

## **The Commission on Pathways of Healing and Reconciliation** **Report for General Conference**

***“So then, let us pursue what makes for peace and for mutual unbuilding.”***  
Romans 14:19

This report includes information gathered in early 2022 when the three pathways for healing were reopened, which includes a summary of written testimonies, verbal testimonies, survey results, and conversations with the members of MCC Kinship Groups (PAD, API, Disability, HIV/AIDS, and Trans/Non-Binary, First Nations, and North America Hispanic groups). The Commissioners are submitting this report to the MCC General Conference for its 2022 gathering.

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

As a point of reference, [The Commission](https://www.mcccchurch.org/commission-on-pathways-of-healing/) 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.

### **Commissioners' Work Plan**

The Commissioners have two focuses of our work:

1. Developing personal pathways to healing.
2. Developing recommendations to the Governing Board which will foster organizational change.

### **Developing Personal Pathways to Healing:**

During the summer of 2021, the Commissioners opened the three pathways to healing by encouraging members and friends of MCC Churches to share their stories of racism and inequity via email or speaking with a trained listener (with listeners who spoke English, Spanish or Portuguese) or they could respond to questions in a survey. The results from this first round are outlined in the Year One report of the Commission that was published in January 2022. A copy of that [report can be accessed here](#). Following the publication of the Year One report, we hosted webinars in various time zones around the globe and in English, Spanish and Portuguese to review our findings in the report and to respond to questions or concerns.

In February 2022, the Commissioners reopened the three pathways for a second round of participation. The responses were:

- Sharing their story via email (2 persons participated)
- Sharing their story with a trained listener from around the world, with English, Spanish and Portuguese available. (2 persons participated)
- Responding to questions in a survey (16 people participated).

The Commission was fortunate to continue our partnership with Rev. Stedney Phillips, MCC's Diversity, Inclusion and Laity Development Co-ordinator. In addition to people self-selecting their participation in these three pathways, Rev. Stedney coordinated each of the Commissioners to visit various MCC Kinships to interview members of those groups to receive their feedback on

racism and inequity within MCC Churches. Those Kinship Groups included People of African Descent: The Next Generation, Asian and Pacific Island, Disability, HIV/AIDS, Trans/Non-Binary, First Nations, and the North America Hispanic. Invitations were extended to each Kinship group, but all were able to attend our sessions. Below is a summary of responses, clustered according to theme or topic from the three pathways and the interviews with the Kinship groups we were able to meet with.

### Summary of Responses:

As stated in our previous report, 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. Participants, who in this second round, were from Australia, Brazil, the Philippines, United Kingdom, and the United States. There were common themes that arose as well as individual responses worth noting.

- **Difficulty in translating experiences of inequity:** We heard from several people outside of the United States who responded that the way the questions were worded in the survey in terms of racism was challenging to translate the concept into their cultural context. This was especially true of cultures where diversity is not recognized in terms of race or racism, but class and privilege. This concern came up often in Asian, Latin and South American and European (particularly German) cultures.
- **Colonialism/US-centric/English speaking biases:** Because MCC is a denomination founded in the United States, many of its cultural norms are hidden to US based people and obvious (sometimes painfully so) to those outside of the US. When it comes to translation of materials or correspondences, there may be phrases or concepts used that simply do not translate into another language and may not be addressed. One non-US clergy person felt that the ordination process was very Americanized and that some clergy who were qualified were not accepted while others who better fit an American mold were accepted. One person stated, *“Structural change is needed throughout the organization and leadership...currently it is a European white based hierarchy.*
- **Invisible criteria of acceptance:** While it is clearly spelled out what the requirements for clergy ordination and credentialing are, some feel they are victims of an invisible criteria that is not posted for how they can be recognized as a viable clergy candidate for open pulpits. One person who attended the 2016 General Conference is still unclear on why we were not able to elect a Moderator. They perceived there was some “insider”/hidden knowledge about the candidates that they were not privy to. Another clergy person still carries pain when their church was closed based upon unclear criteria whereas another church of the same size in their “district” (now known as network) remained opened. This clergy person pointed to a lack of clear communication from the denominational level. *“If you were liked by someone in the denomination, you could do practically anything. If you were not, you were often ignored.”* Another clergy person felt that they were over-qualified in terms of their education for some positions and still were looked over year after year for opportunities.
- **Disabilities:** Several individuals listed dealing with disabilities, especially ones that are invisible to others (i.e., mental health), is a constant challenge to find support in churches. Many suffer in silence because they do not feel comfortable in revealing their condition. In some spaces, people have been made to feel awkward and “unworthy” of an accommodation that may be made for someone with a “visible” disability. One example is being asked to read at the last minute without the accommodation of providing large print. Another example is asking someone to consecrate a chalice of juice at communion when they have a tremor. Asking in advance will help people prepare and

DON'T make assumptions. One person feels there is an impression that there is a "hierarchy of disabilities", and the invisible, hidden, and unseen disabilities are not given as high a priority. All need to be accommodated. In these days of "Zoom Church," some find the use of technology as a challenge and find that use of the chat boxes a great distraction. Lastly, one person shared that, *"it would feel like success if people were more able to talk about their disabilities, if they are comfortable, and not be labeled as 'Difficult Disabled'. It would also be a benefit to have visibility upfront from leadership - for people to be willing to share their disability or be seen in leadership with disabilities."*

- **HIV/AIDS:** Support groups are very important to providing support to those living with HIV/AIDS. With medicines getting better, maybe the church no longer sees the need for this support. It would be nice to have additional programming than World AIDS Day. Hearing stories about people who are living / thriving with HIV still help encourage people to deal with shame and guilt of the past. A recommendation for UFMCC to have a coordinator for HIV/AIDS for the church to be a leader among other denominations for programming and spiritual support.
- **Creating Welcoming Space:** For many People of Color, finding welcoming space has been few and far in between. While cultural gathering during General Conferences or at regional gatherings, that doesn't always transfer to the local church context. One person noted that they kept a membership at both a MCC and a church that was more culturally relevant to them to feed their spirit because neither church was doing it completely. Another person felt it took several years for them as a person of color to be accepted among most white people in the church. This was a heavy lift for them because of the micro and macro aggressions geared towards them. *"Going to church was exhausting, but I was one of the few who kept the church running, so I was committed to show up."* Another person stated they were uncomfortable when there is a clear power dynamic in the space, which is usually white supremacy. And another person mentioned that they were concerned with horizontal racism and the power dynamic "there can be only one" powerful person of color in the room in charge or able to have an opinion.
- **Tokenization:** Sometimes it seems people of color are only approached to do something in leadership or have their opinion matter during Black History Month or Pride Month to emphasize diversity. *"It doesn't feel good to be put back in the corner (when they are done with you) to make someone else feel good."* Another person doesn't feel as if there is an open door to have conversations about race or racism outside of when they are with their own cultural group. And another person stated that as a church leader, they *"felt like Obama. Given power, but hands are tied to make decisions initially."* Lastly, one person focused on their own self-determination and expect the power structure to struggle with inclusion. *"Be at home wherever one finds oneself, step up, stand up. Don't depend on anyone else to give them (you) a place."*
- **Transgender/Gender Non-Conforming:** One person stated, *"the whole reason they came to MCC was to be welcomed, they do feel they can be themselves at church. There is an expectation that one tells their story, but they are met with positive feedback, so to tell the story has also been a good experience."* Another person who came out as trans in the 1990s stated that they did not feel safe as a trans person in MCC then, but they do feel quite safe now. One of the problems raised was that trans people are expected to educate the congregation or expect one trans person to speak for all trans people. This is especially problematic for trans people who are newly coming out, to have to create their own space of safety in the church. Information for/about trans people is not always easy to find on the MCC website, the materials have not been updated in a very long time. An example was given of a recent issue, there was barely any traction on Trans Day of Visibility, only 1 post was made on the denomination's Facebook page. One person stated

that information on the Trans Day of Visibility was not sent out enough, not by email, or other means. *“If they only want us to talk about Trans Day of Remembrance [as opposed to Trans Day of Visibility] what does that say about trans people?”* (Specifically referencing the reality that churches are more inclined to memorialize slain trans people than to honor the visibility of living trans people). Many people, including clergy and people in positions of power/leadership, are not up to speed on trans terminology or able to handle discussions (or pastoral care) regarding trans issues. It would be helpful to have a requirement for training people in leadership, perhaps a certification that must be renewed.

### **Organizational Change:**

Ideally it would be wonderful to have a greater percentage of participation globally from the members and friends of MCC. However, the feedback we did receive is incredibly valuable and provides the Commission with enough information to formulate our recommendations to the Governing Board. We asked the Governing Board for an extension of our term, which was to conclude in June 2022. Our terms were extended to December 2022 to allow time for the synthesizing of our collected data with previous data and reports on race and race equity that preceded the formation of the Commission.

The Commission and the Governing Board are committed to using the framework for organizational change 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. Once the Commissioners synthesize the data and use the process outlined in *Awake to Woke to Work*, we will feel confident in making our recommendations to the Governing Board on how to build a culture of race equity within MCC.

As we formulate our recommendations, the Commission will consult with outside advisors to guide us along this process. We will continue to meet with the Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, Justice consultants from the Unitarian Universalist Association who went through a similar evaluative process with their denomination. We also hope to consult with a person(s) who specializes in Diversity and Inclusion transformation for non-profits and/or religious organizations.

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

We will continue to partner with Rev. Stedney Phillips, 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 to be presented before the end of our extended term in December 2022.

Because we encouraged people to share their stories of hurt and inequality within MCC, we gathered rich and important stories that fit into other categories besides race and racism. This report encompasses many of those concerns and The Commissioners will bring particular attention to these voices as well.

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.