



MCC[®]

METROPOLITAN
COMMUNITY CHURCHES

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Listening Tour Observation - Part 3 - Path Forward

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Listening Tour

LISTENING TOUR OBSERVATION - PART 3 - PATH FORWARD

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OVERVIEW

On 26 January 2017, Metropolitan Community Churches (MCC) Governing Board, Council of Elders, and Senior Leadership Team affirmed the need to listen deeply and act boldly. A 10-month global Listening Tour, February through November 2017, focused on local churches, ministries, and leaders of MCC. Through the Listening Tour, MCC clergy, leaders, and members shared their experiences, perceptions, and recommendations in person and virtually.

The Listening Tour included

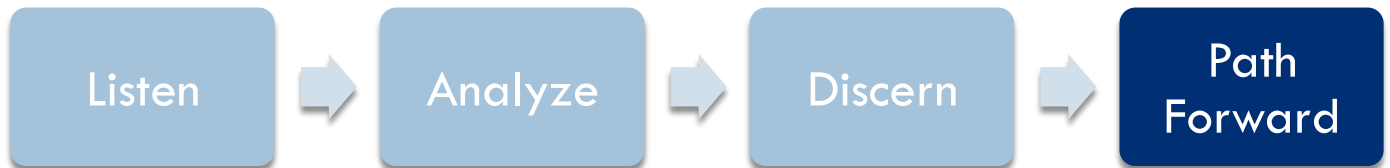
- public conversations in a town hall style forum (mostly in churches during Network Gatherings),
- conferences,
- a series of webinars,
- an anonymous online survey,
- and one-on-one conversations with the Interim Moderator.

Listeners included the Interim Moderator and MCC Elders and Governing Board members where possible. Participants answered the same four (4) questions throughout the Listening Tour. The responses generated thousands of comments.

This report highlights primary themes, topics, and concerns expressed for the four questions. This report also contains other topics raised during the Listening Tour.

LISTENING TOUR PROCESS

The four-step process below shows the Listening Tour process. In this document, we discuss the “Path Forward” step to identify the opportunities brought to MCC through this effort.



Four (4) Questions

Four (4) questions started the conversation:

1. What does being MCC mean to you today?
2. What is one of the best features of your local MCC church?
3. What is one of the greatest challenges of your local MCC church?
4. What would you need from MCC in the next 3 years to follow God’s call to “be” and “do” ministry?

PATH FORWARD

Describing a “Path Forward” is the first step towards the important work needed for transformational ministry and leadership. The goal in identifying a path forward so early in this stage of design is ensure actions are not reactive or seeking a quick fix.

The intention of a “Path Forward” affirms:

- commitment as leaders,
- engagement in creative ways,
- alignment on needed change, and
- agreement on how to shift the wider MCC culture.

The framework of a “Path Forward” begins describing ways in which various MCC leadership bodies have begun to engage in information received in the Listening Tour and the needs discerned and described previously in Part 2. Below are examples of ways each leadership body is working on the Path Forward. Some of these programs, projects, and/or pilots began earlier and have been adapted based on the discoveries from the Listening Tour; others are just starting.

COUNCIL OF ELDERS

The Council of Elders (COE) is tasked by the General Conference to serve in a pastoral role and direct the spiritual life of the Fellowship (see UFMCC Bylaws, Art. 5.E.3. for more details).

Point Elder Program

During the 2017 Listening Tour, many people voiced a yearning to be better connected with MCC. To feel spiritually supported and to access the denomination's resources, many churches and ministry leaders expressed the need for a single point of contact. Early in 2017, the Elders began working on an initiative to pair an Elder with a church and ministry, even for individual leaders. The program began as "Listening Elder." Surveys for feedback on the program generated many comments, concerns, and suggestions. Based on the responses, the program was modified and the name shifted to "Point Elder" to better identify the goal to address the need for supportive connection and to assist in navigating the denomination's resources. Adaptations to finalize the program are complete. A full launch is set for early April 2018.

Spiritual Resources for Diversity and Inclusion

MCC has a long-time commitment to diversity and inclusion in multiple forms – an era globally of new language and learning. These issues are foundationally spiritual in nature. This is why the COE is leading an initiative that began with a review of diversity and inclusion recommendations from the last decade with the purpose of developing resources relevant to the spiritual life of MCC churches, ministries, and leaders.

STRATEGIC LEADERSHIP TEAM

Senior MCC staff continues to meet virtually each month and in person twice a year to collaborate and create strategy for programs, projects, and pilots to best serve MCC churches, ministries, and leaders. In September 2017, the title "Senior Leadership Team" was changed to "Strategic Leadership Team" to ensure a continual strategic focus and expand the team to include other staff members as needed.

Flexible Pathways Program

In an effort to meet the changing needs for pastoral leadership in MCC, and to nurture new types of leadership arising out of congregations, the Office of Formation and Leadership Development has been working for almost two years to develop a Flexible Pathways Program. A team assessed pastoral leadership needs, created a proposal, presented recommendations to the Council of Elders (COE), and provided a survey for feedback. The second reading of the program approved by the COE will now permit new ways to serve MCC through local church leadership. The following description has been approved for implementation in 2018:

"There are flexible paths for licensed and recognized pastoral ministry in Metropolitan Community Churches: Ordained, Standing by Call, and Commissioned.

1. Ordination qualifies a person to be elected, hired, or appointed as the pastor of any MCC congregation, without limitation.
2. Standing by Call is for clergy ordained in another denomination who are elected or appointed to serve as the pastor of a particular MCC congregation and is not transferrable.
3. Commissioning is for lay people who are elected or appointed to serve as the pastor of a particular MCC congregation and is not transferrable.

Annual licensing will apply to Ordained, Standing By Call and Commissioned pastors.”

Processes for the program and protocols by nation or network are currently in development. The Governance Committee of the MCC Governing Board will collaborate with the Office of Formation and Leadership Development to assist with any bylaws revisions that may be needed in relation to the Flexible Pathways Program.

Develop a Culture of Generosity Program

Many global leaders have described a decline in giving and participation in local churches over the last 20 years. Combine this with lower attendance, and it becomes evident: the local church is in need of a revolution. In the second quarter of 2017, MCC sponsored Rev. Elder Tony Freeman, Director of the current Office of Church and Ministry Development, to attend a fundraising institute for training, which includes a yearlong project. Rev. Freeman’s project is a focus on the formation of a Culture of Generosity within MCC. He is collaborating with Dr. Tom Melzoni, who has provided consultation to several MCC churches.

There are multiple components to the Culture of Generosity Program.

- The first component focuses on the local church to grow the culture of generosity through education, cohorts, and presentations at 2018 Network gatherings. Pilot cohorts are currently meeting.
- The second component transforms denominational practices for finances, reporting, and communications, and deepens our relationship with our donors, which includes the local church.
 - The denominational work began in 2017 with a shift to project accounting that prioritizes and allocates funds to programs that support new and existing churches, ministries, and leaders, education, justice and inclusion.
 - The Assessments Task Force, approved at the 2016 General Conference, has completed their work of evaluating the current assessments model. The Task Force report has been submitted to the Governing Board.

International Diversity and Inclusion Program

The International Diversity and Inclusion Program has many facets as a global approach to one of the primary modern crises. Aspects of the program include, but are not limited to:

- Qualitative assessments of churches, ministries, leaders, and the denomination analyzing over a dozen areas of diversity and inclusion.
- Empower and equip local leaders to prepare, lead, and assess contextual conversations and programs leading to greater diversity and inclusion.
- Intentionally recruit and mentor leaders to expand diversity in leadership in all areas of MCC to reflect and embody a multi-cultural and multi-national denomination.

A New Conversation on Spiritual Needs

MCC's Core Values are deeply spiritual. Living into the values of Spiritual Transformation, Inclusion, Community, and Social Action is an act of spiritual fluidity that honors an individual’s traditions, beliefs, and questions. A core spirituality already exists within the multiple and intersectional identities of members. Blending forms of faith and expression, in addition to adapting language of various

forms of spirituality, within the context of the community, can occur through education and encouragement.

A Spiritual Formation program is currently in development called “Floreceré,” translated as “I Will Bloom.” The program’s purpose is to empower individuals and communities to be wholly themselves through spiritual practices that promote human flourishing.

Also, resources to discuss spirituality are in development to provide educational and community forums to engage in a new conversation about meeting spiritual needs.

MCC Identity

There are several strategies underway to examine, redefine, improve, and expand MCC’s identity.

- Renovate and upgrade the MCC website in 2018 to include easier identification and access of resources for leaders, churches, and ministries.
- Launch new marketing campaign through video and short stories of local church ministries and members to demonstrate ways in which MCC impacts global communities. The campaign will focus on the denomination with an outward appeal to external audiences.
- Launch new brand campaign for local churches and ministries to differentiate MCC in the community from other churches that emphasizes liberation and affirmation, especially for churches and ministries in areas more liberal or progressive.
- Preserve the story of MCC through the "Celebrate" 50th Anniversary campaign that includes visual and audio historical resources. The preservation has two strategies to preserve print, video, and audio records. The first task includes professional preservation of printed MCC historical records based on current archives. The second activity engages crowdsourcing of MCC stories through video, images, and audio for digitized preservation and sharing through social media.

Strengthen MCC Networks

The need for communication, fellowship, and resource sharing is great. Networks are intended to provide the infrastructure for connection to meet local church, ministry, and leadership collaboration. Networks can also be vehicles for identifying and mentoring leaders, starting new MCC churches, and supporting existing MCC leaders. The horizontal nature of MCC Networks can also be a wonderful tool for sharing of resources between churches for programming and ministry support.

Recommendations to strengthen MCC Networks include:

- Diversifying Network leadership team
- Add a mentor to the Network leadership team
- More frequent contact between lay delegates and clergy within the Network
- Set up a means to share resources used with local churches and ministries within the Network and between Networks.

GOVERNING BOARD

The Governing Board has primary governance, management, and oversight responsibilities for MCC (see UFMCC Bylaws, Article V. E.3. and Addendum 2 Charter of the Governing Board for more details: <http://mccchurch.org/governing-board/about/our-policies/>).

Assess Nominating and Voting Processes

Address the need for voice and vote in an age of technology for global churches and leaders while still meeting the needs of community discussion and interaction in the General Conference Business Meeting.

Review Bylaws to address an imbalance of lay representation in comparison to clergy representation in official denominational votes.

Evaluate and adapt the Moderator nominating and voting processes to ensure a successful vote for Moderator in the General Conference Business Meeting.

Explore Financial Models

The wider structure and models for funding local churches, ministries, paying ministry leaders, and the denomination are under review. This began with the 2017 Assessment Commission, working as a task force, to evaluate, survey, and make recommendations. Conversations continue to explore creative adaptations and sustainable models that will empower local churches, ministries, and leaders, while offering resources for the much needed and prophetic global denomination to live into its mission, vision, and values.

Modernize Processes in Governance

In a global financial market, there is a need to meet the organizational and fiscal needs of international networks, churches, and ministries through the formation of charities and non-profit organizations to allow MCC official status and improve the ability to generate revenue. Work has begun in nations where this is possible in order to create a strong foundation for MCC's global growth.

Review Bylaws, Policies and Procedures

Over the years, the General Conference has approved the current Bylaws. A Governance Committee team will review bylaws to ensure the current Bylaws meet the needs of MCC churches, ministries, and leaders. Policies and procedures are not voted on or approved by the General Conference. The Policies and Procedures yet have been carefully created over the years to ensure balance and accountability. A review of all of these key governance pieces and recommendations will be completed and presented to the 2019 General Conference.

Preparing for the Future

When discussing the 2016 General Conference with people around the world, in multiple settings, the sentiment in every instance included a desire for change. A majority believed Clergy and Lay Delegates did not elect a Moderator because people wanted someone different. Not the people of the past, or someone from outside of MCC, but someone to lead MCC into the next chapter.

Still, as a matter of discernment, we cannot overlook the global emotional and political climate which influences anxiety and fear within MCC congregations. The Moderator election occurred only weeks after the Pulse nightclub massacre and as police shot unarmed black men in widespread cities across the United States. In the months before a crucial USA presidential election, combined with global political unrest, the tension was tangible and Clergy and Lay Delegates were impacted.

Considering the complexities of anxiety, fear, and varying levels of conflict from outside and inside MCC across many areas of the world, the outcome of the 2016 Business Meeting vote was clear: No. The delegates of MCC wanted a different person other than the slate of Moderator candidates to lead them forward into the next generation.

REFLECTION

By Rev. Elder Rachelle Brown

A reflection on I Peter 2:9-10 was offered when possible during the Listening Tour. This reflection remains relevant as we move through discovery and discernment into the design phases of the transition.

"But you are a chosen generation, a priesthood of all believers, a holy tribe, a peculiar people, in order that you may proclaim the wondrous acts of God who called you out of sadness and sorrow into the marvelous light." I Peter 2:9

This passage speaks to us as followers of Jesus during this present age. We are the generation, chosen and called to come out by God. We are a people, as named by Founder Rev. Elder Troy Perry, as the priesthood of all believers who could not only be IN church, but also become THE church led by the Holy Spirit. We are affirmed as a holy tribe, as described by retired Moderator Rev. Elder Nancy Wilson. Finally, we appear, in the naming of our broadest identities, identified in the word written in the King James Version, as "peculiar." MCC, we are peculiar people! Our profession of liberation from cultural, religious and spiritual oppression is indeed peculiar. In fact, as a peculiar people, we are called to reflect the margins, that which is Queer, not in the sense of odd, but as liberating. In all of our ways, honest and authentic before God, we are a people proud and ever becoming.

Yes, it is quite peculiar indeed when we proclaim our name, love, and entire self as given by God, boldly lived into in our communities, and without apology, we rise up to say "NO" to injustice - and "YES" to the author of our faith. We are not ashamed of the gospel! We embrace the embodiment, God with us, through Jesus the Christ. Just as the early Christians embraced the cross, a symbol of intimidation, terror, and shame, we, too, proudly proclaim our liberation, as a peculiar people, queer and unashamed before God.

Each of us reflect a journey away from oppression, and we are ever transformed like Peter in the gospels, called out of our hiding and fear, sadness and sorrow. Change is not something to fear, but rather a part of living, learning, and becoming the beautiful testimony to God's marvelous light.

The words in I Peter share the testimony many in MCC know, or may be just discovering - and I offer this to us all, as travelers on the journey to a New Day:

"Once you were not a people, but now you are God's people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy." I Peter 2:10

As we continue to be transformed as a new generation, we are indeed a queer people, who have and will continue to experience change through mercy from God and one another. Amen.

CONCLUSION

This report is a beginning, similar to a mirror, to see ourselves in this moment of transition. Each section of this report seeks to demonstrate multiple perspectives from the global community. The discernment and ongoing design intends to evaluate the wider systems for a holistic view as a Path Forward.

Over the next months, leaders at every level of MCC will continue to listen to the needs of local communities. We will continue to look to our mission, vision, and core values to guide in the next steps.

Over the next few weeks, the Governance Committee of the Governing Board will form both Moderator and Governing Board nominating committees. These nominating committees will guide MCC into the process for discerning and selecting a Moderator and new Governing Board members as current terms expire. The Governing Board will also explore new financial models. The Council of Elders will lead new conversations with local churches and leaders. The staff will modify and/or form new programs and projects to engage the Networks, churches, ministries and leaders for a new era of mutuality and collaboration. MCC will expand the message and reach in ways that align with modern technology and best practices.

The need for *liberation, healing, and justice* is greater than ever in the 50-year history of MCC. Each of us, as members of churches and ministries and leaders, are called to serve and live into the moving of the Holy Spirit in this age. May we each be present to give God the glory for what has already been done, offer thanks for this day, and humbly move forward filled with faith