

Unanswered Qs from the June 5th webinar – submitted to Ms. Elizabeth (Liz) Bisordi, Rev Elder Cecilia Eggleston and Rev Elder Tony Freeman

Order for Questions 1,2: Tony, Cecilia, Liz

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1. What, if any, difference do you make between being a global denomination and a universal fellowship? Do you believe we are on the right path for our work by engaging the world as a denomination?

Tony: In the case of UFMCC, we officially call ourselves a “fellowship” (Universal Fellowship of Metropolitan Community Churches) and yet operate as a denomination. So, for us, at this time, we are one and the same.

With that said, when you consider the descriptors of a global denomination, words like “structure,” “Institution,” “bureaucracy,” “stability” come to mind. On the other hand, “Universal Fellowship” conjures up a very different set of descriptors: “relationship,” “covenant,” “missional,” and “organic.”

The question about are we on the right path is a good one. We need some structure and stability, but not at the cost of being more married to supporting and sustaining the institution over living our mission. Too often, organizations, churches and non-profits, fall into the trap of allowing their “mission” to become all about propping up the institution instead of pursuing their true purpose. I believe the time has come for us to revisit how we are organized together by utilizing a grassroots discernment process. (“Discernment” is defined by Rev. Dr. Lisa Heilig as “That is, we listen for, look for, experience individually and as a community, what God’s dream is for us, where is it that God is working in the world, and how we are to join in to do God’s work.”) I’m a proponent of letting go of everything that no longer serves us in our missional efforts. This includes a fellowship-like system where “denominational” overhead and bureaucracy is minimal and the bulk of the financial resources are stewarded at a local/regional level.

Whatever we decide to do and become, I encourage us to not become married to any one system or structure. The rapid rate of change in today’s world calls for an organization, or fellowship, that is lean, flexible, and nimble. We simply can’t avoid or be afraid of changes that will make us be more effective in realizing our God-given shared mission.

Cecilia: The point was made on the webinar about being global or international. There was a suggestion that being global meant everything was done the same all over the world, whereas being international meant that there was appropriate local variation. For example, there are different protocols for MCC ordination for USA, Australia, Europe, Africa and Ibero-America. All require high standards from those in the process and all reflect local educational standards and other aspects, such as background checks. It makes sense for us to continue along this path – agreeing what need to be common standards throughout the denomination and also having regional variation where it makes pragmatic sense to do so.

In terms of being on the right path, we need to take stock of where we are now as a denomination and what God is calling us to do and be in the future. It may be that we decide to focus our attention and resources in particular countries or ministries, rather than trying to do everything everywhere. Just as in the local church, it is better to do a few things really well, rather than stretch ourselves too thinly and not make the difference that we could.

Liz: From my perspective, there is a definitional difference between the two – a denomination is bound together by commonality in structural leadership and doctrine, and a fellowship is a more loosely put together association based on interest. That said, I believe we, MCC, currently fit as a denomination given our essential commonality around what we believe – our Statement of Faith, mission and prophetic call. Regardless of the label we place on it, we are stitched together in the most important and fundamental ways at the core of who we are and whose we are!

In my opinion, being bound this way does not mean we must all look, act and operate in the same fashion. Rather, part of the beauty of our MCC structure and tapestry is that we can “be MCC” without having to look exactly alike. We can and must foster open environments where being MCC is done in ways that are culturally and regionally appropriate. This absolutely can and must be done while we keep the core values of MCC as our foundation. Is that a denomination or a fellowship – I’m not quite sure about the “name” but I do know that we can honor our differences around the world while harnessing the best of MCC together – we are stronger together. I am looking forward to us having this conversation together as we discern what the MCC of the 2020’s and beyond looks like. The most important element is that, in the words of Rev Troy Perry, we remember that the main thing is to keep the main thing the main thing!

2. **If it is decided that a moderator can be elected with less than a majority of the vote, will any of you accept that position knowing that you don't have a majority of folks behind you supporting you? *Note: This is a process question and should be referred to the Governing Board for answer. Candidates are not required to answer. At present, the UFMCC Bylaws state that a candidate must receive a majority in each house to be elected as Moderator. But the GC could always vote to suspend rules.***

Tony: I really need more time to pray about this before I offer a response.

Cecilia: Optional question – no reply received.

Liz: I believe this is a hypothetical question, since our rules call for a majority in both houses. Anything else would be a bylaw question, which would need to be addressed by the Governing Board.

- 3. In the event that you should receive less than a required percentage for election, would you be willing to have your name withdrawn from the slate for successive ballots?**

Cecilia: I will see what the guidance of the Holy Spirit is in that moment.

Liz: This is a hypothetical question so I don't think it can be a clear yes or no response. My reaction to withdrawing my name would likely be very different depending of if we are talking about being at 5% or 48% of the vote. I also believe there is a Governing Board proposal for GC consideration that actually proposes that if a candidate has less than 17%, they are automatically dropped from further ballots.

Tony: I'm going to assume that in this scenario, all three candidates received less than the required majority needed for election. If that's the case and I had significantly less than my colleagues, I would prayerfully consider withdrawing. Leadership is about doing what's best for the body/organization over any personal ambition or agenda.

4. What would be the first thing you do once you are in office? What is one thing you would like to see happen early on?

Cecilia: Pray for God's wisdom, strength and guidance. Then organise a series of meetings with staff, Council of Elders, Governing Board, potential donors and funders, to start the process of building relationship, giving momentum to our ministry together and setting priorities for our work going forward, including addressing our current financial situation.

Early on, I want to engage with local congregations and church leaders to find out what they really want from the denomination, clearly and specifically, and then see what is realistic to achieve in the short, medium and long term. For example, often churches will say "We want resources", but we need to be clear exactly what resources are needed and whether the denomination is the best body to provide these.

Liz: To me, the very first order of business is to engage with MCCer's, our friends and allies to listen and be vulnerable and honest about the realities of where MCC is today and where we collectively believe the Spirit is moving us toward. I see this starting at General Conference and if elected moderator, I will want to reach out and be with and among the GC (in coffee shops, conference rooms, the hotel lobby and/or bar, etc.) too listen and hear what is on the mind and hearts of MCCers). As well, I would invite folks to write to me and tell me about their hopes and dreams for MCC globally and locally.

Once beyond GC, we need to take that and with the Governing Board quickly find ways to share an honest, open assessment of where MCC stands corporately (for example, finances and infrastructure).

I have outlined (see www.Liz4MCC.com) what I believe is our responsibility now to MCCers and as a vital global presence to bring the message of God's all-inclusive love, as follows:

1. Honor Our Mutual Accountability

In order to do right in the world, we need to be right with each other. We will never serve others with integrity unless accountability, mutuality and trust become the cornerstones of our relationships within MCC.

2. Fix the Foundation

The mission statement of MCC is as relevant today as ever, yet parts of the MCC organizational foundation need to be repaired or upgraded immediately. We have a fiduciary responsibility to adhere to the legal and ethical standards of being a non-profit organization.

I have successfully managed international businesses with budgets and staff several times larger than MCC. I have the required and relevant operational skills and experiences to build a strong MCC structure.

3. Trust Our Compass

We know our spiritual direction.

To stay on course, let's admit we need a dose of *'new and improved'* because some of our ways of deciding and doing are traditions that no longer serves us. We need new solutions to old problems.

4. Value Our Values

MCC is gifted with people who have the heart, soul and passion to be the change we want to see in the world. With our spiritual values as our guide, let us commit to do what we can, where we can, within our means, in a timely, smart and sensitive way.

Tony: Of course, I would start with prayer: personal and for the entire body to be in prayer for healing, hope, and our future together. While maintaining that as an ongoing practice, I would also do the following simultaneously:

- Begin a thorough review of all current practices, programs, and policies. There needs to be clear understanding of the current reality that is shared with the body. You can't begin to plan for the future until you have a full understanding of the present.
- Nurture and grow key relationships. The work ahead is going to be arduous and taking the time to balance relationship and task is a necessity for our missional success.
- Begin discerning and drafting 90-day, 6-month, and 1-year operating plans. These plans would be done in consultation with stakeholders and the goals and objectives would support the strategy I outlined in my Town Hall webinar. (The strategy included three components: 1) Rebuild Trust; 2) Build Momentum; and 3) Begin Creating a Culture of Generosity.)

5. I heard each candidate claim their belief that the "Spirit is going to move" in regard to an election. Is that indicative that you believe the Spirit did NOT move last time?

Cecilia: I believe that the Holy Spirit moves in us and through us at every General Conference. For me, it was a statement that, whatever the outcome of the election for me personally, the Spirit will be moving among us as a body.

Liz: Honestly, I'm not quite sure how or if it was the Spirit that moved in 2016. All I know is that it was very discomfoting from my perspective.

What I can speak to is that I believe that we have not come to this far in our history for God not to move and direct us. That still small voice that Troy heard 50 years ago, is still speaking to us if we listen with the wholeness of our being and an open heart, the Spirit will move us into a future where we can continue to be the Church Alive!

Tony: My sharing that belief was not aimed at being a critique of the last General Conference but more a hopeful reflection of my time in prayer and discernment.

6. I wonder how, if applicable, spouses feel about you potentially becoming the next Moderator?

Liz: I asked my wife, Charlene, to respond to this question so you can hear directly from her:

"I'm Charlene Bisordi, Liz's spouse. Liz forwarded the question regarding how her spouse feels about her potentially becoming the next Moderator. Let me first say that Liz would not be pursuing this calling had we not discussed it, and both believed in it. Over the past 30 years we have always made major life changing decisions together. Because I believe in MCC, and I believe in Liz, I am honored and humbled to be the spouse of the next Moderator!"

Tony: Not applicable

Cecilia: My partner is 100% supportive and we are walking this journey together.

7. We have a choice of three persons for our next Moderator. What would you bring to the position that would set you apart?

Liz: From my perspective, as the first lay person to be nominated for MCC Moderator, I believe that I bring something very unique at a time when MCC must regain its stability.

On all levels MCC is at a crossroads. Our next Moderator will have an awesome responsibility to unify, clarify and lead us forward both spiritually and pragmatically. This requires an epic commitment to have the tough conversations, make the hard decisions and lead us as a bridge-builder balancing our past, our present and the future of MCC.

I am a talented, skilled, experienced and successful global manager and leader in the areas of strategic planning, financial budgeting and oversight, change management and human resource development.

Just like you, I am walking my spiritual path and hoping I can make a difference in the world. My years as a member of SunCoast MCC have brought me so many opportunities to be a part of something bigger than myself. Charlene and I are so grateful for many years of having a safe, supportive church home as we continue to grow spiritually as a part of a MCC community of believers.

My MCC experiences have expanded my understanding of my spiritual values. I have plenty to give and plenty to learn, and plenty of God's blessings that have prepared me for who I am now.

AND I never considered that I might be called to serve as Moderator of MCC – and likely you didn't either! Had I chosen to go the ordained minister path, I would not have the skills and experiences I am blessed with and that are needed within MCC now.

From my earliest school days, the Ursuline Sisters fostered and modeled in their students a strong faith in action. All Ursuline schools globally have the motto of "Serviam." This is Latin for "I will Serve" meaning our willingness (and I would say need) to love and serve God. It is in my spiritual DNA and I say, "here I am Lord"

Tony: Number one, experience and a solid track record of transformational and entrepreneurial leadership. While I have had my fair share of frustrations, my résumé does reflect a long history of taking a congregation, non-profit, or office and moving it to a new, higher level, stronger and more vibrant than when I started. Leadership is also about change and being an agent of positive change. I know MCC and I know leadership. Give me a challenge and I am energized and anxious to begin the work.

As I stated in another essay, leadership needs to be coupled with the appropriate character, which leads me to the second reason: character. While we all have "feet of clay," and our humanness is fraught with our best attempts that have fallen short, there are characteristics I have strived to embody throughout my life and ministry. These

include humility, trustworthiness, discipline, resilience, listening, admitting when I'm wrong, giving and receiving forgiveness, asking for and appreciating appropriate feedback, being respectful and curious about people who are different than I am, and trying always to lead with love. To me leadership is not at all about power, position, or prestige, but about a devotion to a purpose that you cannot and will not let go of. And I know I will never be able to live to experience the joy of fulfilling that purpose without being a person of character. It doesn't matter how gifted or experienced I am, character is the foundation of successful ministry and life.

The third reason is passion. I love MCC! I love ministry. I love seeing people's lives transformed. Passion is what gets you through the difficult, rocky, uphill climbs that are so often part of the transformation process. Passion fuels you for another day, when the last one was not what you hoped for or expected. Passion creates the energy to look for new creative answers to old problems. Passion is the protein of leadership—and when it's genuine, it's contagious.

Another reason is my openness to change and my capacity to thrive in new and challenging settings. When I needed to stay in San Diego to raise my son, Mario, after I had completed my tenure at MCC San Diego, I had no idea what I was going to do. I stepped into a whole new world of leading and managing a corporate giving program and then on to leading a community foundation. It's a huge stretch for me to consider MCC looking the same six years from now, or even trying to continue being a smaller version of our current model. The openness to change must be modeled from the top down, and the decision-making and discernment from the grassroots upward. I believe, with all my heart and soul, that MCC will go beyond surviving to thriving. But I also believe that we can't be married to any particular outcome or it will be in danger of not happening.

Lastly, I have a deep and passionate faith. God changed my life over 30 years ago and I give thanks daily for the gifts I have received. I know I can't give away what I don't have, so I spend intentional time most every day nurturing my relationship with God through prayer, reflection, and meditation on the sacred texts. It is out of my own life-changing transformation that I truly believe all things are possible with God. And it is my continued passion and desire for everyone to have the opportunity to experience the life-changing gift that comes with knowing our loving and amazing God.

Experience, character, passion, openness to change, and deep and passionate faith are the qualities I believe set me apart as a candidate for the Office of the Moderator.

Cecilia: I have 30 years of experience within MCC, from being a young local church planter, right through to serving the whole Fellowship on the General Council and the Board of Elders. Being District Co-ordinator and Regional Elder involved both spiritual and organizational leadership, including strategic and financial planning. I have always worked internationally, serving, supporting and resourcing our church leaders and congregations in Europe for nine years and Africa for four years, as well as spending time in the USA. I am able to step off a plane into a different country and culture, and immediately start to build relationships with people I have not met before, helping them to be heard and feel part of our wider Fellowship. I have served with both Rev. Perry

and Rev. Elder Nancy Wilson, so I appreciate the joys and challenges that will come with being Moderator. I have been closely involved in guiding our denomination through organizational change, when serving on General Council and as part of the Structure Review Team. I am used to being in the public spotlight and being a spokesperson for MCC on a local, national and international level. I am the only candidate that brings this breadth of international denominational leadership.

8. Although relocation was not part of the consideration process, if you are elected as Moderator, have you considered where your base of operation would be?

Liz: In today's 21st century, global world, we are so interconnected, we can operate from almost anywhere. I know this since I have spent the better part of the past 20+ years working either from my home office or "on the road." Almost daily, I connect via web conferencing technology, phone calls, and email with individuals from around the globe as we work on global issues. I would plan to continue in that fashion, using the available technology, to meet people where they are.

Tony: While there are any number of logistical and practical challenges to relocating, I'm open to having my base of operations be wherever it would best serve the MCC's mission.

Cecilia: The whole world is the Moderator's "parish" and most of the denominational staff work remotely, and in different time zones. The days of everyone being located in the same office block are long over. On every webinar, all the candidates have been asked what we will do to make the denomination less US centric and more global. Having the Moderator based outside the USA for the first time in our history sends a powerful message about wanting to make that shift. I will be based in the UK and will travel as much as needed to connect with local churches, network gatherings etc wherever they are, as denominational finances allow. I am used to doing this and to adjusting my working hours to fit with the challenges of working with colleagues in different time zones around the world. If circumstances change, and it will be beneficial to the role for me to re-locate, I am willing to consider that.