



STRATEGIC ACTION PLAN

OEM Task Force on Race and Gender



OCTOBER 1, 2016

To: Office of Emerging Ministries
Rev. Elder Darlene Garner

From: OEM Task Force on Race and Gender

Date: October 1, 2016

A Theological Reflection

Metropolitan Community Churches (MCC) was called into being through Rev. Elder Troy D. Perry to be a liberating religious force and presence both for gay and lesbian Christians, as well as those who were enduring severe oppression in churches which claimed to represent and serve Jesus Christ. We have done much to advance that goal (with more to do) in North America and Europe, and continue to serve and lead in parts of the world where LGBTQ progress is not as clear.

But God's people, including in our own movement, continue to suffer oppression due to other causes. The liberation and feminist theological visions that have guided us thus far are calling us forward to engage old challenges left untended for too long. God is not done with us, and continues to call us to liberating work to free all people still held in the thrall of institutional and structural racism and sexism, as well as other forms of oppression.

The Premises

- ❖ Our core belief is that every child of God is worthy of being accepted and loved.
- ❖ MCC has an obligation to help liberate ourselves and others from systems of oppression in our movement and society.
- ❖ Many of the recommendations in this strategic plan require an investment of financial and other resources, and potentially add an additional burden on some congregations— and we believe such investment is absolutely essential to fulfill our mission called by God as a liberating church.
- ❖ Although full implementation of the strategic action plan could impact the ground work of daily church life, prioritizing these recommendations remains an imperative.

The Problem Statement

“ . . .we have all been programmed to respond to the human differences between us with fear and loathing and to handle that difference in one of three ways: ignore it, and if that is not possible, copy it if we think it is dominant, or destroy it if we think it is subordinate. But we have no patterns for relating across our differences as equals.”

--Audre Lorde, from *Age, Race, Class, and Sex: Women Defining Difference*

Racism, sexism, patriarchal practices and other forms of systemic oppression¹ are both personal and societal issues which impact MCC. MCC has ignored these issues in our denomination far too long. There were many factors playing out at the 2016 General Conference, but it is clear that these issues played an important role in the process, including considerable evidence of insensitivity and lack of awareness on social media. The problem we need to address is breaking the silence, that is, raising the voices and profiles of those who are marginalized in church and society, on the one hand, and, opening the eyes, ears, minds, and hearts of those whose privilege(s) and supremacy allow them not to see, hear, understand, and care about those who are marginalized, on the other. Not doing so, and quickly, undermines our ability to transform our world as we transform ourselves.

A Vision for the Future

The issues of racism, sexism, white U.S. male dominance and other forms of systemic oppression are issues that have been left unchecked for a long time, and now the denomination is at a crossroads in determining the future viability and vision for the organization.

MCC Leadership, including the Senior Leadership Team, Governing Board, Council of Elders and all licensed clergy and lay leaders/members will need to lead the way in harnessing a vision of MCC where:

- MCC will move out of denial and boldly do the courageous and difficult work of facing our systemic violence at the intersection of race, ethnicity and gender, and additional intersections such as classism and ableism.
- All people at all levels of the organization feel safe to express their feelings and opinions without being accused of causing hurt and harm to the local congregations and public perceptions of MCC.

¹ The following Sociocultural Locations/Identities represent a broad spectrum of potential areas of systemic oppression: Ability, Age, Ethnicity, Gender, Gender Expression, Language, Nationality, Race, Religion/Spirituality (or not), Sexual Orientation, Size, Socioeconomic Class

- People feel a sense of belonging and feel respected, valued, and welcomed across MCCs around the world, including in the USA where tensions around diversity, inclusion, and oppression still exist.
- Representative members of the lay and clergy have a process to address issues related to conflict and participate in difficult conversations, with mediated spiritual support when necessary.
- A deep sense of love for humanity, justice for all, and valuing the sacredness of all bodies, sexual orientations, gender identities and expressions is the experience of each person who looks to MCC for spiritual well-being and wholeness.

We believe these steps outlined in this strategic plan are vital and necessary in order for MCC to truly become the beloved community of hope, love, and peace across the globe and fulfill its vision of helping individuals transform their lives while transforming the world.

Recommendations for Moving Forward: The Steps to Getting There

To this end, this task force suggests the following strategies to help move MCC to living out the stated shared values.

- Create opportunities on the local, network and denominational level for dialogue with persons in the movement who have or are experiencing oppression within MCC, especially as it relates to race and gender.
- Develop and implement an intentional, multi-faceted education program on institutional racism and other forms of systemic oppression, including the impact of white privilege and male privilege on the movement when asserted. The program should also contain a comprehensive module on gender related issues, sexual ethics, multiculturalism and antiracism training that will be facilitated by an outside resource. The program(s), while open to all, should be required for all clergy, clergy candidates, transfer clergy, chaplains and lay leaders.
- Establish accountability protocols for achieving and maintaining these standards and expectations on the denominational, network and local church levels, including but not limited to the revocation of a local church's MCC affiliation status for failure to do so.
- Develop criteria for registering improved knowledge of and commitment to resist these oppressive systems and establish a process for measuring the impact and effectiveness of the education program on all levels of the denomination.
- Commission an ongoing task force to monitor these efforts on all levels of the denomination and to propose to the General Conference in 2019 additional measures to

combat these oppressions and to identify related forms of oppression that require our concerted attention and action.

- Develop a sense of what values we want to have that takes into consideration our social locations as well as our world views, in such a way that no matter where MCC is in the world these values can be stated, felt, and lived.

The Current Situation

The task force looked at the current MCC values to determine the extent that these values are shared throughout the denomination, and the relevance of the values in today's context. The members agree that these values remain significant in defining what it means to be MCC, and we believe more work needs to be done to practice what we preach. Of particular importance are "Spiritual Transformation" and "Justice." Does MCC as a denomination demonstrate a commitment to holding clergy and leaders accountable for resisting the structures that oppress people, even within MCC? How can MCC begin to live out our values consistently across all aspects of MCC, and specifically when we come together for the General Conference?

MCC Values

- **Inclusion** Love is our greatest value and resisting exclusion is a primary focus of our ministry. We want to continue to be conduits of faith where everyone is included in the family of God and where all parts of our being are welcomed at God's table.
- **Community** Offering a safe and open community for people to worship, learn, and grow in their faith is our deep desire. We are committed to equipping ourselves and each other to do the work that God has called us to do in the world.
- **Spiritual Transformation** Providing a message of liberation from the oppressive religious environment of our day or to those experiencing God for the first time is what guides our ministry. We believe that when people are invited to experience God through the life and ministry of Christ, lives will be transformed.
- **Justice** Working to talk less and do more, we are committed to resisting the structures that oppress people and standing with those who suffer under the weight of oppressive systems, being guided always by our commitment to Global Human Rights.

A SWOT Analysis

The Task Force also looked at the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats that MCC faces. The SWOT Analysis below clearly illustrates the imperative for taking immediate action towards addressing the issues of justice that came to light leading up to and during General Conference. MCC currently has a wealth of talented individuals and leaders who are committed to doing the work of social justice around the world, and yet has neglected to hold leaders accountable for doing the personal and difficult work of eliminating individual and institutional behaviors that result in violence towards oppressed and marginalized groups. By implementing the recommendations, MCC has a better opportunity to increase capabilities, leadership, and attract people who are looking for a church to call home.

<p>Strengths:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Global congregational affiliations • Recognized for leadership in human rights • Congregational system of governance • Percentage of representation of leaders who identify with oppressed and marginalized communities • Commitment for social justice • Less than 50 years old 	<p>Opportunities:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Development of compassionate leaders • Strengthen the efforts for leadership in human rights • Model for other religious denominations world-wide • More cohesive denomination by 2019 • Create a climate of trust and transparency • A welcoming place for individuals and families longing for connection in a spiritual community • Influence the treatment of women and the LGBTQI communities world-wide • To become a leader for racial and ethnic justice world wide
<p>Weaknesses/Potential Obstacles for success</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Congregational system of governance • Operating in a culture of fear • Lack of trust among clergy and lay leaders • Lack of transparency • Leaders are reluctant to speak out on critical issues • Current financial position • Isolation due to geographical locations and proximity to other MCC churches. • U.S. white privilege and supremacy effects not just the U.S. but the world 	<p>Threats:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Become less relevant as a religious institution because of the culture of fear and denial • Could cause some people to sever their relationship with the denomination • Harmful and hurtful behaviors related to race and gender continue to permeate the institution

A Strategic Action Plan

I. Create opportunities for better dialog and communications

(To be addressed by 2Q2017)

- Host small group discussions around the issues of gender and sexual ethics, race and racism, power and privilege, and other areas that have impacted marginalized individuals and groups.
- Utilize MCC web pages as a source for sharing resources and personal testimonials.
- Develop guidelines for dealing more effectively with conflict and foster better communications between leadership, clergy and lay leaders.
- Provide opportunities and safe spaces for clergy to participate in self-reflective activities and discussions with peers.

II. Develop and implement an intentional, multi-faceted education programming

(To be addressed by 2Q2018)

- Develop a “certification” program similar to the UUC’s Anti-Racism and Diversity training program, including their “Safe Congregation” Program or the Anti-defamation League’s program called Communities of Respect®.
- Require three CEU hours of race or gender related professional development for clergy in 2018, and one to three CEU hours annually each year thereafter for license renewal.
- Strongly recommend diversity, sensitivity, inclusion and anti-oppression training for anyone serving in a leadership capacity, including volunteers and paid staff, and make opportunities for this as available as possible.
- Review programs such as REVM, LEAD and CLM to determine opportunities to integrate learning about race and gender in these educational programs.

III. Establish accountability protocols for achieving and maintaining standards

(To be addressed by 4Q2017)

- Encourage a culture of accountability by highlighting accomplishments at all levels throughout MCC.
- Set specific benchmarks and key indicators to measure and monitor results over time.
- Develop a clear, well-publicized and supported program to increase efforts to recruit, and retain clergy who demonstrate the values of MCC, including but not limited to clergy of color, and clergy along the spectrum of gender expressions and identities.

IV. Develop criteria for registering improved knowledge

(To be addressed by 4Q2018)

- Encourage all clergy to participate in programs such as those offered through Vision's Inc. and Undoing Racism® and other efforts to help clergy gain a foundational understanding of structural and institutional inequality, and an understanding of the issues that may impact sociocultural locations, and raise and designate scholarship funds to make this more accessible to more clergy.

V. Commission an ongoing task force to monitor these efforts

(To be addressed by 2Q2017)

- Conduct a review, with the assistance of outside consultants, of the current policy, practices, and procedures to determine if any language may unintentionally create barriers towards marginalized and oppressed groups.
- Create a peer-based team to monitor actions and behaviors of MCC leaders which undermine MCC's commitment to be a "house of prayer for all people."
- Encourage local churches to adopt a policy around inclusive language that goes beyond the language of God and humanity, and looks at the use of phrases that could be insensitive to oppressed and marginalized people, for example references to light as good, dark as bad.
- Create guidelines to assist local congregations in engaging social justice issues that impact the local constituency groups,

VI. Develop a sense of expressed values related to justice and spiritual transformation

(To be addressed by 4Q2017)

- Create a campaign to engage all leaders and clergy in the conversation about the intersection of race and gender. Adopt the proposed theme, "There is room for all in MCC."
- Encourage members of networks and congregations to adopt at least one goal annually that aligns with the proposed strategic plan.
- Develop or adopt an existing attitude and culture survey that can be used to take a pulse on the issues that impact hearts and minds at the local level. Use the results to develop a benchmark for future measurements and indicators.

The Evaluation Process

To help with decision-making, we recommend that solutions be evaluated based on the following criteria for short and long term planning, prior to purchase or development.

Evaluation Process Ratings: 1 – Important; 2 – Very Important; 3 – Extremely Important

Rating Scale	The solution must meet the following criteria:
3	Establishes and enforces accountability protocols, including self-evaluations
3	Includes a component related to one or more of the twelve defined intersections (e.g. race, gender, age, ability)
3	Must be available for ongoing and continuous usage
3	Consistency (i.e. the level of quality and performance does not vary)
2	Repeatable (i.e. able to be repeated using the same methods)
2	Accessible in a variety of languages and formats (i.e. technical and physical)
2	Off-the-shelf (i.e. immediately available)
2	Customizable (i.e. can be modified to fit local needs, where applicable)
2	Affordable

The Conclusion

We the members of the OEM Task Force on Race and Gender appreciate the opportunity to participate in these efforts and make recommendations that we believe will support our denomination. We acknowledge the work that the Diversity and Inclusion Council submitted in 2014, and updated in 2016, and believe that this body of work is still relevant and should be considered in addition to the body of work presented in this case.

Respectfully Submitted,

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Rev. Jackie Carter
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Rev. Elder Dwayne Johnson
Rev. Denise Junious
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Resources

A Church for All People - United Church of Christ:

http://www.ucc.org/justice_multiracial-multicultural_all-people

CrossRoads Anti-Racism Organizing and Training:

<http://crossroadsantiracism.org/>

Body and Soul: Rethinking Sexuality as Justice Love:

<https://books.google.com/books?id=wMhLAWAAQBAJ&printsec=frontcover&dq=Body+and+soul:+Rethinking+Sexuality&hl=en&sa=X&ved=0ahUKEwiL0rHI9KDPAhXD4iYKHZ7QAtAQ6AEIHDA#v=onepage&q=Body%20and%20soul%3A%20Rethinking%20Sexuality&f=false>

Diverse But Not Integrated: Religion's Race Problem:

<https://sojo.net/articles/diverse-not-integrated-religion-s-race-problem>

Emerson, Michael O.: People of the Dream:

<http://press.princeton.edu/titles/8180.html>

Five Keys to Becoming a More Inclusive Community:

<https://www.churchleadership.com/leading-ideas/five-keys-becoming-inclusive-community/>

Living the Vision - Becoming a multicultural church:

<http://resource.moravian.org/FileDownload/2132/livingthevision.pdf>

Multiculturalism, Diversity and Racial Reconciliation:

<http://www.bic-church.org/connect/publications/shalom/previous/pdfs/Summer01.pdf>

National Coalition Building Institute: NCBI:

<http://ncbi.org/>

Study: Church Diversity Does Not Guarantee Diverse Thinking, Beliefs:

<https://baptistnews.com/article/study-church-diversity-does-not-guarantee-diverse-thinking-beliefs/>

They're Playing Our Song: The Secret Multi-racial Churches Know About Music:

<http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2012/juneweb-only/multiracial-church-music.html>

Training for Racial Equity and Inclusion - Aspen Institute:

<https://www.aspeninstitute.org/content/uploads/files/content/docs/rcc/training.pdf>

Unitarian Universalist:

<http://www.uuworld.org/articles/toward-diverse-multicultural-future>

<http://www.uua.org/multiculturalism/curricula>

VISIONS, Inc.: Taking Diversity and Inclusion to the Next Level:

<http://visions-inc.org/>

Why White Churches Are Hard for Black People:

<https://9marks.org/article/why-white-churches-are-hard-for-black-people/>

William M. Kondrath:

<http://www.billkondrath.com/books-articles/>