

## **Communications Commission - Report May, 2022**

This Commission was created by the General Conference and appointed by the Governing Board as a result of an approved motion by the General Conference (which is included in the Terms of Reference below). Our work began in March of 2021. Given the short amount of time the Commission has been in place to address such important yet complex issues, **we recommend that the Communications Commission continue with its work through the next General Conference cycle.** We humbly ask the Governing Board to extend our Commission and appointments.

In the future, we will continue providing recommendations to MCC through the Governing Board, and working with the staff, Elders, and Governing Board to implement changes along the way that will improve our communications (procedures, processes, timelines, translation, cultural and regional diversity, etc.). Consequently, the extension of the commission will cause no delay in implementing improvements, even as we continue our work.

This report will reflect our work thus far and some of the challenges we have encountered. Before we go any further, we want to pause to thank all of our volunteer translators. Their work is crucial to our ability to communicate across our global MCC.

The following people have translated for us since the last General Conference. We are indebted to them for their assistance:

Ansgar Ungeheuer - German  
Rev. Dr. Ana Ester Pádua Freire - Portuguese  
Léo Rossetti - Portuguese  
Rev. Cristiano Valério - Portuguese  
Rev. Francisco Ferreira - Spanish  
Rev Elder Héctor Gutiérrez - Spanish  
Enrique Zenteno López - Spanish

### **Members of the Commission on Communications**

**Rev. Alberto Najera** - Chair of the Commission - Governing Board Member

Virginia Beach, Virginia, USA

Rev. Paul Mokgethi-Heath - Vattholma, Sweden

Léo Rossetti - Rio de Janeiro, Brazil

Enrique Zenteno López - Puebla, Mexico

Rev. Dr. Kharma Amos - Senior Leadership Team - Resource Development Team Lead

Rev. Colleen Darraugh - Internal Communications Co-ordinator

## The Terms of Reference

Because Inclusion, Community, and Justice are core values to MCC, and because we want every church and member to be able to participate as fully as they wish, we seek to address the inequities in our current communications, including ways by which we can increase the understanding of various systems and processes that vary by culture and context.

This Commission was created by the General Conference and appointed by the Governing Board as a result of this approved motion by the General Conference:

**Motion 3: Léo Rossetti, ICM Rio de Janeiro**

***Move to create a commission that will look into procedures and processes of communication between the denomination with all local churches around the globe.***

***To ensure all the communication around processes and criteria [to] reach all local communities promptly.***

This Commission will make recommendations to the General Conference and to the Governing Board. The Commission may also make recommendations, as appropriate and relevant, to other Commissions, such as the Commission on General Conference, the Commission on Pathways of Healing and Reconciliation, and to MCC Staff.

The Communications Commission will **initiate** the work to:

1. Define ways to express appreciation of and support our volunteer translators.
2. Assist with moving MCC towards equitable compensation of translators and commitment to full translation of our communications.
3. Identify the current barriers to our global communications as well as the ways in which our communications are moving towards being effective and accessible.
4. Contribute to the reduction of socio-cultural inequalities within the UFMCC resulting from the primacy of English as the official language of the denomination.
5. Ensure that core documents of our denomination (ex. Bylaws, Statement of Faith) are available online in the languages of all locations where MCC has representation.
6. Explore ways to effectively communicate HOW systems and processes work in addition to the specific content about the system or process.
7. Encourage the development of cross-cultural communication opportunities to build our global community, connection and understanding.
8. Strengthen communication within and between Networks.
9. Develop tools to increase communication from non-English speaking churches to denominational leaders and staff.
10. Give direction to expand the use of social media/apps that provide automatic translation.
11. Examine the timeline needs for preparing digital communications, getting them translated and distributed relative to the needs of staff, volunteers and churches.

12. Provide feedback and direction to the Governing Board and/or General Conference planners that will increase the ability of non-English speakers to participate more fully in the General Conference business and its processes.
13. Recommend a strategy for moving towards culturally and linguistically relevant communications without creating exclusions of various groups.
14. Inspire deeper connections across MCC.

The Commission will meet virtually at least monthly.

The Commission will be in place at least until the 2022 General Conference.

The Commission may recommend that parts of its work be continued by other relevant bodies.

## **Activity by the Commission**

The Commission publicly thanked our volunteer translators in our email announcement about the Commission and again here. We encouraged and supported the acknowledgement of current volunteer translators with an honorarium and have advocated for the inclusion of funding for translation in the general MCC Budget. Much time was spent discussing the challenges experienced by our volunteer translators and the impact on our communications because we are dependent upon volunteers for translation. We have noted that costs for translation done by people in other countries such as Mexico or Brazil are less expensive than if done in the USA. MCC would benefit from less dependency on volunteers for translation, particularly as we increase the volume of our communications.

While technology has its limitations, it also has provided assistance. We celebrate that many MCC staff members and groups are using the Microsoft Translator app as one means of being more inclusive and accessible in terms of language and translation. This General Conference will be an opportunity to expand our use of this technology. We applaud the efforts of Mike Haase, Rev. Lauren Bennett, the Core Team and those preparing for the Business Meeting. The Commission is committed to expanding the participation of members whose primary language is other than English.

We also noted that many terms within MCC do not translate well with auto translation tools. For example, Council of Elders in Portuguese auto translates as the Ancient Ones. During the 2020 Still Giving Campaign, we discovered that the phrase Still Giving did not translate culturally. In fact, we accidentally implied something sexual of our Founder and past Moderator! So you can see that the work of translation is more than technology can cover. We strive to have all documents reviewed by our volunteers for cultural context, relevance and comprehension. In examining our processes and procedures, we became aware that more was and is involved than mere translation.

We spent significant time identifying the barriers to our effective internal global communication. (This Commission has not addressed externally facing communication concerns.) We reviewed previous documents that outlined barriers and concerns. We acknowledge that our work to date has focused on the issues of language, translation, and cross-cultural communication and that

we have not even begun to connect with colleagues working on issues of disability access as it relates to communications. We have identified issues of inequity at many points. There is much to work on which is why we ask that the Commission be continued.

One of the major barriers has been related to timelines. Often there is information that needs to go out immediately with associated deadlines that does not allow sufficient time for translation by volunteers. There has been a big shift and improvement in this regard since the last General Conference with more still to do. If we want to involve our global community, we must do more advanced planning and advanced communications. We must allow time not only for translation but also for local distribution and promotion of the information. The Commission continues to work on timeline recommendations.

We have worked with and listened to staff on several fronts including hosting a meeting with the Community Development Team. As the website is being revised and resources moved to the Resource Bank, we have encouraged the use of Google docs, Google translate, and options for language choice on the new website which will allow for greater accessibility by diverse languages. Again, we note the limitations of auto translation.

Our Core Documents (Mission, Vision, Bylaws, Statement of Faith) are all being reviewed and placed in the Resource Bank in four languages - German, Spanish, Portuguese and English. Other documents in the Resource Bank will utilize the auto translation feature of Google. There will be resources and documents produced in Spanish and in Portuguese that will be in the Resource Bank and English speakers will use the automated translation to access those. This is part of our learning to share across our languages. The Resource Bank will provide greater accessibility to information and resources for those who have internet access.

Since the last General Conference, there have been more communications going out in multiple languages with some of the Statements by the Elders including three languages in one email. While some mobile users might complain that they have to scroll past other languages to get to theirs, we are reminded that we are a global community. We are making efforts to address privilege that has been and often still is given to English speakers in MCC. The Commission notes an increase in stories being shared from outside of the USA in emails and social media.

Members of this Commission have also worked with the General Conference Core Team and General Conference Commission assisting with our cross-cultural communication in the planning stages and looking ahead to our experience of this General Conference. Staff members have participated in more events with our Spanish speaking and Portuguese speaking churches. Worship services that were created collaboratively by our Iberoamerican leaders were promoted to the wider MCC and demonstrated the effective use of three languages throughout the service. We want to inspire deeper connections through more opportunities for cross-cultural community and learning.

The Communications Commission meetings have served as a vehicle for us to share not only the barriers but also to hear what changes are being implemented, what is effective, and what

more might be done. In alignment with the Terms of Reference, many things have been initiated and more remains to be done. We have just started on this enormous mission. It is our recommendation that the Communications Commission be continued for the next triennium.