and respect.

Historically, under the guise of faith, some religious bodies have claimed ownership of understanding the nature of God, and used violence to enforce their positions. Ecumenical and inter-religious work provides an alternative, a *space* where people from varied backgrounds are invited to share themselves and contribute to a better world. As improved global communication brings humanity closer together, fighting over religious differences makes no sense. Most religious traditions focus on what brings us together as humanity.

We are encouraged to pursue mutual dialogue with people from non-Christian traditions in ecumenical and inter-religious work. We must hold as sacred the equality among people of goodwill and faith, respecting their religious traditions. We can then become partners in addressing the challenges that continue to plague the human family. This is what it means to “build bridges that liberate and unite.”<sup>5</sup>

Ecumenical and inter-religious work is not centered on working toward the spiritual conversion of those who are different, the “*Other*,” but rather on mutual dialogue and respect to further the work of justice, compassion and reconciliation.<sup>6</sup> Heeding the call to hospitality in scriptures, we welcome the stranger and the other. To welcome all means there is no “*other*,” only a new *we*. Ecumenical and inter-religious work breaks down barriers creating an atmosphere where all are present at the table.

MCC functions under a wide umbrella of Christian understanding that requires tolerance for difference and continuous learning and dialogue. More than ever, we are aware that Christians have multiple understandings of Jesus and live and work in a religiously pluralistic world. If we expect to be honored as Christians, then the Buddhist, the Hindu, the Jew, the Muslim, the Agnostic, the Humanist, and all others must also be heard, respected, and honored.

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<sup>5</sup> MCC’s Statement of Purpose

<sup>6</sup> Work by Bishop Steven Charleston, Episcopal Divinity School

MCC's ecumenical and inter-religious work should not be stealth proselytizing or an attempt to convert.<sup>7</sup> Rather, it must be a work that involves mutual respect so that we can hear what others are saying even as we wish to be heard. The vitality created by this mutual respect serves to enhance our experience of the sacred. In such an environment honest relationships are built, and friends working together can make a significant difference in the world. We must be prepared for radical openness and inclusivity. If we believe the answer to the question, "Would Jesus Discriminate?" is "No!", we must live that out and be faithful participants in the global Body of Christ and the whole human family.

Clearly diligent participation in ecumenical and inter-religious activities, both formal and informal, and at the local, regional and global level is a core component to the life of MCC. Participation in these endeavors can serve to strengthen both MCC as an exciting and relevant growing movement, as well as contributing to the transformational work of the world's faith communities.

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<sup>7</sup> The Reverend Canon Durrell Watkins, Sunshine Cathedral MCC, Ft. Lauderdale

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