

## **Historical Perspectives on the Role of Elders in Metropolitan Community Churches**

*Rev. Elder Don Eastman (2013, 2017)*

*Updated by Rev. Elder Darlene Garner and Elder Nancy Maxwell (2017)*

*Updated by Elder Nancy Maxwell (2021)*

### **History**

In Metropolitan Community Churches the spiritual leadership of our movement has always been vested in what we have called Elders. Central to this role is trusted influence of these Elders with multiple congregations and their leaders. The function of Elders is to inspire, nurture, guide and strengthen church leaders to build healthy congregations that will fulfill the mission of God. They are often the prophetic voice proclaiming the good news of MCC's message and our call for justice. This function is widespread in Christianity and is structured in various ways with differing names. Whether lay or clergy, "Elders are professional ministers and are authorized to perform all the Rites and Sacraments of the church." (UFMCC Bylaws V.E.3.)

Throughout our history as both a movement and a denomination, Rev. Elder Don Eastman observed three eras in which we have structured the position of this role of Elder in different ways.

- The Board of Elders: 1970 to 2003
- Board of Elders/Regional Elders: 2003 to 2010
- Council of Elders: 2010 to Present

Within the first several years from the founding of Metropolitan Community Church of Los Angeles in 1968, a widespread movement quickly formed around the charisma and message of Rev. Troy D. Perry. By 1972 there were 22 new MCC congregations.

The birth of the Universal Fellowship of Metropolitan Community Churches came with its first General Conference in 1970, followed by formation as a California nonprofit corporation in 1971. Systems and structures were adopted through which this new movement would continue to grow in its early decades.

The systems and structures fulfilled three essential functions necessary for the growing movement:

- Spiritual leadership would be provided by Elders (similar to some Protestant denominations) rather than bishops (as was the case in some hierarchal denominations). They did not want the authoritarian/hierarchal structure they associated with bishops.
- Connectional management would be provided by Districts dealing with congregational affiliation and needs.
- Governance would be overseen by a Board of Elders, including management of the denominational headquarters, organization of the General Conference, and corporate legal requirements.

### **The Board of Elders: 1970 to 2003**

In this entire period, Metropolitan Community Church was a new religious movement led by its founder, a highly charismatic entrepreneurial leader. We trusted Troy. All of our structures and systems were responsive and reactive to that reality. Equally important: Troy trusted us. Most importantly, Troy trusted the Holy Spirit. That profoundly shaped the Board of Elders, as well as the General Conference and the Districts.

Whatever the expectations and responsibilities of these Elders, as a Board, they served essentially as a system of support and accountability for the charismatic founder. With the churches, they were often powerful messengers of the movement. The election of an Elder was highly political and sometimes symbolically addressed a major issue at a General Conference. The office was highly volatile; Elders often were not re-elected or voluntarily left office after one or two terms.

In this period, three of the seven Elders were full-time (Rev. Elder Troy Perry, for the entire period, Rev. Elder Nancy Wilson from 1979 to 1985, and Rev. Elder Don Eastman from 1986 to 2003, and then on through 2007); the others served in a voluntary capacity. A third Elder (Rev. Elder Darlene Garner) became full-time in 1999. In 1985, the function of governance was given to the General Council which included the Board of Elders and the District Coordinators. The role of Elder was especially demanding on those who were not serving full-time. For example, some Elders who also served as local church pastors devoted from one-third to half of their time to the role of Elder and the Elders, who were lay leaders with secular employment, devoted most of their vacation time to this ministry.

Elders serving on the Board of Elders between 1970 and 2003 included:

- Rev. Elder Charlie Arehart (1976-1983; 1987-1991)
- Rev. Elder Roy Birchard (1973-1974)
- Rev. Elder Carol Cureton (1974-1979)
- Rev. Elder Don Eastman (1983-2007)
- Elder Clarke Friesen (1997-2001)
- Rev. Elder Darlene Garner (1993-2018)
- Rev. Elder John Gill (1973-1977)
- Rev. Elder Jeri Ann Harvey (1979-1987)
- Rev. Elder Wilhelmina Hein (1991-1997)
- Rev. Elder John Hose (1970-1989)
- Elder Mel Johnson (2001-2003)
- Rev. Elder Louis Loynes (1970-1973)
- Elder Michael Mank (1981-1987)
- Rev. Elder Troy Perry (1970-2005)
- Rev. Elder Richard Ploen (1970-1976)
- Elder Larry Rodriguez (1987-1997)
- Rev. Elder Nori Rost (1999-2003)
- Rev. Elder James Sandmire (1973-1980)

Rev. Elder Freda Smith (1973-1993)  
Rev. Elder Jorge Sosa (1997-1999)  
Rev. Elder Hong Tan (1993-2003)  
Elder Richard Vincent (1973-1976)  
Rev. Elder Jean White (1979-1993)  
Rev. Elder Nancy Wilson (1976-2003; 2005-2016)

### **Regional Elders: 2003 to 2010**

This period and its structure began to be shaped in 1999 when Troy made it clear he would retire as the Moderator in 2005. Succession planning, the transfer of charisma and new structures for a new era became the focus of extensive dialogue and deliberation over the next two years resulting in major structural changes enacted by the 2001 General Conference.

In this new structure the Districts were disbanded and replaced by larger denominational regions and the District Coordinators were replaced by Regional Elders elected by regions to serve full-time. The three-tier structure (church/district/denomination) was replaced by a two-tier structure (church/denomination). The role of Elder became more multi-national with each region including more than one nation. This sometimes called into question the title, "Elder", which did not convey the role in some countries and cultures. With a wider understanding of the title "Bishop", in some areas of the world we unofficially used this title.

In this new structure, the role of Elders as spiritual leaders continued to be primary. Elders also became responsible for connectional management as well as spiritual leadership. And all Elders, in theory, were to do the same things. The intention of the new structure to provide resources to the churches through denominational program staff was prevented by lack of projected growth in membership and income. So, Elders also needed to take on the roles intended for program staff. Further decline in revenue required more downsizing to achieve sustainability.

Elders serving on the Board of Elders between 2003 and 2010 included:

Rev. Elder Arlene Ackerman (2003-2010)  
Rev. Elder Lillie Brock (2003-2013)  
Rev. Elder Don Eastman (1983-2007)  
Rev. Elder Cecilia Eggleston (2003-2007)  
Rev. Elder Diane Fisher, (2003-2010)  
Rev. Elder Darlene Garner, (1993-2018)  
Rev. Elder Debbie Martin, (2003-2006)  
Rev. Elder Ken Martin, (2003-2013)  
Rev. Elder Jim Mitulski, (2005-2010)  
Rev. Elder Troy Perry (1970-2005)  
Rev. Elder Armando Sanchez (2003-2005)  
Rev. Elder Glenna Shepherd (2006-2009)  
Rev. Elder Gill Storey (2003-2005)

Rev. Elder Nancy Wilson (1975-2003; 2005-2016)

In terms of representative governance, the elected officers accountable to the General Conference were the Board of Administration and Moderator; the Regional Elders were elected by the Regions and accountable to the Regional Conferences and General Conference.

### **Council of Elders (COE): 2010 to 2015**

Through the work of the Structure Review Team, the role of the Elders was once again restructured in 2010. Regions, the Board of Administration, the Board of Elders, and the position of Regional Elder were discontinued. A Governing Board, MCC program offices and a Council of Elders were established. All members of the Council of Elders, including those also serving on MCC staff, became volunteers.

In terms of representative governance, the elected officers accountable to the General Conference became the Moderator and members of the Governing Board. The function of governance of MCC is now vested in this Board.

Four of the former elected Regional Elders also became directors of program offices:

- Rev. Elder Lillie Brock, Co-Director of the Office of Church Life and Health
- Rev. Elder Ken Martin, Co-Director of the Office of Church Life and Health
- Rev. Elder Darlene Garner, Director of the Office of Emerging Ministries
- Rev. Elder Jim Mitulski, Director of the Office of Formation and Leadership Development

After July 2010, new Elders were appointed by the Moderator, approved by the Governing Board, and affirmed by a vote of the General Conference. A Council of Elders replaced the Board of Elders. The functions of spiritual leadership and connectional management were vested in the Council of Elders.

- As spiritual leaders, their roles are those described in Ephesians 4: apostle, prophet, evangelist, and pastor-teacher. Central to the function of spiritual leadership is the equipping and empowering of new leaders. In MCC this is realized through leadership development of both clergy and laity.
- As connectional managers, their roles include oversight of matters of church affiliation (UFMCC Bylaws V.B.1. and 2.), ordination of clergy (UFMCC Bylaws IV.B.1.b. and c.), recognition of aligned non-government organizations (UFMCC Bylaws V.D.a.) connection of churches with each other, and resourcing the various needs of churches.

In this new structure, the Moderator's role has also changed. The relationship of Elders with the Moderator previously had been that of peer and colleague. The Elders are now appointed by and accountable to the Moderator. (UFMCC Bylaws V.E.3. and V.E.3.c.)

In 2012, the Moderator appointed, Governing Board approved, and General Conference affirmed two new Elders:

Rev. Elder Héctor Gutiérrez, Assistant Director of the Office of Emerging Ministries

Rev. Elder Mona West, Director of the Office of Formation and Leadership Development

**Council of Elders (COE) 2015-2020**

In 2015, Moderator Rev. Elder Nancy Wilson appointed, the Governing Board approved, and the General Conference affirmed seven additional Elders, who served on the COE with Rev. Elder Nancy Wilson, Rev. Elder Darlene Garner, Rev. Elder Héctor Gutiérrez and Rev. Elder Mona West, with appointments until December 31, 2020:

Rev. Elder Ines-Paul Baumann  
Rev. Elder Pat Bumgardner  
Rev. Elder Tony Freeman  
Rev. Elder Dwayne Johnson  
Elder Nancy Maxwell  
Rev. Elder Margarita Sanchez de León  
Rev. Elder Candace Shultis

Following the General Conference in 2016, the Governing Board elected Interim Moderator Rev. Rachele Brown, who was installed as an Elder, in accordance with MCC Bylaw V.E.2., which states the Moderator is an Elder and moderates the Council of Elders. The Elders during this Interim period (2016-2019) were as follows:

**Council of Elders 2016-2019:**

Rev. Elder Ines-Paul Baumann  
Rev. Elder Rachele Brown  
Rev. Elder Pat Bumgardner  
Rev. Elder Tony Freeman  
Rev. Elder Darlene Garner (retired 2018)  
Rev. Elder Héctor Gutiérrez  
Rev. Elder Dwayne Johnson  
Elder Nancy Maxwell  
Rev. Elder Margarita Sanchez de León  
Rev. Elder Candace Shultis  
Rev. Elder Mona West

At the 2019 General Conference, Rev. Elder Cecilia Eggleston was elected Moderator. As Moderator of UFMCC, she also moderates the Council of Elders (with the Elders' tenure of service on the Council of Elders extended one month, expiring on January 31, 2021).

**Council of Elders 2019-2020:**

Rev. Elder Ines-Paul Baumann  
Rev. Elder Pat Bumgardner  
Rev. Elder Cecilia Eggleston  
Rev. Elder Tony Freeman  
Rev. Elder Héctor Gutiérrez

Rev. Elder Dwayne Johnson  
Elder Nancy Maxwell  
Rev. Elder Margarita Sanchez de León (retired July 2020)  
Rev. Elder Candace Shultis (resigned September 2019)  
Rev. Elder Mona West (retired March 2020)

During their 2015-2020 terms, the members of the Council of Elders instituted several initiatives. They implemented the COE's Call to Prayer, inviting MCCers to write a prayer, which the denomination's communications office published in weekly emails. They also provided spiritual reflections for the seasons of Advent and Lent, as well as prayers for world events and memorial tributes upon the deaths of important historical or denominational figures. The COE issued important social justice statements concerning such topics as gun violence, systemic racism, immigration, and international human rights; the final statement from this COE was to affirm MCC's religious freedom through the practice of performing marriages of all genders, supporting family diversity and the right to health care regardless of sexual orientation or gender identity. In addition, the members of the COE adopted the Point Elder system, in which an Elder was paired with congregations and clergy members, to provide requested pastoral care, spiritual support, perform ceremonial duties, and resource churches and clergy to appropriate denominational staff. Other projects included a webinar before the 2019 General Conference to discuss the answers to the question, *"What is the Spirit calling Metropolitan Community Churches to do and be that requires all our churches to work together?"*; hosting a "rolling" world-wide COVID-19 memorial service; proposing a number of amendments to the UFMCC Bylaws such as changing the procedure by which Governing Board membership is made through appointments and the process of recognizing affiliated churches; reviewing the judiciary process; exploring flexibility for pathways to authorized ministries; providing the opening prayer for the Governing Board monthly meetings; hosting a twice monthly live broadcast on spiritual practices called Spiritual Nourishment from May 2020 through January 2021; as well as providing spiritual support during General Conference, including pastoral care of Moderator and Governing Board candidates.

**Council of Elders (COE) 2021-2023**

In January 2021 Moderator Rev. Elder Cecilia Eggleston appointed, the Governing Board approved, and the General Conference affirmed, the following members of the 2021-2023 Council of Elders:

- Rev. Elder Alejandro Escoto
- Elder Velma Garcia
- Rev. Elder Goudy
- Rev. Elder Karl Hand
- Rev. Elder Miller Hoffman
- Rev. Elder Carolyn Mobley-Bowie
- Rev. Elder Maxwell Reay
- Rev. Elder Troy Treash

**The Role of the Council of Elders**

From the UFMCC Bylaws:

ARTICLE V – GOVERNMENT, ORGANIZATION, AND OFFICERS

...

3. COUNCIL OF ELDERS: The Council of Elders of the UFMCC is that body authorized by the General Conference to serve in a pastoral role and direct the spiritual life of the Fellowship. This Council shall consist of a Moderator and Elders appointed by the Moderator, subject to approval by the Governing Board and affirmation by General Conference. All UFMCC Elders are deemed professional ministers and are authorized to perform all of the Rites and Sacraments of the church.

a. QUALIFICATIONS: Elders must be those individuals of obvious spiritual quality and leadership who are mature, have sound judgment, have a proven record of accomplishment as lay or clergy members within the Fellowship, and have successful experience in envisioning and strategic planning for the future. Elders must be excellent communicators, skilled motivators and teachers, self-motivated and devoted to continuous learning. Further, Elders must be capable of understanding and working within sound fiscal guidelines, be sensitive to cultural differences, and be able and willing to embrace diversity. It is desirable that the Council of Elders reflect the diversity of the Fellowship.

b. DUTIES: The primary responsibility of Elders shall be to give pastoral leadership and care to enable the Fellowship in our spiritual journey. The Elders shall exercise spiritual and pastoral

authority to build a shared vision for the UFMCC, prepare UFMCC for the future, and support UFMCC's strategic direction. The Elders serve as official representatives of the Fellowship in the areas of public and community relations; provide oversight of and support to congregations; consult with churches on issues related to church development; and fulfill other ecclesial and ceremonial duties.

**Use of the Honorific Title "Elder"**

It is a custom that former Elders hold the honorific title of "Elder" as long as they continue to abide by the Elders Code of Ethics and the Code of Conduct for MCC Ministry Leaders. Therefore, all former members of the old Board of Elders and the Council of Elders are referred to as "Elder" although they are no longer active members of the Council of Elders.

**ROSTER OF MCC ELDERS  
1970 to Present**

Rev. Elder Arlene Ackerman (2003-2010)  
Rev. Elder Charlie Arehart (1976-1983; 1987-1991)  
    Rev. Elder Ines-Paul Baumann (2015-2020)  
        Rev. Elder Roy Birchard (1973-1974)  
    Rev. Elder Lillie Brock (2003-2013)  
        Rev. Elder Rachelle Brown (2017-2019)  
    Rev. Elder Pat Bumgardner (2015-2020)  
        Rev. Elder Carol Cureton (1974-1979)  
    Rev. Elder Don Eastman (1983-2007)  
Rev. Elder Cecilia Eggleston (2003-2007) (2019-Present)  
    Rev. Elder Alejandro Escoto (2021-Present)  
        Rev. Elder Diane Fisher, (2003-2010)  
    Rev. Elder Tony Freeman (2015-2020)  
        Elder Clarke Friesen (1997 -2001)  
        Elder Velma Garcia (2021-Present)  
Rev. Elder Darlene Garner (1993-2018)  
    Rev. Elder John Gill (1973-1977)  
    Rev. Elder Goudy (2021-Present)  
    Rev. Elder Héctor Gutiérrez (2012-2020)  
    Rev. Elder Karl Hand (2021-Present)  
    Rev. Elder Jeri Ann Harvey (1979-1987)  
    Rev. Elder Wilhelmina Hein (1991-1997)  
Rev. Elder Miller Hoffman (2021-Present)  
    Rev. Elder John Hose (1970-1981)  
Rev. Elder Dwayne Johnson (2015-2020)  
    Elder Mel Johnson (2001-2003)  
    Rev. Elder Louis Loynes (1970-1973)  
    Elder Michael Mank (1981-1987)  
Rev. Elder Debbie Martin, (2003-2006)  
    Rev. Elder Ken Martin, (2006-2013)  
    Elder Nancy Maxwell (2015-2020)  
    Rev. Elder Jim Mitulski, (2005-2010)  
Rev. Elder Carolyn Mobley-Bowie (2021-Present)  
    Rev. Elder Troy Perry (1970-2005)  
    Rev. Elder Richard Ploen (1970-1976)  
Rev. Elder Maxwell Reay (2021-Present)  
    Elder Larry Rodriguez (1987-1997)  
    Rev. Elder Nori Rost (1999-2003)  
    Rev. Elder Armando Sanchez (2003-2005)  
Rev. Elder Margarita Sanchez de León (2015-2020)  
    Rev. Elder James Sandmire (1973-1980)

Rev. Elder Glenna Shepherd (2006-2009)  
Rev. Elder Candace Shultis (2015-2019)  
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Rev. Elder Hong Tan (1993-2003)  
Rev. Elder Troy Treash (2021-Present)  
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Rev. Elder Mona West (2012-2020)  
Rev. Elder Jean White (1979-1993)  
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