

## **Topic 1: Local Church Engagement**

**NOTE:** For questions 1-7, the order of the answers is Liz – Tony - Cecilia

**Question 1:** There is an attitude that individual churches can exist without being part of the denomination. How do we change that attitude?

**Liz:** MCC has a compelling value proposition not offered by any other denomination. We welcome people to come just as they are knowing and proclaiming that all are welcome at God's Table believing as they do and coming just as they are - - God's perfect child. While certainly true that a church does not need to be affiliated with MCC, there are several compelling and practical reasons to be part of MCC, including:

- Care and connection, where we are part of something larger than just ourselves and our local church. Just as humans need that social connectedness as a part their well-being and wholeness, I believe the same holds for churches. Being part of MCC allows us to harness the energy of MCC and our rich cultures and diversity to build a future that fosters spiritual growth and responds to the evolving world around us. The plan I have for the MCC of the future, includes the denomination moving to become an intentional "resource hub" to put churches together and sharing their best practices.
- MCC provides practical functions, such as
  1. Licensing of clergy, which relieves the risk management burden for the local church.
  2. Providing continuing education for our clergy, career counseling, clergy support groups and specifically targeted retreats and conferences.
  3. Leadership certification for our laity around leadership certification (LEAD program)

In the spirit of honesty, there are churches for whom this will never be satisfactory and will want to go it alone or align differently, and that is okay. While it is hard to lose individuals and churches, we must allow this to happen and accept it with a sense of love and appreciation, always leaving the door open.

**Tony:** There has always been a number of independent churches dotting the Christian landscape. Some of these were probably previously tied to a denomination. If their decision to separate was based on a call from God and was discerned in community, it should be honored.

What churches lose in the process is what many of them really need: appropriate accountability. Accountability to a "higher authority" helps organizations maintain healthy boundaries and practices. It's not to say that independent churches have no accountability, but rather it shifts from a blend of external and internal accountability to primarily internal accountability. That's why even large, successful churches, like the Crystal Cathedral under Robert Schuller, make an intentional choice to be a part of a denomination.

From his study of denominations, Rev. Elder Don Eastman has shared with me that they serve two primary roles: to protect the clergy and to protect the congregation. Sometimes, it is to protect them from each other. Without some sort of denominational accountability, these essential parts of the system are difficult to manage when serious conflict or issues arise.

In our system, the disaffiliation process is clear. By following the course of action outlined in the MCC bylaws, it is my hope that a congregation will go through a healthy discernment process which includes clearly understanding what they will be losing should they choose the independent route.

**Cecilia:** Relationships only work if both sides can see a positive aspect for them. We can have a discussion with individual congregations and church leaders about what they need, as well as what they can offer. Sometimes, the relationship has broken down, or communication has stopped because of changes in leadership, structure etc. Sometimes, there is a gap in understanding between what the local church pastor expects as communication and engagement from the denomination and what is realistic. (There will be pastors out there who have congregants who “never” hear from their local church - apart from the call from the pastoral team, the card to say “We miss you at worship” etc : )

It may that we are able to work together on a project that is close to the heart and passion of that particular congregation. Perhaps the denomination can be the conduit to connect them with other churches/church leaders for mutual support. It may be all the church wants is to be recognized for the good that it does and that it upholds the values and mission of the wider denomination. Most folk like to have their successes celebrated and hardships acknowledged. Just having some simple pastoral contact may be a good beginning. Asking “What do you need?” and being honest about what the denomination can offer is a starting point for further discussion.

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**Question 2:** We have lost many clergy and churches - churches that have left MCC and churches that have closed. What is your retention plan or thoughts?

**Liz:** We will always have attrition in both our clergy and church ranks, which is actually healthy in any organization. We need to be very honest with ourselves that not every church or clergy person will be a good fit. We need to focus on building quality churches and aligned organizations vs. being focused on the quantity. If churches are struggling and closing, we need to ask the tough questions around, “why” and what would it take to retain and grow healthy churches. Given the very limited resources available, I think we need to take these on a case by case basis.

Today, in our current reality, I believe we must focus our energy on developing and growing healthy churches and aligned organizations.

**Tony:** The challenges you have raised in your statement and question are real. They are real throughout Christianity; in North America, over 4,000 churches are closing every year. Some can be attributed to the natural life cycle of people and organizations which is further exasperated by the shift in society to what some experts have termed a “post-Christian era.”

The fact that MCC is still attracting clergy from outside MCC should be promoted. New transfer clergy from other denominations are currently pastoring in several MCC churches. And we also continue to support new, emerging churches around the world, several of which have recently transitioned from emerging to affiliated status.

To retain churches and leaders we need to continue to improve our systems of support for both our clergy and local congregations. Support coupled with a renewed sense of purpose and identity would go a long way towards not only retaining existing clergy and churches, but in attracting new ones.

**Cecilia:** Often, we just haven’t had what we needed to keep a church open and the congregation, or the denomination have made the decision to close. I have certainly accompanied a few congregations along that road. Sometimes, it is just time for folk to move on in their own faith journey and MCC just isn’t best fit for them anymore. For clergy, there is also the practical aspect of wanting to earn a living from their call and the desire to respond to new challenges. It is always worth finding out why people and churches leave, so that we can learn from their experience and do better where we can.

Having a clear vision and mission which engages people and clear opportunities for them to get involved, both locally and at a denominational level, are attractive ways of helping folk to feel as though they belong. Providing support to clergy, so that they can grow personally and professionally within MCC, is really improving. Our OFLD offers a variety of channels for this and has just been awarded a very large grant to enable this work to develop further. We have MCC Oasis for individuals whose churches have closed, or who are not near any local MCC. This is an online community sharing their faith and getting support from MCC clergy. We can look at ways of making this option better known and connected early on in the process, if it looks likely that a church will close, so that congregants know that there is still a home for them in MCC.

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**Question 3:** It seems in many ways the "ideal" of a mid to large size church is shrinking. How do we address this challenge in 2020 and beyond?

**Liz:** I would challenge the idea of the ‘ideal’ size church being mid-to-large. In today’s world of “spiritual not religious” people, we need to rethink what it means to be church – is it a large group of folks worshipping together on Sundays or should we be approaching this in a different fashion? There is evidence today that large mega churches are seeing decline as well. We need to be focused on healthy churches and how connection is done. Large churches that can sustain themselves often develop smaller groups/cells where care and connection occurs which deserves review to see where a form of replication is may be appropriate. Our work on emerging ministries and different configurations of

“church” are methods already in place to address the idea of “quality” not “quantity” in our churches. Clearly, we need to look at different models for sustainability and growth in our churches that is not so “numbers” oriented.

I want to see us do the work to determine our target “market,” which will be different in different places, based on different demographics. Unlike previous generations, today the world consists of 5 generations: pre-Baby Boomers, Baby Boomers, Gen X, Gen Y (Millennials) and Gen Z. They are driven differently, and we can’t have a one-size fits all approach. I have learned in my years of management and leadership that what motivates and works for these groups is different and we must work through this. I spoke in the Meet the Candidates webinar about the need to address “ageism” and this is one element of that work.

In the webinars I also outlined four priorities for the Moderator and leadership team which are related to this challenge. One of the areas was creating advisory councils around various “isms” including ageism, colonialism, and racism. For these problems and needs, we need to employ “design thinking” methods and processes. For those not familiar with design thinking, it is an approach used extensively in business to do creative problem solving (aka outside the box thinking). It has a human-centric focus and is primarily concerned with the needs of people and creative solutions. The stages of design thinking are:

- 1) empathize (getting to know the user and their needs/wants)
- 2) look for patterns, inhibitors and what the big problem is to be solved
- 3) ideate (brainstorming on potential solutions)
- 4) prototype solutions and
- 5) test (try the prototype, evaluate, modify, etc.).

This is not a long drawn out process but rather done in short sprints, where it is ok to fail, learn from it and move to the next iteration.

**Tony:** That’s very true. The most significant loss in MCC’s (the denomination) worship attendance has been in our “mid-size” or “program size” churches. While working at the Office of Church and Ministry Development, we studied this challenge. Most of these congregations were unable to sustain the level of income needed to adequately staff a program size church. Obviously, there are no easy answers or quick fixes to this challenge.

In light of the shifts in the religious landscape, perhaps we would be better off focusing more on how to improve our churches’ ability to increase their missional impact. (Only 10% of all North American churches average more than 350 in worship attendance.) Our marriage to only measuring “inputs” (i.e. worship attendance and offerings) may need to be challenged and explored. We have no shortage of churches with less than 350 in average worship attendance that are having a significant impact in their congregation and community. This seems to beg for new ways to measure and evaluate ministry—ones that capture the vitality and vibrancy of a congregation’s missional influence and effectiveness.

**Cecilia:** Large to midsize MCC churches, as defined in US terms are not common in Europe. However, our ministry is still very much needed. In the UK, only 5% of the population attend church on a regular

basis <https://faithsurvey.co.uk/uk-christianity.html> In the national census in 2001 and 2011, there was a voluntary question about religion and many thousands of people responded in a campaign against this question by registering their religion as “Jedi Knight” (this really is not fake news! ), highlighting perhaps that religion is totally irrelevant to many folk here.

<https://www.theguardian.com/uk/2012/dec/11/census-data-religion-jedi-knights>

In the midst of all of this, a new movement has developed called “Sunday Assembly”, which has all the elements of a church service and community without any reference to God. A thoughtful talk or presentation, opportunities for mindfulness and reflection, some good communal singing and then a decent cup of tea and cake with friends. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sunday\\_Assembly](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sunday_Assembly) Throughout the UK, classes and retreats on mindfulness, yoga and other practices abound. Many people are passionate about justice issues, care about the environment and have questions about life and the world beyond them.

All this tells me that the need to belong, to be inspired, to be connected in authentic ways, to contribute to a greater good and have an inner “spiritual” life, however we might define it, are all part of being human. The challenge is finding ways that meet these needs and engage people – both old and new. There won’t be one clear answer, as we minister in so many different cultures and situations. The common denominator will be passionate, equipped and called leaders, clergy and lay, who are willing to step out into their communities, hear the need and start to respond to it. At a denominational level, we can explore what is working and learn from it, using that to resource more opportunities and really support those doing the ministry.

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**Question 4:** How does UFMCC recruit and retain clergy when many of our churches cannot afford full-time pastors?

**Liz:** This is certainly not an easy question to answer and given our financial realities at the local church level this is and will be a challenge. My observation is our clergy do this because it is a “call” not because of what we pay them. This is consistent with many studies on job satisfaction which indicate that individuals are not just driven just by wages. Neil Ducoff in his article, *Top 10 Reasons Why Great Employees Stay*, listed several reasons that I think are applicable here as well, including that their work has purpose and meaning, personal contribution makes a difference (the stronger the bond, the less likely people are to leave, they trust leadership, emotionally invested in their work and the culture is irreplaceable.)

My experience is that an important element of retaining talent is to have intentional leadership development. We need to engage our clergy and build their leadership and management skills. Another key area to explore is how to leverage our pool of clergy to help find ways to offer cost effective insurance and retirement benefit options that most churches can’t afford on their own. While the actual expense might remain with the church or clergy, if we can pool our numbers, we should be able to find tangible ways to reduce costs. This is an area we’d have a work group take this on quickly to begin finding solutions that benefit our clergy and churches.

**Tony:** Again, this is part of a larger trend. More and more clergy are pursuing the bi-vocational route. A couple of years ago, Rev. Dr. Kharma Amos invited me to present a workshop on “Leadership Development Made Easy” to a large gathering of clergy from a variety of denominations. (Most of whom felt called to work bi-vocationally.) While we need to continue to strive for our churches to be as healthy and vibrant as possible, we also need to continue to look for ways to support and encourage our bi-vocational pastors.

This needs to be augmented by continuing to lift-up programs like L.E.A.D. so that our bi-vocational pastors have support from skilled and trained laity. This can lessen the stress that too often contributes to burnout.

**Cecilia:** I believe that God will continue to call people to ordination, regardless of what our structure is. Our ordination process has already started to engage with individuals on this issue, so that there is a realistic expectation from those applying about the likelihood of not having a full time position. There is also a similar responsibility to look at what we can reasonably define as “church”. This may become quite a different entity over time. MCC believes in the priesthood of believers, so how do we equip and enable our lay people to answer their own call? Some people may not have felt able to answer their call, if there is a perception that only an ordained person can do certain tasks.

I didn’t become ordained for a very long time within MCC, partly because I could do so many things at a lay person – I was District Co-ordinator and Elder as a lay person. I also couldn’t see a place for my call. I didn’t want to pastor a local church and, at that time, there didn’t seem to be any other reason to become ordained. It was only when I realised that I did not want to back into secular work, and that God had a call for me, that I trained for ordination. I knew that if I stayed in the UK, I would certainly be a part-time pastor. I then did pastor a local church and loved it in many ways. Northern Lights MCC already had strong lay leadership, excellent lay preachers, leaders and celebrants when I got there. I preached once a month and also had some role in the service each Sunday. I used a weekly blog to focus on the church’s life, vision and mission. I gained greatly from hearing others preach, celebrate and lead. I think it was healthier for the congregation. It also meant that occasionally I was not on the worship rota at all and could fully experience worship in the way that congregation did. This may be a very different model than some of us are used to and it may not be appropriate for every church. It does offer more possibilities for churches where the pastor is part-time. It also embodies our value of the priesthood of all believers.

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**Question 5:** Have you done any contemplation or research on the differences in the ministry, structure, challenges, and impact of churches in urban vs rural contexts? What kinds of professional development will you be willing to engage in order to better understand those differences, and the

various differences in HOW church happens (i.e. house churches, online ministries, etc.) that our traditional brick-and-mortar and church growth in numbers expectations tend to dismiss?

**Liz:** As a life-long learner, I would want to continue to expand my knowledge base to learn more about this area of urban vs rural contexts.

Regarding the differences in “how” church happens, I am very encouraged by work that has been done in the area of emerging ministries to create different ways of doing and being church, since we need to reach people where they are located. Part of what I have laid out in my four priorities as the Moderator is that MCC needs to look differently in different places. This is an absolute strength of MCC versus other more traditional denominations. Traditional bricks and mortar churches and methodologies for measuring their success are not as relevant in today’s fast-paced and changing world. I see the use of technology to reach individuals globally (particularly virtual church) as a key area growth area and when done well can literally have far reaching impact. I am also very excited by the “new” ways of doing church that we are seeing spring up within MCC. This is a sweet spot for us, and I’m very encouraged by what we are seeing. Here are just a few examples of the creative, meeting people where they are, work being done around MCC to bring our message of love and inclusion in real, tangible ways to people: Open Table Dinner Church MCC in Cambridge, MA USA ( <http://opentabledinnerchurch.org/>), Church in Progress MCC in Auckland, New Zealand (<https://churchinprogressmcc.com/>), and Neema MCC in Mtito Andei, Kenya (<http://www.totalengagementconsulting.com/blog/latest-updates-kimer-kamba-vocational-center/>).

**Tony:** Let me start with the second part of your question first: I’m always reading new books that are seeking to make sense of the current challenging climate in Christianity (I would recommend *The Agile Church* by Dwight Zscheile, *Journey In the Wilderness* by Gil Rendle, and *Canoeing the Mountains* by Tod Bolsinger), and I would be more than open to engaging in any type of professional development that would better equip me to assist our churches to be innovative and more effective in pursuing their mission.

No one seems to know what the future church will look like, but we do know that this calls for us to be innovative and open to new forms of faith communities; It’s encouraging to see several of our MCC’s engaging and experimenting in non-traditional forms of being and doing church.

I don’t personally have a lot of experience with rural churches, but I would, again, be more than willing to learn in order to better understand the challenges within that particular context.

**Cecilia:** Reverend Elder Don Eastman once told me that a leader should spend a third of their time learning, so I would be delighted to research these and other questions about how we might serve in different types of communities around the world. There will already be churches, within and beyond MCC, who are successfully serving their local communities, whether rural or urban, and we can learn

from them. A key question here is how we measure “success”. There are qualitative and quantitative aspects to measuring this. Number of people attending is one thing, but folk if regularly go home from the worship service totally unchanged by their experience, or only attend to join in the latest church fight, then the attendance figures may not mean much! Finding out how people are growing in their faith, whether they feel as though they belong, if they would recommend their worshipping community to others, are examples of other measurements we could use to see how our ministry is changing the world, by changing lives.

## **Topic 2 – Global Considerations**

**Question 6:** There are several large countries outside the US like Brazil that have 200 million inhabitants and several large cities with over a million people. Yet in 7 years we have had only 1 new ICM in Brazil, ICM of Salvador (Bahia). We have a huge potential for growing the denomination in the country, but we need a greater presence and investment of the denomination in our country. What do candidates intend to do to influence the growth and expansion of more ICM congregations in Brazil?

**Liz:** The development and growth of healthy congregations is key to MCC’s survival. In Brazil we have certainly had a period of explosive growth in a relatively short period, but I agree we need to invest continued growth. One of my four priorities is to grow new leaders and support existing leaders in intentional ways, which holds true for ICM in Latin America as well as all MCC’s globally. I see huge potential in Brazil in supporting our Trans brothers and sisters and believe it is an area where we can continue to have tremendous influence and growth.

The current financial and staffing realities at a denominational level means we don’t have the resources to make this all happen and need to together problem solve how to do provide this support in different ways. As part of that we should be empowering our geographies (in this case Latin America and Brazil) to work with and assist each other. From a denominational level, we should continue to provide resourcing assistance by finding other churches and groups that can provide support to churches in Brazil and elsewhere. I believe decentralization and empowerment will be keys to spurring growth.

**Tony:** John Maxwell, a well-known teacher on leadership, says that “everything rises and falls on leadership.” (To me, leadership is about not about power, prestige, or position, it is about a devotion to a purpose that you cannot and will not let go of.) Developing and growing a leadership pipeline in these regions and countries with large populations is the key to increasing our presence and impact. This kind of effort would require a strong partnership between MCC and the current leadership in the aforementioned areas. One where we partner to develop culturally appropriate leadership recruiting, training and development resources. It’s important for us to embrace the fact that one size doesn’t fit all and tailor our leadership development plans to fit the context. In this type of model, leaders learn to become leaders of leaders, and leadership development is a priority.



New leadership will also need to be supported as they venture from the theoretical to the practical ministry of starting new churches (in forms that are culturally appropriate). An ongoing mentorship plan is vital if we are to truly assist our new leaders in the challenging work of planting and growing new communities of faith.

I also think we sometimes assume more financial resources are available in larger, urban areas, when that is often far from the truth. This challenges our capacity to find and secure the space needed for worship, teaching and fellowship. We may want to re-explore the model that was so successful in South Korea where the emphasis was on instituting small-group ministry to expand the opportunities for teaching and fellowship, while continuing to hold large worship celebrations. The beauty of the small-group model is the space already exists in people’s homes—and the supply is limitless and nurtures deep spiritual connections in “neighborhood” settings.

**Cecilia:** I would be interested to know more about the situation in Brazil, in order to be able to make good decisions about investment of resources. I will want to listen to our existing churches, church leaders and to our Ibero-American Elders, as well as doing some research myself. Finding, training and supporting new leaders will be key to any growth. We have the Garner Institute for this, which if it is working well, could a model for developing leaders in other places, such as Africa. If it is not working as well as it could be, we can look at how to improve it. Brazilian society is also changing, but life is still very hard and even dangerous for some in our community. I am sure that God has plans for ICM in Brazil. We just need to understand what they are and look at how best to respond to them.

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**Question 7:** What is the importance of Latino ministries within but mainly outside the US? What is the strategy to strengthen and incorporate the perspective of Latino communities to the denomination?

**Liz:** Serving the Latinx community is essential both within and outside of the US. With Latin America representing almost 6% of the world’s population with over 400M inhabitant there are untapped opportunities and potential for MCC to bring people to the wholeness of being. MCC has already invested and needs to identify the best practices we had in emerging and growing churches and provide that for replication in other parts of the world, with the applicable cultural differences recognized. MCC also answers a need, particularly the in the Trans-community in Brazil in a way mainstream Christianity does not and we need to lean in to that call.

According to the Pew Research Center within the US, young Latinx’s are a fast-growing population. MCC need to find ways, working with local churches and groups, to tap in to that market by understanding what their burning desire and question is. We can offer them something mainstream Christianity, especially Catholicism, does not - - we are the justice movement, we are the church that says the Table is open to ALL people to come as they are and believing as they day.

I've prioritized global understanding and decentralization as imperatives for moving MCC forward. While we currently have two Latinx Elders, I want our other Latinx leaders to be part of the council on global growth. We need to hear and learn from this community and empower these leaders.

**Tony:** The Apostle Paul's analogy of the body in 1 Corinthians, Chapter 12, underscores the value and importance of all of the differing parts of the body. Our Latinx siblings are crucial to our having a healthy "body." Our global challenge many not be primarily one of resources, but a relational one. How do we as people who place such a high value on inclusion and diversity, truly live and minister together as equals? What ways are we being called to let go of our present ways of doing and being church in order to share power and influence, and do so in ways that builds each other up and makes the body stronger? I purposely pose these as questions because to offer closed statements would be void of the very voices we need to hear and include in order to respond authentically and justly.

**Cecilia:** I believe, as MCC believes, in the priesthood of all believers. I passionately believe that we are all gifted and called. Therefore, if we are not actively equipping and empowering our Latina/Latino members and communities, then we are missing out one of the colours of God's rainbow people.

I look forward to learning more about what Latino ministries we have and what can be done to strengthen them. I am not as familiar with some of the specific issues and dynamics as my American colleagues. However, I do know about racism, disempowerment and the feeling of being not being valued or heard, through listening to other communities. I would use that knowledge to develop my understanding of the issues that you raise and work with you to develop appropriate strategies.

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**NOTE:** For questions 8-14, the order of the answers is Cecilia - Liz – Tony

**Question 8:** What concrete proposals do the candidates and the candidate have for those who are black, Latin American, poor and have to work doubled to support themselves and keep the Church open? What is your awareness what it is to be ICM outside the United States, especially below the equator?

**Cecilia:** I worked with our churches in South Africa for four years as Regional Elder. I spent a month at a time in the country on each visit and learned greatly from our congregations and leaders there. We had active four congregations, which were all different, including in their racial mix. None of our pastors there were paid full time and all had secular work. I saw how HIV/AIDS greatly impacted the country, and especially the Black congregations. People were still very silent on the issue and our churches did great work in talking about HIV/AIDS and providing practical and emotional support to those who are affected. I saw the levels of economic disparity and saw how racism still has a huge legacy there. I saw

and experienced for myself how violence has become an everyday part of life, driven partly by poverty, but by other issues too – for example, lesbians subjected to rape to “cure” them of their homosexuality.

In the midst of all this, I witnessed amazing worship, strong fellowship, powerful preaching and prayer, and outstanding justice work. I never knew I would be so at home, singing badly in Zulu! I worked hard to stay in close contact with all the church leaders, mentoring them and providing appropriate resources. We held a Regional Conference in Cape Town, which meant that the European MCCs really committed themselves to a great deal of expense in order to fully be connected with their African siblings. The conference planning team was made up of people from Europe and from South Africa. They did a brilliant job! From the conference, partnerships between churches and individuals were developed which enriched both congregations. I also used my regional budget to send more experienced MCCers from Europe to South Africa to provide training, as well as offering training myself, particularly focusing on developing leadership.

In terms of concrete proposals, I would use my learning from my time working in South Africa, to help me to understand the issues faced by our congregations in Latin America and work with our congregations there to find realistic and sustainable solutions.

**Liz:** A key imperative and priority, I have set forward if elected Moderator is to ensure we address “ism’s,” including racism and post-colonialism. Overcoming years of oppression and the associated power dynamics is not something that can be addressed overnight but we have to start, and I think it begins by talking and listening. I’ve spent years promoting diversity and inclusion but am also aware that I am a white woman and, as such, have not experienced what others, particularly people of color, have and are experiencing. If we are to be the people, we proclaim we are, we MUST have these discussions, and we cannot begin to heal without the discussions and open hearts and minds

I do have a proposal for us as a start to address these issues together. Let’s have, what they call in computer companies, a “hackathon!” For those not familiar with the term, a hackathon is an event where a large number of computer programmers and software designers collaborate on a project for a short period of time. For MCC, I think we connect globally on a collaborative project (in this case around this issue) and share ideas, make connections, begin to solve real problems together.

Finally, it is my commitment to all MCCer’s that as Moderator, my first order of business will be to work with you to have these discussions and to invite us all to the table to work on solving them.

**Tony:** The reality is “double” work is not limited to churches below the equator. Having part-time, and bi-vocational, pastoral leaders is also becoming more and more the norm in other parts of the world. In a previous question I expounded on the importance of developing indigenous leadership. Please note that when I share about leadership, I’m talking about both lay and clergy. If we are to have vibrant communities of faith, we must also have vibrant leadership development of our laity. This is particularly essential when our pastoral leadership is part-time (paid or unpaid). The work of the church is too important and expansive to put the bulk of the responsibility on any single leader. What are the cultural and contextual barriers to living out our value and calling to be a “priesthood of all believers”? Let’s

continue to look for viable ways to share and grow our ministries by supporting and equipping our laity to assist in the work God is calling us to do around the world.

I've had the privilege and pleasure of visiting several of our churches below the equator. This experience is helpful when considering ways in which we can together imagine the future. One of the learnings I had was that there is a deep hunger to be MCC/ICM in many parts of our world. The liberation and freedom that come from being able to integrate one's spirituality and sexuality is a gift MCC/ICM uniquely brings to our world. My hope and prayer is that the Holy Spirit will continue to lead and guide us in new ways to increase our missional impact in all parts of the world.

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**Question 9:** While in Africa, I heard a lot about feeling disconnected from MCC. How will you make sure the voice of churches outside the USA are heard and they feel connected to UFMCC?

**Cecilia:** I think it is fair to say that some churches and church leaders feel disconnected from MCC, even if they are based in the USA. There is something about how we communicate and connect with each other that urgently needs our attention.

On the particular question of how we connect with churches outside the USA, there are several aspects to this. When we don't see our experience reflected back at us, we may not feel that we belong. For example, one basic thing is to measure what stories we are sharing as MCC. How many MCC news stories are from outside the USA? How many would we expect there to be, based on the spread of our churches? Once we know this, we can improve our output. That also requires us to be able to find the stories from our churches and use them.

There is a challenge around representation on bodies, such as the Governing Board, or the nominating committees. There may be only one church in a whole country, or time differences and access to the internet may be barriers to some people being able to get involved. This can also lead to the same few people being asked to be involved in a project, regardless of whether they are actually the best person to do the work. I don't have an immediate solution to this, but I am committed to finding ways of making us more diverse in many ways.

When I served on the Board of Elders, I put forward the idea of us having official languages and developed the proposal to make it happen. We can look at other protocols, such as the way we write the date, so that it makes sense to everyone. 12/02/19 is near Christmas in the US, but mid February in the UK! At the moment, all our General Conferences take place in North America. I know that this can be expensive, even for US congregations. However, are we willing to take a chance and have a General Conference somewhere else in the world? That means some churches really having to work hard to send delegates, but it sends the message that we are not just US based. Some of these things may seem small, but when you don't see yourself and your culture reflected in the body of Christ, it can hard to feel as though you belong.

**Liz:** One of the key priorities I've laid out is around the global nature of MCC. Having spent many years managing and leading global teams, I know the importance of putting aside the US-centric, "we know it all" point of view and embracing others in order to effectively problem solve. There would be an Advisory Council with representatives from around the world that would be tasked with working through inclusion of all voices. To be successful we must lean in to each other and capitalize on one of our biggest gifts – one size MCC does not fit all MCC's. Our mission and vision bind us as a church and movement but what makes us most powerful is that we can look and be different in all parts of the world. It is one of our greatest assets and is a differentiator from mainline churches! I also want us to dust off the International Task Force report and have the Advisory Council look at it and let's go find the nuggets and implement them now .

**Tony:** One of the keys to connection is feeling and being included in meaningful conversations and decision-making. Having our future discernment and decision-making processes be effective in the future will require strengthening our relationships and making sure all voices are included, heard and valued. Research shows that the more top-down a major decision is the less likely it is to succeed. Grassroots participation, or discernment and decisions made with and by the body, is essential to our living into our calling to be a 21<sup>st</sup> Century movement. All parts of the body must be included if we are to experience the richness that our diversity brings to our movement. As one of my colleagues stated on a recent webinar, we have had some prior success in taking on large, and small, issues utilizing a process that invites and includes the vast majority of voices in MCC. Let's build on that success and continue to work intentionally to grow in relationship with one another through inclusive, grassroots participation in our discernment and decision-making.

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**Question 10:** What is the role/possibilities of a postcolonial perspective/theology with a Moderator leading from the "Global North?"

**Cecilia:** As a British person, I am painfully aware of my country's colonial past and am repeatedly saddened and horrified, as I visit countries where our "Empire" made its presence felt. There is always more to learn about the dynamics of white privilege and how we can unconsciously be informed by this. As mentioned previously, I have some experience of working with our churches in South Africa and have also spent 3 months volunteering in Swaziland. These experiences do not make me an "expert", but rather give me some insight into life beyond Northern Europe.

I have studied Liberation Theology and see how we live it out as MCC in many ways. There is much more we can do to address racism and postcolonialism within our own churches and communities. Providing a theological framework and resources for this will help, as well as training church leaders, who might not feel comfortable or confident to lead these discussions in their churches. As part of our visioning process for the future of MCC, we can look at how we address these issues within our own structures

and systems. As Moderator, I would be very committed to making sure this happens and will actively listen to those who can help us do this important work. Your stories matter to me.

**Liz:** This is an interesting and multi-layered question and as written is theological in nature and would be best left to MCC's theologians, who come from around the world and bring different perspectives.

There is interest to me in this question as it relates to our being a denomination that is primarily located in and has long-established churches in the Global North. Many of our emerging churches outside the US are located in Global South areas, which will bring some interesting opportunities and challenges. Our theological background is mostly founded in Western Christianity (Global North), so finding ways to relate and empower our churches located in the Global South could present interesting challenges. But, as I've noted in questions above, I am fully supportive of and encouraging our decentralization of the power structure and the need for a global Advisory Council to provide solutions to further empower churches at a more local level.

**Tony:** I think the possibilities are real. However, it will take time as most culture shifts do. If we are truly committed to a more egalitarian way of being together, this is not optional. I would see the Moderator's global presence as more of a shared role. There are leaders (and leaders yet to be empowered) that are much more experienced and knowledgeable about issues and circumstances in their own country than one from the "Global North." I think the Moderator's role is to lift up and support their voices, to stand beside, or even behind them, not in front of them. I believe that the Moderator, and MCC's voice, will have more authenticity and impact if we were to follow this model. This is not an abdication of responsibility, but a liberation of our global voices.

Another part of my response goes back to some of what I wrote in the previous question. While we need and must have a shared understanding of what it is God has called our 220 churches to do and be together, that we could not accomplish alone, there is also the need for clear objectives at the local and regional levels. This is not a one size fits all proposition. The resources and issues in one part of the world can be very different in another part. How do we empower decision-making to happen in this way? As long as most decisions are made "at the top," we will miss the nuances and passion that comes when we are given the opportunity for input and are invested in the decisions and outcomes. There are many existing models that would be a fit for a 21<sup>st</sup> Century movement that include regional and local decision-making, particularly around the development and allocation of resources; the model used by the Vineyard churches is one that would be interesting for us to explore. Our current system and structure, including our bylaws, push us towards a centralized decision-making model. The process of discerning how to best organize ourselves to be a vibrant 21 Century movement calls for a grassroots process that is supported and encouraged by MCC leadership bodies.

### **Topic 3 – Denominational Connection and Culture**

**Question 11:** I appreciate that all 3 candidates are referencing "a bottom-up" culture, (vs top-down) --- anyone want to offer specifics? (how that would look?) How do you envision more of a grassroots infrastructure of MCC to empower and engage the global movement of MCC?

**Cecilia:** No structure is perfect, but we can learn from what we have done before. I served as European District Coordinator for five years and Regional Elder for 4 years. Districts provided local ownership of decision-making and representation at General Council, through District Coordinators. Resourcing was not equal and many churches did not belong to a District, so had limited or no voice. Putting all churches in Regions gave better representation for all and better resourcing, but the structure was too big.

We need to have a simpler structure, with fewer people in it, which will provide representation and resources for local churches. Our current structure does not offer clear pathways for local congregations to make their voices heard and be represented when denominational decisions are being made. Any new structure needs to have this. As MCC is registered in the USA as a legal entity, there may well be part of the structure that has to be in compliance with this. This would perhaps be our administrative/governance body. Our Elders are a great part of our heritage. I am uncertain at the moment how they might sit within any new structure. It is important for us to have wise spiritual leaders. I anticipate that we will continue to have paid staff providing resources to local churches.

**Liz:** As I envision MCC of the future, I see a much more decentralized organization, where most decision-making is done at the local church or area level. The role of the denomination shifts to be a resourcing agent for local churches. We would continue to provide education, certification and licensing, and the denomination would then be responsible to act as a resourcing agent for local churches, gathering best practices to share among the churches, etc. They would continue to have judiciary and governance responsibilities. The new structure should have a minimal staffing and infrastructure requirements and push much more decision-making out of the hands of the denomination and empower individuals at their level where things actually happen.

**Tony:** I think that my response to the previous question addresses, at least in part, the issues raised in this one. To be clear, I don't believe that we can stay the same—and live into being a 21<sup>st</sup> Century movement. I have intentionally used the verbiage "21 Century movement" instead of "denomination" to underscore how I envision our future. Simply becoming a smaller version of what we are now is also not the answer. We will need to grab onto the Holy Spirit and embrace the "new thing" that God is calling MCC to do and be. And in doing so we will also need to be generous with our grace. Change doesn't come without a cost. There will be grief and all of the emotions that accompany it, so tending to our relationships and expending the necessary time and energy to process our grief will be critical in our capacity to move forward in a new and healthy way.

To go into uncharted territory will require lots of grace—and trust. It also requires new learning together. It also requires us to give equal time to tasks and nurturing our relationships. This is hard,

challenging work that if done right, will include impassioned differences of opinions and, of course, not everyone will be happy with the outcomes. (A surefire way to fail, though is to try and please everyone.) There will be friction and we will need to lean into our faith and spiritual practices, both individually and corporately, in order to get to our Promised Land.

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**Question 12:** Trust has been named as an issue. What would you do to create vehicles for and increase communication between members of the clergy; between clergy and laity; between the membership and leadership, especially considering our finances and global locations?

**Cecilia:** It was been wonderful to see how many people have joined us on the Moderator candidate webinars. Organising online discussions about different issues or areas of ministry will help us to learn from each other and also focus on what we have in common. Face to face settings, such as network gatherings are good places to have respectful Holy Conversations about matters which are important to us. In both instances, we can use techniques, like “the goldfish bowl”, where some folk discuss a topic and other folk listen, then give feedback about what they have learned. Somewhere on the internet, there must an app or something that would be the online equivalent of post-it notes or a whiteboard, where people could pop ideas and find other people to work with on it. Surveys work well, if we want to collect opinions and information, as long as we share the results and talk about what we are going to do next with the feedback.

There is something very powerful about praying together. I love the weekly Council of Elders Prayer link! It connects me with MCCers all over the world and shows the beautiful diversity of our theology. We could set up some intentional prayer partnerships, perhaps between a lay person and a clergyperson, from different churches or different even countries. There could be an initial commitment to meet weekly for 6 weeks (perhaps during Lent), spend time sharing about their faith journey and their life, then time in prayer.

**Liz:** Trust is basic foundation upon which all the work we can and do begins. Communications, integrity and trust go together, and I proposed creating advisory councils, which would be meant bring together disparate individuals from different parts of MCC to answer some of our more burning issues. We need to create these opportunities for care and connection - - this needs to come from all areas, not just from the Moderator - - and to enter in to sacred space to have the tough discussions. I am committed to transparency at all levels. Part of how I have built both my managerial and leadership expertise was by listening to people, particularly those with disparate viewpoints and allowing others to ideate and bring forward ideas. We then “try them on” and if they work, great and if we fail, that is fine, we need to learn from the failure and move forward.

This will take time, intentionality and courage on all our parts as there is no one quick fix, but it is a starting point for rebuilding trust. I will also commit to host once a month “open” calls through June 2020, where people can get together, ask questions and ideate on various topics. One of my major observations about the breakdown in trust over the past few years was the lack of communication and



transparency, which I personally experienced as it relates to MCC's financial challenges. We, each of us, will need to collectively do this work, lay and clergy, members of local churches, denominational leaders, elders, geographically and racially diverse groups, etc. It will take each of us working together to turn the ship around. I also know that as we do this and start to implement programs designed to answer our burning questions and issues, people will start to believe, and momentum can be restored. This will become the new self-fulfilling prophesy!

**Tony:** Thank you. This is a very good and interesting question. It begs us to evaluate and discern our current practices. We have no shortage of vehicles for communication, yet they appear to be inadequate. And, truth be told, there's nothing in our polity or system that would restrict us from establishing more groups, cohorts, etc., in order to facilitate more frequent and improved communication. For example, who should be responsible for increasing communication between clergy and laity? Is that the sole function of denominational leadership? Or is that something that could be a shared responsibility? Having meaningful and frequent communication is essential to rebuilding and maintaining trust throughout our fellowship.

While participating in a course offered by the Lily School of Philanthropy (Indiana University, USA), the professors underscored the importance of several key components that are necessary for organizational vitality and trust. These included, "leadership," "institutional clarity," "organizational readiness" and "best practices." Without going into detail about each of these components, it's clear that you must have all of them in place in order to have missional success. What if we were to more intentionally focus on communicating our work related to each of these areas? How might that benefit our movement in terms of both vitality and trust?

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**Question 13:** You have all mentioned trust work in the short-term. What is your long-term vision for UFMCC?

**Cecilia:** A question to ask ourselves is "In 10 years' time, what will MCC have done to change the world?"

Our local churches are changing lives on a daily basis by their care, their justice work, their worship and witness. My vision for MCC is that we continue to reach out to the margins, to those who do not have voice and raise them up. That means that we may grow more in some countries than others. We may take a risk and decide to focus our energy on a smaller number of settings, rather than reaching out to the whole world. We may choose to have a much looser, more flexible approach to what is church, and what it means to be part of MCC, although we will remain true to our core values and vision. We will have a denominational structure which is "fit for purpose" and can readily adapt to emerging need. We will have strong partnerships with other organisations and between churches within and beyond MCC, so that we can maximise our impact, especially in justice work. We will have a culture of generosity and abundance, where we see possibility and growth, rather than scarcity and lack. We will be at the forefront of theological discourse, based on our lived-out reality and seeing the Divine in all places and

in all people. We will fully embrace our diversity and will have boldly addressed the different -isms that can stop us seeing the value and potential in each other. We will be the embodiment of Christ in the world and the power of the Spirit will be evident in us and through us.

**Liz:** MCC is needed more than ever given the geopolitical climate we live in which is filled with rhetoric of hate, distrust and misogyny brought about by power. My long-term vision for MCC is related to Rev. Dr. James Forbes' question at the Chicago General Conference, where he asked, "what is the question for which MCC is the answer?" We, MCC, have the call to be the answer to all the rhetoric, a place where all are welcomed to God's table in the wholeness of who God created them to be. This ability to be our authentic selves, fully integrated spiritually and sexually, set MCC apart from any other faith group. I see this as being lived out differently in different parts of the world or based upon different affinity groups, but what binds us is the invitation to the Open Table and that is uniquely MCC.

**Tony:** Vision casting, in its most effective form, comes from listening to the hearts and passion of the people and restating, repetitively, their hopes and dreams in concise and inspiring words. Vision casting should unite and motivate an organization or movement to go further than it believed possible.

With that said, I do have some personal hopes and dreams for our future together. Our current MCC Vision statement includes the words, "...unfinished calling...prophetic destiny..." To me, until we have shared the message God has uniquely given us to share, which is "anchored in the liberating Gospel of Jesus Christ," we are far from done. Let me be clear that I'm not talking about trying to convert the world to Christianity. I believe there are many paths to God and Christianity is one of those paths. Part of our unfinished calling and prophetic destiny is to show the world that God is bigger than any one religion or set of beliefs, and that we can co-exist in relationships that reflect our shared values of love, dignity and respect. We are called to model for the world that we are not in competition with each other but are committed to a common vision that includes living by the Golden Rule and the betterment of humankind.

Motivating and inspiring starts on day one of this new era in MCC. Spell out the current reality and then expound on our strengths and the possibilities for a bold, transformational future that only we are uniquely positioned to accomplish with God.

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**Question 14:** It has been very difficult and challenging to get the Working Groups (Advisory Councils) and the ITF Report back in motion. How will you inspire people to be willing to participate in this work?

**Cecilia:** Too often, we ask people to take on enormous tasks with little or no resources to undertake the work. (The Moderator Nominating Committee paid for its own face to face meeting, for example). There has to be a better way of finding even a small budget for this work, if we think that it is important enough. Having a clear sense of purpose and a time limited commitment both help people to

understand what they are signing up for. It is important also to show people that their work is valued and how it will be used. We have had some good successes, such as the team that worked on the Statement of Faith. It is worth looking at why that team was able to work so well, and other successes, in order to do better with other projects in the future.

**Liz:** I believe people are just waiting for the new Moderator and the new Governing Board to be in place. Some will be watching with open arms and others with clenched fists, but I know no one wants MCC to fail – our mission is too important. Inspiration comes from invitation and I will invite people to be part of the solution... my commitment is to practice the design thinking I spoke about in a previous question. This will not be about talk, talk, talk, but rather talk, listen, create ideas and solutions to implement and then go implement. I think actually taking action/movement, even if an idea fails, will inspire people.

**Tony:** When a team or other group appears to be uninspired, there's usually a challenge that needs to be addressed around the purpose and working approach of the team or group. I think a starting place is to go back to the purpose of these groups (or councils) and allowing the team to discern whether this is something that they are still passionate about. If so, what in our system is stonewalling that passion? Is it that they are passionate about their work, but don't feel valued and heard? Another factor contributing to the lack of participation may be related to our issues around identity and mission clarity. We all want and need to know how we fit into the bigger picture of the organization. If we're clear about mission and identity it is much easier to see how your role contributes to the organization's purpose and accomplishments.

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**NOTE:** For questions 15 - 21, the order of the answers is Tony - Cecilia - Liz

**Question 15:** MCC is sometimes seen as "The Gay and Lesbian Church" by those outside MCC and sometimes some within MCC...is there space or means of growing or reframing the meaning of MCC by those with different identities (e.g. transgender, bisexual, asexual, or heterosexual allies)?

**Tony:** The question reminds me of one that Jesus asked his disciples, "Who do you say I am?" The disciples all responded to Jesus' identity question with different answers. My guess is if you asked different people "who" MCC is, we would also receive a variety of answers. Questions around our identity and getting missional clarity are as urgent as our need to rebuild trust. Again, these types of questions are best responded to through a grassroots discernment process. The possibilities are endless in terms of growing or reframing MCC's identity. There's value in allowing our past to inform our identity; it's part of who we are and why we are here today. Yet, informing is different than dictating. To be an effective 21<sup>st</sup> Century movement, we will want and need to be clear about our identity. My sense is that our MCC Core Values, along with the new Statement of Faith, will be important and informative pieces to our identity puzzle.

**Cecilia:** When people say that to me, I remind them that we are first and foremost “Christian Church”. Rather than “Gay and Lesbian”, I think of us as “Queer church”, although I know this word does not sit well with everyone. There are so many churches that heterosexuals could go to, so any allies who choose to be part of MCC are “queer” in making that choice (In UK English, queer also has the connotation of being odd or different, as in “There’s none so queer as folk”.) As we continue to grow in our diversity, there will be a change of perception, but our shorthand “brand” may still be the Lesbian and Gay Church for some, even though we are much more than that. We can help to change perception by talking about our diversity and by having leadership on all levels that reflects that.

**Liz:** Absolutely. Our roots have been as the “gay and lesbian church’ but it is only one facet of who we are and what we have become. We are the only church and movement where all people are invited to come and experience God with their whole, authentic selves. In other denominations, people have to hide and lie or be lied to. What do I mean? Think about all the churches who say they are “open and affirming.” That by implication means there was something wrong before that they are now evolving to – not so with MCC. From our first days we were there for ALL people to come just as they are and believing as they do. Think about the denominations where people still have to lie about who they are, such as a straight person having an affair or a gay clergy member who while “welcomed and affirmed” still has to practice celibacy, -they cannot bring all of their selves to the table. We invite and minister with and to all people, no questions asked. We cry for and out about our friends, families, allies and those who have yet to meet who are oppressed, hidden and in the margins. We must continue to open and widen the aperture for our trans, bi, asexual and hetero allies. Imagine harnessing the power of MCC to take action about the atrocities of our Trans brothers and sisters in places like Brazil. This was a long way to say, we have a much larger community that we serve, we must be mindful to not be like other groups who then become the oppressors, rather we must be the radically inclusive church Jesus has called us to be for all people.

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**Question 16:** If representation and voice are seen as important factors by some in MCC, how do we balance any priority of equity in a way that is validating for the most possible people?

**Tony:** One of our challenges is to discern what gaps exist between our lived values and our stated core values. One is reality, the other is often aspirational. While we all share the responsibility of gracefully recognizing and lifting up those perceived or real gaps, it is incumbent upon the leadership to ensure a process is developed to address the gaps that we agree need our attention. Our values underscore and guide how we are to be in relationship with each other and have a significant role in ensuring equity and validation for the most possible people. This is important work that has major implications for rebuilding trust.

**Cecilia:** When the denomination used to send out a local church survey, I was always a little uneasy about completing it. It asked about different sexual identities and ethnicities within the congregation, among other things. I didn't like to make assumptions about the sexuality of others. However, if I didn't complete and return the survey, this also meant that it was hard for MCC to have an accurate picture of who we are and who we serve. If we don't have this information, it makes it more difficult to ensure that there is equity of representation. We also need to balance equity of representation with ability. For example, we want a diverse and appropriately skilled Governing Board. Having many different channels through which people can participate will help us to hear from the greatest number of voices. Where we are lacking in diversity, we can look at examples of good practice in other organisations, to see how they addressed this to build capacity and encourage participation.

**Liz:** Providing safe space where we agree to honor each other and listen to the "truth" that others bring is an important first step. I have found that some of my most profound learning experiences have occurred when I have been participated in bringing together disparate voices, who are willing to express their truths, hopes, and struggles. This requires courage and vulnerability and can lead to amazing understanding and clarity.

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**Question 17:** In light of ongoing budget shortfalls, do you think that the current structure of the denomination/movement is sustainable? Do you have a vision for a different one?

**Tony:** No. I don't believe our current structure is sustainable. (Just look at the January 2019 Profit and Loss Statement on MCC's website.) While I appreciate the work of the Governing Board and believe they are doing their best to address the financial issues, they are also faced with a system and structure that is not sustainable. The truth is the model has not been sustainable for several years. The current structure was adopted in 2010 at the General Conference in Acapulco, Mexico. From 2010 to 2016, MCC's total worship attendance has declined by almost 50% according to the numbers reported; (from approximately 620,000 down to 346,000). In some ways, we are still structured like a Walmart, but the reality is we're more 7-11, convenience store, sized. The bylaws require much of our current way of operating and it is time to ask the Spirit to guide us to a more viable model for our movement.

My hope is that through a thorough process, we can position ourselves to be a 21<sup>st</sup> Century movement that goes beyond sustainable to thriving and vibrant. In our rapidly changing world, we need to either avoid getting married to any one system or structure or find one that is nimble enough to change with the times. Again, this is no simple or easy task. As a matter of fact, I would be skeptical of any type of quick fix offered. To address adaptive challenges, and this is one, requires new learning together. Adaptive work also entails a different style of leadership, one that facilitates the process and is skilled in adaptive leadership, listening, convening, and consensus building.

**Cecilia:** Our current structure is not working well for us. We have to develop our vision and then have a structure that is appropriate for what we want to do over the next few years. We may choose to have a 6 or 10 year vision, and have a 3 year strategic plan, which we can adjust quickly as the world changes. Our structure will therefore have to be flexible too. Any structure will need to resource local churches effectively and also provide clear means of communication, so that churches and church leaders can be readily involved in decision-making. There has to be clear lines of accountability and responsibility, so that everyone knows and understands who is responsible for what. There also needs to be good communication between the different parts of our structure, so we don't waste energy replicating work or have issues fall between the cracks.

**Liz:** Our current structure is not viable in the long-term given the financial realities and changing religious landscape. We need to take bold actions. Having managed direct profit and loss responsibility for business units from \$1-2M to \$400M, where I've had to greatly reduce cost, I have learned to think differently about structures and strictures. I see us re-evaluating the mission and purpose of the denominational headquarters team and every action we take must be seen through a lens of does it support the local church and/or does it expand our message and vision to the outside community. Having spent over 15 years managing transition and transformation activities with large clients and affected personnel, I recognize that some find this uncomfortable, but I'd say that to not change is not just uncomfortable, but it can suck the air out of you.

I think we must move to a smaller staff, who are dedicated "resourcing" churches, gathering best practices from local churches which can be shared across the churches. The other major role would be in the area of communications and getting our message out externally, as we are unique in our prophetic call and commitment to issues of justice.

## **Topic 4: Justice Issues**

**Question 18:** How will you engage and lead the denomination in intersectional justice work?

**Tony:** If the denomination goes through a process that leads to a leaner, less centralized system, we will need to find new, creative ways to do the work that was often done by staff. One way in which we can do that is by creating synergy between the Global Justice Institute (GJI) and MCC. While the GJI is already part of MCC, we often don't take advantage of the opportunities to engage in the work that GJI highlights in their communications. Having a clearer working relationship would benefit all parties, including those who need our support and assistance.

Two other points: first, there should be some justice goal that's specific and engaging enough that all of our 220 churches could get behind it. Having a shared goal of this type will also enhance our missional clarity and identity. Second, it seems reasonable that certain geographical areas would also want to develop a shared justice goal. For example, if there's legislation in Florida that is abhorrent to our values and purpose, then why would the Florida MCC's not work together to fight said legislation? The same

goes for countries and regions. Together we accomplish things that we could not do alone; let's maximize what God has already given us for the greatest good.

**Cecilia:** As Moderator, I would use sermons, blogs and other means of communication to explore this issue. I would also highlight examples of good practice that I find in our denomination and beyond. Many MCCers are already engaged in this justice work, so we can draw on their experience and wisdom. We have the Sacred Space Online Learning facility (SSOL) <https://ofld.mccchurch.org/online-learning/ssol/>, which would be a great vehicle for local churches and church leaders to share their experiences and learn from each other. This may also be a good way of sharing relevant resources for different countries around the world. There would be something powerful about the same article or book being read and discussed across the whole denomination, with insights being fed back into a central place and shared. This may increase our understanding of how different issues play out around the world. I would certainly be interested in being engaged in something like that.

**Liz:** As the Moderator I would look to first give voice to those who are experiencing this systemic oppression. We are broken, but I have great faith that together with intentionality, we can begin to mend and heal, becoming more attuned to each other and the world. I've mentioned Advisory Councils which would provide first steps in addressing the intersectionality experienced within our denomination.

Externally, we need to reclaim our voice in this area, and I look forward to working with the Rev Pat Bumgardner and the Global Justice Institute, as well as national and international leaders and groups with whom MCC has established relationships.

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**Question 19:** The Latin reality is especially cruel to trans women. We have daily challenges, including our physical security. Many of us live in underemployment or the sex market. They are lives getting lost with the fundamentalist discourse. What change in this scenario can ICM cause?

**Tony:** ICM has the opportunity and responsibility to work to change these cruel realities. MCC has already influenced societies in differing parts of the world by serving as a harbinger of acceptance for LGBT individuals. The work is far from done, but we have shown what a small number of passionate people can do if they are committed to change. We start by continuing to share our affirming message of the inclusive Gospel and God's love for all people. As family and friends learn about our message and work, they, too, are very often changed. It's a process...that needs nurture and hard work to be effective. And throughout the process we as people of faith, are called to be the voices of hope for all those that are hurting, especially the marginalized. As we combine this with our justice work, ICM has unlimited potential to help create a more just and safer world for everyone.

**Cecilia:** Our ICMs can provide a safe space for trans women. They may also be able to help with issues such as housing or employment. The church I served has a particular outreach to LGBT asylum seekers

and the congregation provided a lot of practical, as well as emotional support. When we support individuals, they grow stronger to fight back at injustice on a daily basis. They also have a place to rest and recover. As a denomination, we can work for justice, alongside other organisations, including the MCC Global Justice Institute.

**Liz:** We must have the courage to say, “no more!” It can’t just be a few leaders in Latin America that say this, it must come from all parts of MCC. We need to exert political pressure as well as stand up with and for our Trans brothers and sisters. We need to be visible and proclaim what Jesus really taught (not what the evangelicals are saying) and change hearts one at a time. I would also like to engage the Global Justice Institute and some of their contacts in to this discussion. If you agree with me on what question MCC is the answer to, you will raise your voice with me.

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**Question 20:** Have any of the Moderator candidates thought about the critical role we may be able to play with LGBT Elderly? Could we, as a denomination, create funding or programming to educate convalescent homes, rehab centers, assisted living, etc?

**Tony:** We can certainly play an important role in the life of our elderly LGBT siblings. What is it that we have to offer that no one else does? Could we be a movement that goes beyond talking about valuing our seniors, to one that actually does it intentionally in ways that are life-affirming?

Some of our most vibrant churches are engaged in specific ministries that attract and retain elderly LGBT people. All of our churches could learn from their example and witness.

The reality is that in many parts of the world, there are existing organizations that specialize in the types of services for LGBT elderly you listed. What would it look like for us to explore partnerships with these organizations? I’m sure spiritual support and guidance are needed wherever our LGBT elders live, particularly those who are isolated in nursing homes and hospices. I’m also certain that our MCC Chaplains could educate us on the felt and real needs of LGBT seniors. We are grateful for their life-giving ministry and need to find ways for them to share their experience and wisdom with the body, so we can better serve our LGBT elderly.

**Cecilia:** There have long been jokes about an MCC retirement home, with all its potential eccentricities! Provision in older age is certainly an important issue. It would be a great opportunity for local churches to engage more in their communities, as consultants to such facilities. It may even be a source of revenue if a fee was charged for the time and expertise offered. There may well be MCC people who are already doing this and may have resources to share with their colleagues. At a denominational level, there may be possibilities for partnership with other organisations and ways of educating and influencing decision-making through those channels.



**Liz:** As an MCCer who lives in Florida I am very aware of this concern, in fact, the average age of the town where my home church is located is 68. There are certainly many opportunities and possibilities and it is an area that the Advisory Council on “ageism” may be able to look at it (this is one of the “ism” Advisory Councils I have mentioned previously). In the meantime, many MCC’s are partnering with local groups to help sensitize staff in nursing homes around the needs of our LGBTQ community. I would ask OFLD to take a leadership role in gathering, if they have not already, some of the practices already in place in churches to share with others.

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**Question 21:** Do any of the candidates have experience or thoughts about commitment to mental health in the church?

**Tony:** There’s research that shows the LGBT community is disproportionately impacted by mental health issues. The need to address these issues through practical and spiritual means is real and urgent. Yet, in many ways, I think many of our communities of faith reflect society’s muted response when it comes to these types of issues. On the other hand, I doubt there’s hardly a person alive that hasn’t had some experience in either personally dealing with a mental health issue or knows someone close to them that is or has dealt with them. While most of us are not mental health professionals, these issues impact the people we have been entrusted to care for, so what is an appropriate, helpful, response from our communities of faith? Your question is a good one and is deserving of more of our attention and resources. Thank you.

**Cecilia:** Many of our people experience mental health issues either from time to time, or as part of the daily fabric of their lives. We do not need to be medical professionals or experts, but we can offer safe shelter and be good friends, doing things that make life more bearable during hard times.

Mental health is as important as physical and spiritual health. As a church leader, there is a balance to be struck between sharing our personal experience and not overburdening our congregation. After my wife died, I offered two or three sermons that focussed on my struggles with grief. One was based within our series on the Psalms, when I got “Despair” as my topic. I was careful to talk about hope and my own journey towards healing, as well as the reality of what I had experienced. Similarly, in our Art and God group, I showed the group a piece of art that summarised the year that had just passed at that time. It contained many ups and downs of my life, including times of struggle. The art work was an honest portrayal of my year and took some congregants by surprise, as I suppose they thought my life was one smooth glide. Other church leaders also talked at different times about their experiences with mental health issues and we offered a workshop, led by a medical professional and someone affected by mental health issues, on how to be a good friend to someone who experiences depression or other challenges. The pastoral care team also received training on relevant issues.

**Liz:** There is work being done in some MCC's already in this important area. With the number of individuals, especially LGBTQ+ teens suffering from depression and attempting suicide, this is a particularly timely question. I am aware of programming that has been done in some churches to bring in experts to speak about mental health issues facing individuals today. MCC through the Office of Formation and Leadership Development (OFLD) has done work around clergy wellness and coaching. So, there are some work efforts already rolled out but certainly we have more work we can do in this area.

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*This is the end of the document.*

*Thank you for taking time to read the responses of our Moderator candidates!*