

## **The Commission on Pathways of Healing and Reconciliation** **Year One Report**

***“How good and pleasant it is when God’s people live together in unity!”***  
Psalm 133:1

This report outlines the first year's work of the Commission, its initial findings and the next steps it will undertake in order to present final recommendations to the Governing Board in mid 2022.

### **Purpose and Mission of the Commission:**

In a letter written to the Governing Board, one person wrote “*MCC cannot move forward until we look back.*” This statement encapsulates the spirit and intent of the Commission on Pathways of Healing and Reconciliation. The Commission was established by the Governing Board to help MCC address racism and other issues that were highlighted during and after General Conference 2016. <https://www.mcccchurch.org/commission-on-pathways-of-healing/>. The Commission developed a [charter](#) to guide their work. In brief,

The Commission on Pathways of Healing and Reconciliation will:

- Design and offer a pathway for individuals to move towards healing and reconciliation on elements that have fractured relationships in recent years
- Review previous reports on diversity and inclusion, making recommendations on further work to be done
- Conduct an in-depth review of MCC and its current state in relation to race equity
- Work with the Governing Board, Council of Elders, MCC staff, church leaders and local congregations to start the process of organizational and policy change, which will embed racial equity into all areas of the denomination
- Make recommendations for accountability mechanisms, so that the progress towards race equity, diversity and inclusion continues

### **Members:**

At the direction and leadership of the Governing Board and Moderator, individuals with the skillset, diversity and availability to serve on the commission were interviewed and selected. The members of the Commission created a [covenant](#) to guide their work.

**Rev. Dr. Roland Stringfellow**, MCC Detroit, USA (Co-Chair)

**Rev. Elder Cecilia Eggleston**, Moderator UFMCC (Co-Chair)

**Rev. Cathy Alexander**, MCC Staff

**Mr. Kedric Brown**, Resurrection MCC, Houston TX, USA

**Ms. Clare Coughlin**, Governing Board UFMCC

**Mr. Juan Garcia**, MCC of Washington DC, USA

**Rev. Jakob Hero-Shaw**, MCC Tampa, USA  
**Mr. Richard Norman**, Good Hope MCC, South Africa  
**Ms. Ivana Warwick**, ICM Sao Paulo, Brazil

Previous Members:

**Ms. Coralie Weston**, Vision of Hope MCC, USA  
**Ms. Reece Jackson-Whitaker**, Founders MCC, USA

### **Commissioners' Work Plan**

The Commissioners are divided into 2 sub teams to be able to focus more intensely on specific areas of concern:

1. Organizational change within MCC
2. Developing personal pathways to healing.

#### **Organizational Change:**

The Commissioners had a starting place through the work of the Rev Elder Ines-Paul Baumann. He reviewed the documentation made by a variety of groups within MCC as it related to race, racism, race equity and other inclusion issues, and then compiled a summary report for the Governing Board, Council of Elders and Staff to address a number of issues, which they have received and have begun to take appropriate actions. This was an invaluable resource as it connected previous work with the task that lay ahead.

A key resource that the Commissioners use to help work through the process of organizational change is found in the document "[\*\*Awake to Woke to Work: Building a Race Equity Culture\*\*](#)" produced by Equity in the Center. At the "awake" stage, we focus on increasing diverse representation at all levels. At the "woke" stage, we focus on inclusion and internal change in behaviors, policies, and practices. At the "work" stage, we focus on integration of a race equity lens in all aspects of the denomination.

The Commissioners consulted with two organizations to help guide us in a framework of change.

- **Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, Justice consultants from the Unitarian Universalist Association** shared lessons learned from their process of developing a race equity culture and addressing organizational and structural inequity within their denomination.
- The **Washington Consulting Group led by Rev. Dr. Jamie Washington and Rev. Samuel Offer** developed and performed a day-long training on anti-racism with MCC Staff, the Commissioners, and the Governing Board. A few of the outcomes from this training included:
  - Developing an agreed way of working with one another that is respectful, open to listening and learning and owns our individual responses and journey
  - Developing a common lexicon to enable us to communicate well and with common understanding about the different issues that we are working on together, particularly around racism and white supremacy
  - Begin to think about the dynamics of how to bring lasting cultural change to MCC.

Following this day-long training, all participants received a survey to evaluate MCC's commitment to race equity at the denominational level to the local level (19 people participated).

#### Developing Personal Pathways to Healing

In June and July of 2021, the Commission sent invitations throughout the denomination inviting people to share their experiences within MCC around racism or other areas needing healing and reconciliation. Three ways were offered:

- Sharing their story via email (7 persons participated – 2 of 7 emailed Cecilia and Roland individually)
- Sharing their story with a trained listener from around the world, with English, Spanish and Portuguese available. (5 persons participated)
- Responding to questions in a survey (73 people participated).

#### **Summary of Responses:**

The Commissioners recognize the courage and trust that it took for the responders to engage in this important process and to re-live painful experiences. The Commissioners offered the pathway resources in English, Portuguese, and Spanish. One person from Asia, one person from Australia, and three people from Europe participated. The rest were from the United States. There were common themes that arose as well as individual responses worth noting.

- **Lack of Support:** There seems to be a lack of support for clergy by denominational leadership. One person shared they were not offered any pastoral care nor collegial support after a major hurt and they needed to find their own way to make peace and move forward on their own. There were several questions raised regarding the ordination selection process and whether it benefits some over other qualified candidates. There is an “elite” class of people who are favored rather than treating all people equally. There needs to be a safe process for whistleblowers.
- **Mistrust in Leadership:** Confidences have been broken and attempts to approach leadership were met with silence or silencing, indifference and/or resistance. Leaders have pitted Black people against one another. It appeared that leadership did not have the willingness or skillset to address racism and supremacy. The leadership seems to be threatened to address racism and power dynamics. There is a pattern of protecting the institution rather than the people who need support. There needs to be a clear understanding of what happens to someone when they violate the code of conduct.
- **Disappointment with lack of follow-through:** There seems to be no accountability or consequences for bad/negative behavior during the 2016 General Conference once it was brought to the attention of denominational leadership. Several hurtful social media posts have been made, but who enforces or monitors MCC's policies? Some feel they no longer matter to MCC which they labeled as a form of spiritual abuse.
- **Racism / White Supremacy:** MCC has a white European culture and training is needed to see how this world view impacts others. There needs to be a mechanism to address racial incidents at the MCC staff level. MCC is seen as not being welcoming to clergy of color. One person's Latin identity was erased, and they were mistaken to be an ally rather than a member of the community. This leads to exhaustion and not feeling seen or valued. Leaders must consider diversity in worship and theology. There appears to be more diversity among the laity whereas the clergy tends to be more monolithic.

More attention needs to be paid to cultural differences around the world, and the ordination process needs to reflect this cultural diversity.

- **Sexism:** During the 2016 General Conference, some men were seen as disruptive because they did not get the outcome they wanted. We are a denomination that seeks to be inclusive, but it will actively harm women. There have been situations of bullying (primarily online) that included a theme of sexism with a group of men bullying a group of women. One person experienced a Black woman being silenced by white men at the local level when the issue of race and racism was addressed.
- **Transphobia / Misgendering:** One individual shared they are continually misgendered in public and private settings within MCC. Thus, they feel erased and silenced by MCC. It is important to allow individuals to self-identify, rather than making assumptions on external appearance.
- **Ageism / Ableism:** Those who are Gen X or Gen Y are often overlooked and ignored. Their contributions are not taken seriously. There needs to be greater awareness of multigenerational experiences. An older black woman in a wheelchair wanted to have her concerns acknowledged during the 2016 General Conference, but many felt annoyed by her and wanted her silenced.
- **Invisibility:** The question of “who really matters” in MCC was a recurring theme. A common tactic to suppress others is through ignoring their voice, their complaint, their identity and/or their ideas. Public statements that do not acknowledge racism, sexism, etc. render people invisible.

*A Commissioner’s analysis included: “Some of the contributors came to MCC with a history of pain, and hoping to land in safe space, but instead found more trauma in a variety of ways. The pain in the testimonies was evident. Distrust compounded by examples of breaches in confidentiality, insider/outsider behaviors in leadership, promises to enact change but no results. I saw a pattern in testimonies of a lack of faith in the future direction of MCC. There were calls for people to apologize and to name specifically where their lack of knowledge and/or awareness caused pain and suffering. I saw themes of a great love for MCC, and deep disappointment when this beloved community has sought to be safe and liberating but has failed.”*

### **Next Steps for the Commission**

The Commissioners are grateful to those who were willing to interact with us and also know that we need to hear far more stories from around the world. We are not satisfied with the number of responses compared to the size of the denomination. We recognize that additional outreach is needed to non-English speaking people to gain their experiences. The Commission will partner with MCC staff, kinship groups and others to find the most effective ways to get feedback from MCCers around the world. Connecting again to the colleagues from the Unitarian Universalist Association may be a good idea to gain guidance in the ongoing work. We will partner with the Governing Board and Senior Leadership Team on their ongoing work on race equity so that we may incorporate it into one cohesive plan for MCC.

The Commissioners will continue to send an E-Blast Newsletter bi-monthly to keep the denomination informed of the work. As questions or issues dealing with the focus of the work of the Commission, several Commissioners are assigned to respond to email inquiries.

Each Commissioner sought to be reappointed by the Governing Board for another year to continue to work on receiving feedback from MCC'ers, especially increasing the number of respondents from areas outside the United States. As the 2022 General Conference approaches, the Commissioners are planning to present a more comprehensive analysis of the MCC's race equity efforts and present a plan first to the Governing Board and then to the General Conference of our recommendations for organizational change and ongoing healing opportunities.

## **Commission Webinars**

### **Region, Languages, Dates and Time Zones**

Brazil - Portuguese/English - 24th January - 7pm BRT / 10pm GMT / 5pm EST

USA (Houston) - Spanish/English - 24th January - 7pm CST / 8pm EST / 1am GMT (25th January)

Philippines - English - 27th January - 7pm PHST / 11am GMT / 6am EST

United Kingdom - English - 27th January - 7pm GMT / 2pm EST