

## **Moderator's Report to General Conference 17<sup>th</sup> July 2022**

As many of you may remember, I was overjoyed to be elected to serve as Moderator in July 2019. For me, it was the personal fulfilment of a deep and long held call. In the time that has followed, I have been asked on different occasions if my joy has lasted.

The answer is "Yes".

MCC is filled with remarkable people - gifted, talented, resilient, generous people. I am honoured to serve alongside you. I speak regularly with local church pastors and ministry leaders around the world and am always energised by these conversations. MCC is an amazing gift to the world. We remain at the cutting edge of inclusive worship and passionate social justice ministry. Remember, most Christian churches around the world still do not welcome LGBTQI+ people with open arms. Many do active harm. In many non MCC congregations globally, women are allowed no place in leadership. Worship, especially preaching and celebrating communion is the sole province of those who are ordained. Racism, sexism, ableism, homo -, bi - and transphobia in many faith communities go unchecked and unchallenged. Whilst there is always room to grow and learn, MCC is still a church like no other.

These last 3 years have certainly not been the easiest for any of us, and I am very grateful to my colleagues on the Governing Board, Council of Elders and MCC staff, who have shared their wisdom, knowledge and their honest truth with me. I am also grateful for the prayers, support and encouragement that I have received from MCCers around the world.

In July 2019 UFMCC was in a perilous financial state. There had been a breakdown in trust between the denomination and local congregations, and MCC seemed to have lost confidence in itself. The impact of racism and sexism within the denomination was profoundly felt by many.

My first task, along with the Governing Board, was to address our finances. This included restructuring the staff team and establishing a more realistic budget. None of these decisions were easy. The staff were professional, helpful and gracious throughout this difficult time.

Improving the communication from the Governing Board and ensuring transparency around our financial reporting were both instrumental in rebuilding trust. Churches and individuals began to trust that MCC is a good financial steward and have been generous in their support of our shared ministry. Special thanks to Chad Hobbs, Treasurer and Rev. Elder Diane Fisher, Clerk to the Governing Board for their role in creating excellent communications from the Governing Board. Thanks also to Rev. Colleen Darraugh for improving the frequency and quality of communications from the denomination and to our volunteer translators.

I appointed Rev. Dr Kharma Amos as the Resource Team lead, with responsibility for fundraising. She took the initiative on developing the first ever MCC Endowment fund, which will provide additional income for ministry in the future. I worked with Kharma and Marina Laws to shift the emphasis of the Moderator's Circle donor programme away from the role of Moderator, to focus instead on the people who actually give to MCC, as well as giving to their local church - our Partners in Hope. Many of these individuals have given faithfully to MCC, in both good and challenging times. It is heartening to hear their MCC stories and their motivation for giving. As you will read in the Treasurer's report, MCC is now in a stable, healthy financial position. Your generosity and faithfulness, coupled with the MCC staff's excellent stewardship, the Governing Board Finance Committee's rigorous examination of the monthly budget and Governing Board's oversight, has brought MCC to this place. A special thanks to Tammy Erwin, who has worked tirelessly to bring UFMCC right up to date with its audits and to Rev. Marsha Warren, for her support on this.

MCC staff work hard to create excellent resources to share with church leaders and congregations, as well as the support and expertise they offer. Board training and specific training for treasurers offered by Tammy Erwin, Rebecca Wilson and Marina Laws are a few examples. The financial stability has given the staff an opportunity to offer further resources using external facilitators. Rebecca Wilson and Rev. Cathy Alexander commissioned A Place for Hope to offer training on how to manage conflict in a healthy way and further training is planned. The current MCC website is being updated, under the guidance of web designer Tara Nelson, and there will be easy access to worship and other resources, as well as information that is useful for clergy, lay delegates and other church leaders. Thank you to Chris Baker, who ensures that our websites stay online and are protected from the different threats that lurk in cyberspace.

MCC's voice of justice is much needed in the world. The improved financial situation has allowed MCC to be partners with other organisations, becoming a sponsor for events, such as the US National Day of Trans Visibility and Queer Youth Day, as well as continuing our long-standing partnership with the Religious Archives Network, which holds and honours the stories of so many MCC leaders. MCC has become a partner with Charter for Compassion, which has projects all over the world and is just beginning to develop its work around LGBTQI issues. I have also made personal connections with leaders of other denominations – The Fellowship of Affirming Ministries, Universal Unitarian Association and United Reformed Church. In September 2022, I will attend the World Council of Churches Assembly in Germany. We are working with our churches in Germany, with LGBT+ faith groups in Europe and around the world to co-ordinate a strong presence there. Thanks to Rev. Paul Whiting and Rev. Dr. Axel Schwaigert for their work on this. Later this year, I intend to develop a Partnerships Team to develop our social justice work more fully on the global stage, working with MCCers who are already active in this work and have links to other organisations. I am also working with James Hartman & Associates to make public statements on justice issues around the world, collaborating with local church leaders where appropriate.

As well as the financial situation, another pressing issue I wanted to address as Moderator was that of racism within MCC. At General Conference 2019, the Governing Board was tasked with establishing a Commission on a pathway of healing and reconciliation “in order to shine a light on elements that have fractured MCC relationships since General Conference 2016 and continues”.

I chose to co-chair this Commission and the Governing Board appointed Rev. Dr Roland Stringfellow as co-chair. The Commission will give its own report to the General Conference on its work to date. I am grateful to those who have been willing to share their experiences of racism and other issues within MCC and to all the Commissioners who have given their time and energy to this important work. I am also grateful to the many volunteers around the world who offered to be “listeners” for those who wished to tell their story in person. The Commission issued an interim report at the end of 2021 and will make its final report and recommendations by the end of 2022. In the meantime, the staff, Governing Board and Council of Elders continue to engage with race equity, diversity and inclusion, as part of their ministry.

As part of its work, the Commission analysed previous MCC reports on diversity and inclusion. One of the key issues that arose from these reports was the need for antiracism training at all levels of the denomination. In response to this, the Council of Elders approved the requirement for all MCC clergy to complete at least 2 hours of anti-racism, anti-oppression or anti-colonialism training as part of the clergy licence renewal process. Funds of US\$42,000 were raised during the Still Giving campaign, celebrating milestone birthdays for Rev. Troy Perry and Rev. Elder Dr Nancy Wilson, to use for racial justice work. Some of these funds have been used to provide training. The Commission, Governing Board, Council of Elders and MCC staff had a whole day of anti-racism training together, facilitated by the Washington Consulting Group. Rev. Stedney Phillips organised a day of training for all staff on microaggressions by Beyond Conflict. Funds from the Thriving in Ministry grant given by the Lilly Foundation have been used to provide training on diversity, equity and inclusion for clergy and ministry leaders, facilitated by Multicultural Consulting Services. In addition to participating in these training opportunities, I have participated in “Responding to the Call: Anti-Racist Organizing and Leadership for White Religious/Spiritual Leaders” facilitated by Evangeline Weiss and Chris Crass, including a series of coaching circles following on from the training. I am committed to continuing my deepening understanding of racism and white supremacy, so that I can more authentically lead MCC to becoming the truly diverse, racially equitable and inclusive movement that I believe God is calling us to be. I am mindful of race equity, diversity and inclusion when making decisions about staffing appointments, recommendations for appointments to Commissions and Governing Board committees and in the appointment of the current Council of Elders.

The previous Council of Elders completed its term in January 2021. The Elders were gracious and thoughtful in helping me to step into the role of Moderator, gave me a broader perspective when I brought fledgling ideas for their input and encouraged me to be bold. I greatly appreciated the opportunity I had to serve alongside them. A heartfelt thank you to Elder Nancy Maxwell and Rev. Elders Pat Bumgardner, Ines-Paul

Baumann, Tony Freeman, Hector Gutierrez, Dwayne Johnson, Candice Shultis, Margarita Sánchez De León and Mona West.

As a new Moderator, I wanted to bring fresh energy to the Council of Elders and chose to appoint a whole new Council, which the Governing Board approved, and the Special General Conference affirmed. This Council is entirely made of volunteers – there are no serving Elders on staff. Some are local church pastors, others have secular work, one is a chaplain. There is a rich diversity of theology, backgrounds, countries and cultures. Your Elders are Elder Velma Garcia and Rev. Elders Goudy, Alejandro Escoto, Karl Hand, Miller Hoffman, Carolyn Mobley-Bowie, Maxwell Reay and Troy Treash. The Elders offer a monthly Tea Time for chat, prayer and reflection, respond to pastoral and prayer requests, participate in ordination, anniversaries and other church celebrations. They have recorded reflections for Advent, Lent and Easter, which many churches use as part of worship. Thanks to Janine McCarthy who co-ordinates the weekly Elders Call to Prayer, the translators and all those who have contributed a prayer. I had intended to establish a Commission to review how MCC offers spiritual leadership at a denominational level to report to this General Conference. However, this proved to be one task too many. I intend to establish the Commission by the end of 2022.

The Council of Elders and Governing Board have had several joint meetings, in order to work on complex issues together and joint working groups have been established, also with staff involvement to work on support for church closure, the judicial process and church disaffiliation.

The judicial process needed updating and I have facilitated the working group doing this work. The Governing Board appointed Rev. Deana Dudley as the Judicial Process Manager, a new role which will oversee the judiciary process. Thank you to my Confidential Executive Assistants, formerly Marina Laws and now Tammy Rabon-Noyce for their support of the Governing Board, the Council of Elders and me in our work.

In the months following General Conference 2019, I travelled extensively to meet with churches at network gatherings in USA, Brazil and Australia. Meeting with people in their own context, getting a glimpse of their culture and seeing the communities in which MCC ministers are important to me. It was inspiring to hear how local congregations are serving their communities. I was glad to answer questions about how the denomination works, to hear concerns and suggestions for better partnerships between the denomination and the local church. In Brazil and Australia, I met with officials and politicians at different levels, supporting the local churches in their justice work. Thank you to Rev. Cristiano Valerio and Rev. Alex Pittaway for organising these significant meetings. Cristiano is the regional office for Brazil and supports Rev. Elder Hector in his ministry with our ICM churches in Latin America. It was fantastic to be part of Melbourne Pride! I was greatly honoured, along with my wife Orgena, to accompany our founder, Rev. Troy Perry, his husband Phillip de Blicke and Rev. Steve Pieters as they presented artifacts from MCC's history to be placed in the Smithsonian collection in Washington DC, USA.

Whilst MCC's financial situation and the healing needed around racism were no surprise to me at the beginning of my term, a global pandemic was certainly not part of my work plan. When Orgena and I left for Australia in January 2020, COVID-19 was already starting to make its presence felt. When we worshipped with MCC San Francisco in late February, the church was already taking precautions, with elbow bumps at the sign of peace and hand sanitiser at the ready. We arrived home in early March and two weeks later the UK went into full lockdown.

Around the world, MCCers were in the same pandemic storm, but not in the same boat. Some countries had good access to vaccination, others did not. Some federal, state and local governments offered good guidance, others ignored the advice from scientists and health experts, causing significant harm to the population they were elected to serve. In the midst of all this, MCC congregations continued in ministry. Food pantries and feeding programmes became even busier. Church pastors and boards suddenly had to become experts in building hygiene and were making decisions about how best to keep their congregations protected and yet held in community. Those with technological skills suddenly were pushed to the forefront of ministry, as online worship, bible study and coffee time became part of everyday church life. In all of this, there was, and continues to be, grief, loss and opportunity. Many congregations lost members to Covid. In at least one congregation, over 10% of the congregation succumbed. The loss of Rev. Vickey Gibbs, Resurrection MCC early in the pandemic was a huge shock. MCC colleagues have lost multiple family members and most of us know people who have contracted the virus. It has been a gruelling time and has shown how resilient we are. Churches have been able to reach out beyond their local community and connect with those who are nowhere near an MCC. Pastors have invited guest preachers from other countries, and have supported each other in many ways, such as through shared bible studies and personal connection.

I want to place on record how extraordinarily proud I am of our MCC staff in their response to support church leaders during this pandemic. The Community Development Team, led by Rev. Elder Hector Gutierrez, provided regular online support sessions and staff used funding from the Lilly Foundation grant to provide personal and spiritual support for clergy. Guidance was offered about best practice for keeping congregations safe. Early in the pandemic, local pastors with experience of providing online worship were brought together on a panel to share their expertise. Funding from the Lilly grant was also used to bring in external facilitators to provide webinars on becoming Hybrid Church. Workshops were also offered for US churches on the PPP loan scheme from the US Government and Employee Tax Credit. Churches in financial difficulties were offered assessment agreements. Churches struggling with worship were offered a list of preachers willing to offer an online presence. I know that many staff provided a listening ear for church leaders who were struggling to navigate this new landscape and support their congregations, whilst also dealing with illness and grief within their own families. In the midst of all this, we lost one of our staff members, Camille Aruallo to cancer. She had good friends on staff and is much missed.

I wondered what I could offer that might just provide a moment's relief for pastors and ministry leaders. I started to offer a time of prayer and reflection most weeks on Facebook live. These gentle sessions last for 30 – 40 minutes and are designed to be a breather from everyday life. I really enjoy the live interactions with MCCers and others from around the world. I know others watch the videos later. I am grateful to Mike Haase, who is ever present, supporting me with any technical issues and providing links to resources in the comments section. I am also grateful to Orgena for providing live singing performances, often at very little notice, as well as technical support as needed! These reflections are a small contribution, but they help me to feel connected to people in our congregations and hopefully offer something in return.

I started to record sermons for the first Sunday after Christmas Day, the first Sunday after Easter and for Pentecost which may be used in the local church. It has been lovely to get feedback from pastors to say that it has given them one less thing to prepare at a busy time of year. I am glad to do something to lighten the load. It has also been a delight to share in the church anniversaries, ordinations and other special events, by recording a video greeting to share in the service.

Network leaders have continued their important ministry of connection between local congregations during the pandemic. It has been a delight to be able to attend online network gatherings wherever possible. I also participated in the monthly ICM Latin America worship service and attended the PAD: The Next Generation Ritual Ceremony. (People of African Descent). I co-facilitated a retreat for network leaders, and it was great to hear the different ways in which they support the congregations in their area. I have engaged in discussions with staff about how best to move forward with developing networks, as this remains an area that still needs further discernment.

Before the pandemic started, I had discussed the possibility of starting online MCC Communities with Rev. Wanda Floyd and she has taken the lead in this area. This is a way of building links between those who are already part of MCC and others around the world, who have no access to a local church. The MCC Communities are language based. My hope is also that this online presence be also a point of connection for those whose local church may have closed, but want to remain part of MCC. The pandemic has shown us that online connection can greatly extend the reach of MCC, especially to those who do not live near any form of inclusive faith community, and I look forward to seeing how we might develop online communities further. The new website [www.visitmccchurch.com](http://www.visitmccchurch.com), designed and created by Rev. Duane Romberger is also part of MCC's outreach to people who are new to MCC and was created last year, with significant input from MCCers around the world.

It can be hard to contemplate the future, when so much is going on in the present. However, we need to prayerfully consider what God is calling MCC to be and to do in the years ahead. As part of that work, I serve on the General Conference Commission, which is co-chaired by Rev. Lauren Bennett and Mike Haase. This Commission was charged with examining how General Conference might be conducted in the future. The

Governing Board also tasked it with looking at whether the current system of voting in two Houses is the best way going forward. The Commission has its own report, however I want to acknowledge its work in actually giving space to imagine how the General Conference might be different, even before the pandemic started.

It was clear in 2019 that having the next General Conference in the USA again was not acceptable to many delegates. I also recognised that wherever they are held in the world, these large gatherings are out of the reach of many MCCers. The “dream sessions” facilitated by the General Conference Commission highlighted what MCCers really valued about General Conference, such as connection, learning from each other and worship. The General Conference Co-ordinators, Mike Haase and Rev. Lauren Bennett developed the idea of having a multi-site global General Conference, so that more people could enjoy a larger gathering, closer to them. Every location was open to all MCCers, with connecting times of shared worship, speakers and programming around the world, as well as locally appropriate sessions. Elders, Governing Board members and staff would all be dispersed to the different sites, providing a denominational presence at every site. Planning was well underway for this model, with sites in Brazil, England, the Philippines and USA. However, the fluctuating COVID situation in different parts of the world, new variants, travel restrictions and the risk of having large in-person gatherings meant this option was not safe or financially viable. Huge thanks to the General Conference Core Team for their work in planning General Conference - Rev. Dr. Kharma Amos, Dr. Lillian Dunlap, Rev. Elder Hector Gutierrez, Rev. Jennifer J.C. Hall, Chad Hobbs, Barry Hundley, Rev. Lori McPherson, Léo Rossetti and to the Governing Board for their leadership in deciding to hold General Conference online. Thank you Mike and Lauren who co-chair the Core Team, and all the General Conference teams who have re-focussed their efforts to ensure the online Transformational weekend and Business meeting are a great success.

In 2021, I presented the following 5 aims to the Governing Board to guide MCCs work up to 2025, the end of my term as Moderator:

**Spirituality** Clear articulation of our queer, inclusive theology with rites and sacraments that reflect our values

**Presence** Global presence which is locally appropriate and globally robust

**Diversity** Increased integration of diverse people in a holistic and measurable way

**Leadership** Robust recruiting, training and mentoring plans to raise up a new generation of leaders

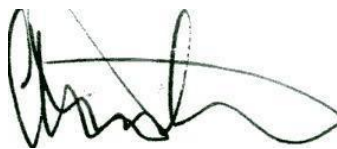
**Resources** Abundant and appropriate resources that reflect and embody the generosity and creativity of our people

The MCC staff, Governing Board and Council of Elders spent two sessions, facilitated by Evangeline Weiss, to develop goals in each of these areas to guide our work for the next three years. We also dreamed a little of what MCC could be by 2030 – only eight years away. This strategic vision statement does not replace the UMCC Vision Statement and is intended as an aspirational and guiding document for future planning at a denominational level. It sets out our strategic direction of travel. The goals that will be worked over the next three years will bring MCC closer to this vision, which is attached at the end of this report.

Like all denominations, MCC needs to look at how we respond to the new landscape that COVID-19 has created and how to communicate our core message of God's inclusive love for all in a way that will transform lives around the world. This will involve in depth analysis of the data provided by our churches, as well as discussions about priorities for resources and funding. MCC is in a good place to really move forward in exciting ways and build on all that we have achieved together in the past three years.

As we enter the next 3 years of ministry, I am so grateful to each of you for what you do to bring hope, joy and justice to the people that God is calling MCC to serve. Thank you to all the Governing Board, Rev Paul Whiting, who resigned earlier this year, Clare Coughlin, Rev. Elder Diane Fisher and Chad Hobbs whose terms finish in July, and Rev. Marie Alford-Harkey, James Chavis, Mark Godette and Rev. Alberto Najera, who will continue to serve until July 2025. I have endeavoured to name many of the individuals who contribute so generously of their time and who will not be acknowledged in other reports. I am thankful for the grace and encouragement extended to me by Rev. Troy Perry and Rev. Elder Dr. Nancy Wilson. I am profoundly glad to be accompanied on this journey by my wife Orgena. I thank God for the opportunity to serve alongside you. It takes all of us to be MCC.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Cecilia Eggleston', written in a cursive style.

Reverend Elder Cecilia Eggleston

Moderator



**UFMCC Strategic Vision 2030**  
**Draft 2nd May 2022**

MCC will be a renowned and respected organisation for LGBTQ spiritual matters, locally and globally, and respected for an accessible, inclusive, and radical theology.

We will be influential in the spheres of social and theological commentary, spiritual and inner healing, and the creative arts.

Members of the press, educational institutions and others will call on MCC for comments and a clear voice of spiritual authority in matters of justice as they are occurring.

We will be active partners with other organisations around the world, working together to bring justice, peace, and dignity for those at the margins.

We will lead the way by bringing Good News into digital spaces, creating fully accessible online communities and supporting local churches to reach out online, to engage with those who are seeking a spiritual community and a place to belong.

Metropolitan Community Churches will be a truly global movement, with diverse representation on all its leadership bodies, with voices from the southern hemisphere equitable with those of the north.

We will have servant leaders around the world that are called, equipped, and empowered to serve local communities with integrity, responding to local needs with care, courage and thoughtfulness. They will be able to risk doing church differently where needed, whilst upholding and living out MCC core values.

We will listen to both the voices of experience and the voices of those who will take MCC into the future, navigating the tension of being in the now and also ready for what may be next.

There will be collaborative, innovative partnerships between the local church and the denomination, where all can contribute, learn, and grow together.

MCC will develop and share high quality resources, giving a strong theological foundation for justice work and the day-to-day life of being a local church.

There will be a culture of generosity and an appreciation of all that MCC has.  
We will be kind, thoughtful and caring towards each other and to those we engage with.

We will have a quick, robust, and functional communication system throughout MCC  
that helps us minimise duplication of effort,  
collaborate in ways that bring strong ideas and gifts to the fore,  
and build upon the best grassroots work being done by congregations/spiritual  
communities.

We will be nimble, flexible, and able to pivot quickly to be efficient and effective in our  
work.

We will have a 20-year history of clean audits and financial stability.

We will have a growing endowment fund with \$3Million USD.

We will help our congregations set up endowments  
and provide them with assistance for fundraising.

We will have more scholarships available to assist those entering vocational ministry in  
MCC,  
as well as lay leaders committed to increased education and skills-building.

Metropolitan Community Churches will have the faith, resources, resilience, creativity  
and flexibility to fully live out its calling and to transform the world.