

Our Relationship The United Church of Christ in the USA August 29, 2008

From the earliest days of Metropolitan Community Churches, the United Church of Christ in the USA has been an influence on and an ally to MCC. The UCC is about 51 years old as a denomination, and is an amalgam of the churches in the Congregationalist tradition and Reformed traditions. As of 2006, the UCC has been fully supportive of marriage equality for lgbt persons. They have just slightly less than 6,000 congregations in the US, and over 10% of them are officially welcoming to lgbt people. Many MCC congregations enjoy warm relationships with local UCC congregations, their pastors and members. Similar denominations exist in other countries, such as the United Church of Canada, and the Uniting Church of Australia.

One of Rev. Perry's mentors in the founding of MCC was an anonymous UCC clergy who advised him.

Two of our early Elders had UCC connections. Rev. Elder John H. Hose was from the Reformed branch of the church that became part of the UCC. John Hose brought his UCC polity and Reformed theology into MCC's formative days and into our founding documents. Rev. Elder Roy Birchard, another early MCC Elder, was a minister in the United Church of Christ as well. Rev. Arlene Ackerman claims UCC roots, as did early MCC pioneer and leader Rev. Jeffrey Pulling.

Dr. Avery Post, a former President of the UCC, was a friend and occasional advisor to Rev. Perry in the first decade of MCC's life.

The early founders of the UCC Coalition of Lesbian and Gay Concerns also were the first ecumenical partners of MCC in working together on civil rights issues for LGBT people in the United States. They were part of the first delegation of LGBT religious leaders that were invited to the Carter White House in 1979, led by Rev. Nancy Wilson, who was then MCC's Chief Ecumenical Officer. Recently, at a Fellowship Annual meeting, the leaders of the UCC Coalition had dinner with MCC leaders.

Over the last twenty-five years, the United Church of Christ continued to be our closest Christian denominational ally in the United States. All through the years of our dialogue with the National Council of Churches in Christ in

the USA, the United Church of Christ stood up for the full inclusion of Metropolitan Community Churches. Their witness and work on behalf of our community during the AIDS years was also important.

During this time, several key UCC affiliated seminaries began admitting more and more MCC students, and today we have significant partnership, and seats of the boards of several of those seminaries.

President Paul Sherry and his wife Mary visited our General Conference in 1995, and in 1999, as he prepared to retire, Paul brought incoming President John Thomas to our Conference, where we announced the beginnings of some bi-lateral conversations, denomination to denomination. Rev. Perry was an official guest of the UCC General Assembly before he retired as Moderator.

Over the next few years, as the UCC went through some major reorganization, and as MCC also began our process of reorganization, a couple of initial meetings were held, but we agreed that we would slow down that process while we each re-focused on some internal issues.

In December of 2005, MCC's new Moderator, Rev. Nancy Wilson, visited the headquarters of the UCC, and met with President Thomas, and key staff and leaders of the UCC, including their Ecumenical Officer.

In 2006, we had held our first special conversations about our clergy credentialing processes, and ways in which we could cooperate more denominationally.

Meanwhile, on a local level, there have been some developments. MCC San Francisco planted a new church in Berkeley, California, that is an MCC, UCC and Disciples church, the only experiment of its kind so far.

A UCC in Tacoma, Washington, upon its demise, left its building to MCC. In doing so, they asked them to consider dual affiliation. The church spent a year in that process, and is now dual affiliated, one of two MCC's that also belong to the UCC (the other one is the church in Berkeley).

In 2003, MCC's largest church, Cathedral of Hope in Dallas, Texas, left the denomination, and in 2007 they officially joined the United Church of

Christ. In 2006, one other church in MCC left us and joined the UCC, our church in Columbia, South Carolina.

In addition, MCC has a dynamic partnership with The Fellowship, an network of African-American, Pentecostal and Baptist churches that are lgbt, same-gender loving affirming. About 20% of Fellowship churches are also affiliated with the UCC. Their presiding Bishop, Yvette Flunder, holds UCC credentials.

A handful of MCC clergy have served UCC churches over the years, and some of those have dual credentials.

Because of our complex history and relationship over the years, there have been rumors that MCC and the UCC might consider merging. No such conversations have ever taken place, and there are no plans for such conversations. Bi-lateral conversations rarely lead to merger, rather, to denomination-to-denomination cooperation, which is our continued goal.

It is our hope and belief that MCC will continue to have a warm, significant friendship and relationship with the United Church of Christ and its leadership as we continue, each in our own way, to proclaim an inclusive gospel.