

Resource Document: MCC's Relationship with the Fellowship.

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NOTE: For more information about the Fellowship link to their web page:

<http://www.radicallyinclusive.com/>

1) Joint Press Release Issued September 11, 2007

African-American Cross-Denominational Group and World's Largest Predominantly Gay Christian Denomination Announce Joint Efforts to Promote "Radical Inclusivity"

*The Fellowship, Metropolitan Community Churches Unveil Goals;
Plan Calls for 10 Major U.S. City Gatherings in 2008*

On September 11, 2007, with the backdrop of 9-11 as catalyst, the leadership of The Fellowship Churches (www.radicallyinclusive.com), a national U.S. trans-denominational fellowship of primarily African-American Christian leaders working for radical inclusivity, and Metropolitan Community Churches (www.MCCchurch.org), the world's largest and oldest Christian denomination with a primary, affirming ministry to lesbians, gays, bisexuals, and transgender individuals, gathered at DaySpring Conference Center in Florida to declare solidarity and commit to work in unity on three objectives.

FIRST JOINT OBJECTIVE:

-- Resistance to and healing of religious and spiritual violence perpetrated against people who have traditionally lived at the margins of society, including people suffering from substance abuse; people living with HIV/AIDS and lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer and inter-sex people;

SECOND JOINT OBJECTIVE:

-- Radical and full inclusion of all people living at the margins of communities of faith and spiritual practice;

THIRD JOINT OBJECTIVE:

-- Commitment to the deep and challenging work toward reconciling the historical divisions in faith and religious communities created by racism, sexism, classism, serophobia and homophobia.

Presiding Bishop Yvette A. Flunder of The Fellowship and Moderator Rev. Elder Nancy Wilson of Metropolitan Community Churches facilitated discussion among their respective organizational leaders, resulting in the following public declaration:

JOINT DECLARATION BY

Bishop Yvette Flunder, Presiding Bishop, The Fellowship

and

Rev. Elder Nancy Wilson, Moderator, Metropolitan Community Churches

The Fellowship and Metropolitan Community Churches (MCC) lift up to the world our commitment and intention to challenge major fundamental, deep-seated religious beliefs, doctrines and theologies of the oppressive dominant culture.

This culture treats people on society's margins as enemies of God and routinely mistreats, oppresses and excludes people from the community of faith and its institutions. We further confirm that these acts defeat the Christian commonwealth and we claim a season of refreshment, repentance and reconciliation.

Our organizations recognize the powerful opportunity to leverage our mutual ministries and movements toward full inclusion of all people and to provide networking and deepening of our common commitments.

Both organizations have agreed to facilitate 10 major city gatherings of open and affirming congregations in 2008 to listen and learn, share approaches and challenges in overcoming spiritual violence, discrimination, and racism and to unite people in prayer for true peace in the community and in the world.

As leaders, we have agreed to model solidarity among churches and people who live in the context of, and respond to, particularly painful experiences of violence.

As leaders, we have agreed to share insights and effective approaches for overcoming violence.

As leaders, we have agreed to deepen ecumenical contacts among the churches, national councils of churches, and related organizations and networks.

As leaders, we have agreed to work with intention to connect congregations, student and youth groups, theological and other church-related institutions in the search for a global declaration of the radically inclusive love of God for all people.

As leaders, we have agreed to promote interdependence while maintaining independence. Neither organization seeks to be an instrument of ecclesiastical restraint in the sense of diminishing the member church or ministry's individual calling.

As leaders, we have agreed to establish and maintain strong relationships vital to our ministries and movement. As we make every effort to strengthen one another we recognize the importance of knowing one another, respecting one another and esteeming each member highly. As people of God working to uphold and advance the radically inclusive love of Jesus Christ, we will face the onslaught of opposition and we will do so together. We will encourage and strengthen our respective member churches and ministries through the sharing of our experiences. Our aim is to give insight as well as inspiration.

We believe associating and assembling together are vital in building relationship. The Bible tells us that the assembling of the saints should not be forsaken. Therefore, we make every effort to come together as we have the opportunity for healing, corporate prayer, worship, fellowship and edifying one another in the Lord.

/signed/

Bishop Yvette A. Flunder

Presiding Bishop

The Fellowship

The Rev. Elder Nancy L. Wilson

Moderator

Metropolitan Community Churches

2) January 15, 2009 announcement of the MCC / Fellowship Collaboration team

On September 11, 2007, the MCC Board of Elders hosted the leadership of The Fellowship in a historic meeting that marked the official beginning of intentional relationship-building between the two faith-based groups.

The Fellowship is a cross-denominational fellowship of primarily African-American Christian leaders representing churches and faith-based organizations from diverse geographic and theological backgrounds. The overriding purpose of The Fellowship is to support religious leaders, both clergy and laity, in moving towards a theology of radical inclusivity which, by its very nature, requires an equally radical social ministry reaching to the furthest margins of society to serve all in need without prejudice or discrimination. www.RadicallyInclusive.com

Founded in 1968, Metropolitan Community Churches (MCC) is the world's largest and oldest Christian denomination with a primary, affirming ministry to lesbians, gays, bisexuals, and transgender individuals. Known as the "Human Rights Church" for its commitment to social justice, local MCC congregations can be found in 28 countries around the world. www.MCCchurch.org

The MCC/Fellowship leadership body declared solidarity and committed to work in unity on three objectives.

1. Resistance to and healing of religious and spiritual violence perpetrated against people who have traditionally lived at the margins of society, including people suffering from substance abuse; people living with HIV/AIDS and lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer and inter-sex people;
2. Radical and full inclusion of all people living at the margins of communities of faith and spiritual practice;
3. Commitment to the deep and challenging work toward reconciling the historical divisions in faith and religious communities created by racism, sexism, classism, serophobia and homophobia.



Rev. Nancy L. Wilson (L), Bishop Yvette A. Flunder (R)

Photo taken on September 11, 2007, at DaySpring Conference Center in Florida (USA) during discussions that led to the historic joint commitment to work for "radical inclusivity."

Next Steps: Joint MCC/Fellowship Collaboration Team

The leadership of MCC and the Fellowship met again twice in 2008 to prepare the way for strengthening and deepening the organizational relationship. An outcome of those conversations was the decision to create a joint 12-person MCC/Fellowship Collaboration Team.

The six MCC representatives to the Joint Collaboration Team are:

- Ms. Kathy Beasley, Team Leader (MCC staff and member of Joy MCC in Orlando, FL)
- Mr. DeWayne Davis (member of MCC Washington, DC)
- Mr. Robert Ferguson (Deacon and member of Jesus MCC in Indianapolis, IN)
- Rev. Dr. Cindi Love (MCC Executive Director)
- Rev. Dr. Mona West (MCC Director of Formation and Leadership Development)
- Rev. Phil Mathews (Pastor of Imani MCC in Durham, NC)

The charge to the joint MCC/Fellowship Collaboration Team is to carve out clear steps and decisions that will bring about mutually-beneficial collaboration between the two organizations. The intention is that their work will be completed by and reported to the 2010 MCC General Conference. Potential areas for collaboration that the Team will explore include, but are not limited to, such things as recognition of clergy, affiliation of local congregations, support of local churches and church leaders, collaboration on social justice and human rights efforts, and shared administrative and personnel services.

We are eager to receive feedback from you about this next step as MCC and The Fellowship move forward from cooperation to collaboration. You can contact us at RevNancyWilson@MCCchurch.net and RevDarleneGarner@MCCchurch.net. For more information about the MCC/Fellowship Joint Collaboration Team, [click here](#).

In closing, we invite you to join us in prayer that God will bless the work of the Joint MCC/Fellowship Collaboration Team so that we might all grow from strength to strength in our commitment to radical inclusivity.

Grace and Peace,

The Rev. Nancy Wilson, Moderator
The Rev. Darlene Garner, Vice-Moderator
Metropolitan Community Churches
www.MCCchurch.org



3) Question and Answers about the MCC relationship with the Fellowship.

Many thanks to Rev Elder Darlene Garner who initially provided the answers to these questions.

QUESTION: What are the members of The Fellowship doing at the same time in terms of their relationship to MCC?

ANSWER: As mentioned in the announcement, The Fellowship has appointed six of its members to serve with MCC's six representatives on the Collaboration Team. Together, the twelve of them will be looking at both "organizations" to determine how and in what specific areas we might be able to work collaboratively.

QUESTION: Is this potentially leading towards a merger?

ANSWER: No one knows right now what our relationship might be in the short-term or in the long-term. Neither MCC nor The Fellowship is entering into this relationship with any particular outcome in mind, beyond the desire to have a collaborative relationship. What a collaborative relationship will look like has not been decided; coming up with specific recommendations is the work of the Collaboration Team. Even so, there is absolutely no reason to believe that anyone involved in this work is entering into it with the intention of dissolving either MCC or The Fellowship and merging them into one organization, faith community, or movement.

QUESTION: Is there any downside to pursuing these goals?

The only real downside that I see is that some of the membership of either MCC or The Fellowship might allow their fears or prejudices to blind them to the possibilities of collaborative, mutually-beneficial relationship. As the history of race relationships in the U.S. has taught us, the prevalence of such attitudes on either “side” would be harmful to both MCC and The Fellowship as institutions, to our missions, to our movements, and to our people.

QUESTION: Are we invited to events of The Fellowship?

ANSWER: Absolutely yes. The Fellowship sponsors two conferences a year (their Leadership Retreat in the winter for clergy and pastoral leaders and their annual conference in the summer). The Fellowship invites, encourages, and warmly welcomes MCCers to attend both of those events and MCC announces The Fellowship events to our constituency. The actual number of MCCers that participate in Fellowship events is growing each year. This year about 30 MCCers attended the Fellowship Leadership Conference in Charlotte, NC, USA. Rev Candy Holmes was announced as MCC’s ecumenical interface with The Fellowship and Rev Elder Nancy Wilson was one of the featured plenary speakers.

You might recall that the 2008 MCC Clergy Conference was held in conjunction with The Fellowship’s Leadership Retreat, and in June 2008, The Fellowship Annual Conference that was held in Dallas included the participation of around 50 people from MCC as conference registrants, workshop presenters, and speakers.

QUESTION: What does “Special Observer Status” mean at our upcoming General Conference?

ANSWER: This means that during the General Conference business meeting, the leadership of The Fellowship will be seated with voice but no vote. This would give them an opportunity to witness “up close” how we in MCC “take care of our business” and is an expression of hospitality that can be extended to the leadership of other denominations, faith groups, and like-minded organizations.

The Fellowship has been encouraged to announce our 2010 General Conference beyond its leadership so that more of its membership can get to know us. We hope that many people from The Fellowship will attend and, beyond merely attending, we expect that some will be workshop presenters, worship participants, and conference volunteers.

QUESTION: Will we have equal or similar status at their events/conferences?

ANSWER: The Fellowship events do not include business meetings, so there is nothing to “observe.” Many MCC leaders (including Rev. Elder Nancy Wilson, Rev. Elder Darlene Garner, Rev. Elder Lillie Brock, Rev. Elder Arlene Ackerman, Rev. Elder Jim Mitulski, and countless other clergy and lay people) have attended Fellowship-sponsored events over the past several years. Their experiences and observations is that The Fellowship makes no distinction at its events between members of The Fellowship and members of MCC; MCCers participate fully in all

aspects and proceedings of their events. Indeed, the Fellowship excels in extending hospitality and a sincere welcome to people from MCC. The presence of MCCers is always publicly acknowledged by the leadership and loudly applauded by the membership of The Fellowship.

4) Summary of the Fellowship, MCC and Unity Fellowship Leadership Conference held Feb, 2009 - - from Rev Candy Holmes, MCC's ecumenical liaison to The Fellowship

The Fellowship, MCC, and Unity Fellowship
Leadership Conference
Charlotte, North Carolina
February 18-21, 2009

In the beautifully situated and gracious city of Charlotte, North Carolina, an estimated 150 clergy and lay leaders from MCC, The Fellowship, and the Unity Fellowship Church Movement converged from across the country to join hearts, minds, and spirit for a time of inspiration and renewal. The theme of this year's leadership gathering was – "Whole Leaders." Bishop Flunder's welcoming remarks at the beginning of this retreat set the stage and invited all to consider that God's prophetic call to places of wholeness is issued not only so that our lives would thrive, but also so that our ministries would flourish into all of the sacred spaces so that God's people can find wholeness.

During this conference, the universal language of Spirit led leaders from the three spiritual communities into meaningful dialog and learning, powerful worship, engaging fellowship, and life-changing healing. Each day began with prayer and most days ended with worship. During the course of the day, thought-provoking plenary and workshop sessions created opportunities for truth telling, caring, and building up each the other. Enough cannot be said about the breadth and depth of information and wealth of inspiration that came from these timely messengers. The speakers who shared from their wells of wisdom and insights were --

- Bishop Yvette Flunder (Divisions – Going Beyond Them)
- Rev. Nancy Wilson (Crossing Boundaries)
- Rev. Mona West (Homosexuality and the Bible)
- Rev. Phyllis Pennese and Ms. Vicki Sides (Parallels and Intersection of Racism and Homophobia)
- Rev. Penny Nixon (Sexuality and Spirituality).

To round out our holistic time of retreat, time was made for the enjoyable rituals of feasting and fellowshiping. This fine dining experience topped with dancing took us to another level of mutuality and appreciation.

Lastly, there were dynamic preachers (Bishop Tonya Rawls, Pastor of Unity Fellowship Church, Charlotte; and Bishop Yvette Flunder, Founder of The Fellowship and Pastor of City of Refuge UCC) and moving worship that lifted us higher every day led by Min. Charlene Moore. To bring a close to this remarkable time of refreshing, the concluding worship service was punctuated with an inspiring message from Bishop Flunder and healing prayers led by leaders from MCC and The Fellowship -- Rev. Candy Holmes and Min. Joi Rhone.

Our Conference Partners -- Summary Background

The Fellowship, founded and led by Bishop Yvette Flunder, is a primarily African-American cross-denominational coalition with Pentecostal roots. This coalition of churches, faith-based organizations from diverse geographic and theological backgrounds, and community leaders are boldly committed to the radically inclusive vision of the Gospel. The overriding purpose of The Fellowship is to support religious leaders, both clergy and laity, in moving towards a theology of radical inclusivity which, by its very nature, requires an equally radical social ministry reaching to the furthest margins of society to serve all in need without prejudice or discrimination. The Fellowship works to create, sustain and celebrate community on the margins.

The Unity Fellowship Church is a movement founded and led by Archbishop Carl Bean. This primarily African American ministry unequivocally proclaims that "God is love and love is for everyone."

5) Rev Dr. Yvette Flunder received MCC clergy credentials on May 3, 2009

NEWS RELEASE For Immediate Release

Bishop Yvette Flunder To Receive Clergy Credentials in Denomination of Metropolitan Community Churches

May 3rd Event In Washington DC Another Step In Deepening
The Relationship Between MCC, The Fellowship, Says MCC Moderator

WASHINGTON, DC-Bishop Yvette Flunder, presiding bishop of The Fellowship, a movement of churches and faith leaders built on God's radically inclusive love, will receive clergy credentials in Metropolitan Community Churches during events in Washington, DC on Sunday, May 3, 2009.

Metropolitan Community Churches is the world's largest and oldest Christian denomination with a primary affirming ministry to lesbians, gays, bisexuals, and transgender persons, along with their families, friends, and allies.



Bishop Flunder, an internationally-known preacher, educator, conference speaker and singer, holds clergy credentials in the United Church of Christ and founded City of Refuge United Church of Christ in San Francisco in 1991. In 2003, she was consecrated Presiding Bishop of The Fellowship, a multi-denominational movement of more than 50 churches and faith organizations in the U.S. and Africa.

Rev. Flunder has served as a consultant to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the Congressional Black Caucus Health Brain Trust and the Department of Health and Human Services. She is the past board president of Justice and Witness Ministries for the United Church of Christ. Bishop Flunder currently serves as a board member of the National Sexuality Resource Center and is a trustee of Pacific School of Religion.

Rev. Elder Nancy Wilson, moderator of Metropolitan Community Churches, said, "We share a deep connection with Bishop Flunder and The Fellowship; we share a common calling and a common ministry of inclusive Christianity. In a very real sense, she has been part of our movement for a long time." Both The Fellowship and Metropolitan Community Churches offer positive, welcoming ministry to the LGBT communities and preach an inclusive gospel message.

For additional information on the intentional relationship-building between the two faith organizations, read "From Cooperation to Collaboration: Growing Relationship Between MCC and the Fellowship " by [clicking here](#).

"In ordaining Bishop Flunder as clergy within Metropolitan Community Churches, we affirm our trust in her ministry in the Fellowship," added Rev. Wilson. "We know that the same Spirit that animates MCC animates the Fellowship; we are one in Christ. We value Bishop Flunder's ministry, celebrate her calling, and honor her contributions to us."

In remarks this week, Bishop Flunder noted, "For years I have deeply appreciated the contribution of Metropolitan Community Churches to the 'Jesus' work of ending injustice everywhere. The justice work of MCC has not been limited to extending God's Extravagant Grace to sexual minority communities; it has also made a significant impact in bringing an end to racism, sexism, patriarchy and war. This is a

Church that had its beginnings in the fire of Pentecostalism and political awareness...Spirit and Truth. I am thrilled to embody a connection between the United Church of Christ, The Fellowship and Metropolitan Community Churches...great justice movements of our time."

Rev. Wilson indicated that she will also seek clergy credentialing with The Fellowship "as part of our ongoing commitment to strengthen and deepen the relationship between our two movements."

Bishop Flunder is a graduate of the Ministry Studies and Master of Arts programs at the Pacific School of Religion, Berkeley, California, and holds the Doctor of Ministry degree from San Francisco Theological Seminary, San Anselmo, California. She is the author of *Where The Edge Gathers: Building A Community of Radical Inclusion*.

MCC clergy credentials will be conferred upon Bishop Flunder during the 11 am worship service of Metropolitan Community Church of Washington, DC, 474 Ridge Street NW, Washington, DC 20001 where Rev. Dr. Charlie Arehart is interim pastor. The occasion will mark the first time since 2005 that MCC has extended extraordinary credentials, and the first during the tenure of Rev. Nancy L. Wilson as MCC Moderator.