



11 July 2016

**1st Lay Delegate's Report
June/July 2016**

Since our last board of directors meeting, my work for the church has focused on General Conference.

Forum on General Conference – Sunday, June 26, 2016

David and I held a forum after service to advise the congregation on important items being voted on at General Conference. From that conversation, we learned that (1) most in attendance were *against* electing Stephanie Burns and to a lesser extent Joe Cobb to the Governing Board; (2) most trusted us to elect lay candidates to the Governing Board; (3) most felt a person of color should be elected as Moderator, with Darlene Garner the front runner and Hector Gutierrez a close second; and (4) most affirmed the Statement of Faith, raising some concern over the use of “priesthood,” which has negative connotations.

With this feedback, David and I brought the views of our congregation to General Conference.

Overview of General Conference in Victoria, British Columbia

1. Challenges

My feelings about General Conference are mixed. It was stressful rooming with two others and being in an environment where alcohol was served. Also, since 12 Step meetings were inconveniently scheduled at 7am and services/plenaries often ran over and conflicted with affinity groups like the HIV/AIDS group, it was difficult for me to make my own connections apart from meeting people that David and Kenny knew.

This conference relied heavily on a high-tech audio/visual system that was not operating properly. The main screen in the center (which featured PowerPoints and videos) and two smaller screens on either side (which displayed what the on-site cameras were capturing and broadcasting over the web) would often repeatedly blink off without warning and impeded the presentations, often to hilarious effect. PowerPoints were often not in sequence with music. Needed microphones were slow to activate.

These flaws in some ways are very MCC. In Richmond, difficulties like this happen and our reaction is one of smiles and acknowledgement that we are all human. But when churches are spending huge sums of money to send delegates, I expect a higher level of preparation and professionalism. This was a new Worship Team, so my hope is that they will learn from their mistakes and work toward a much cleaner presentation next conference.



It is also important to note that there is no MCC in Victoria, the capital of British Columbia, a very white, affluent community that is very friendly but inaccessible on many levels to the traveler. So I question the denomination's decision to send us there.

2. Positive Moments

Given these challenges, there were also many positive moments for me. I was able to shake the hand of Rev. Elder Troy Perry after a worship service early in the week and I often ran into Moderator Nancy Wilson in the hallway and elevator of the hotel. David and Kenny each introduced me to these major figures. I also shook the hand of Mariela Castro, daughter of Cuban president Raul Casto, and got a few hugs and a kiss from Rev. Elder Freda Smith, the first ordained woman and elder of MCC.

And the list goes on. I met, hugged and shook hands with elders Dwayne Johnson, Hector Gutierrez and Darlene Garner. I also met Governing Board candidates Rev. William Knight, Rev. Stephanie Burns, Rev. Joe Cobb and Kim Brown.

Seeing Rev. Elder Freda Smith preach Sunday evening before the opening of General Conference was a rare treat. History played a big role in the sermons and other reflections of the conference. Rev. Kenny and I had just read four books about the gay liberation movement and the role MCC played in a church history and polity course we took together. We also watched a few videos of Freda Smith speaking about her role in the formation of the denomination.

Two other worship moments that engaged me and brought me grace were led by Rev. Candy Holmes (Darlene Garner's partner) and Rev. Roland Stringfellow (of MCC Detroit), both African American. Six of the nine preachers at General Conference were white and only two were African American.

Candy Holmes spontaneously (I'm told) got up and led the conference in "Thank You, Lord" at the end of the Thursday evening service. I had overslept my nap that afternoon and got to the service late feeling disconnected. Candy Holmes' open arms during this song brought me in. Richard Ward, a lay delegate from Roanoke, was also present with me and made me feel one with the conference.

The most memorable service for me was led by Roland Stringfellow, the General Conference Worship Leader. It was Friday morning and the service began with house music and dancing! Many attendees were dancing on the make-shift dance floor. I hung back and watched. When Rev. Stringfellow came out, he was in full drag and fierce! He was introduced as Madame Butterfly of House Emerge (the butterfly was a theme throughout the conference and "Emerge" was the title of the conference).

M. Butterfly then took us on a historic journey from the Stonewall riots to the present-day shootings in New Orleans and Minnesota and Dallas as a fierce diva who witnessed it all. His character sermon was brilliant, and I believe Rev. Stringfellow will be someone to watch as MCC takes a hard look at itself and its future. I believe we need visionary leadership like this.



Business Forum Notes – Monday, July 4, 2016

This forum allowed clergy and delegates to ask questions and voice concerns before the Business Meeting the following day. The Moderator's Nominating Committee presented their process, which was impressive in its depth. The Statement of Faith committee also presented its process after which David raised our congregation's concern over the use of "priesthood" in the statement.

During the forum, a number of concerns were raised on the lack of accessibility for people with special needs. MCC has many people with physical, sight and auditory challenges.

While I had to leave with Rev. Kenny to attend a meeting of our MCC History and Polity class, we learned from David that someone on the floor requested that Onnetta Brooks recuse herself as a candidate for the Governing Board because of her mismanagement of the Moderator's Nominating Committee, which resulted in more than half the Governing Board resigning. This request would have an impact on voting during the Business Meeting.

Business Meeting Notes – Tuesday, July 5, 2016

Lay delegates and clergy are divided into separate houses. In order to pass, elections, motions and amendments to our Bylaws must receive a two-thirds vote or 51% of the vote in both houses.

1. Motions and Bylaws

All motions and amendments to the Bylaws passed. The most significant vote was to affirm the new Statement of Faith, which passed overwhelmingly. The Bylaw changes were mostly housekeeping. The Statement will be kept in a special historical documents archive separate from the Bylaws so that it is easier to amend and reshape it as the denomination sees fit.

The use of electronic voting devices is new to General Conference, and there were a fair number of questions about them as we moved toward voting for the Governing Board and Moderator positions. But the assembly seemed to adapt fairly quickly.

2. Governing Board

The Governing Board was elected in one vote: Onnetta Brooks received the lowest number of votes essentially voting her out of office. Rev. Jacob Hero (who is trans, I learned), received the most votes. Other clergy elected were Rev. Joe Cobb, Rev. William Knight, and Rev. Stephanie Burns.

I voted for all candidates except Stephanie Burns, according to the wishes of the congregation.



Since there was a third resignation among the laity on the Governing Board, there were three positions to fill and three candidates. All three who were presented were affirmed to take office: Kim Brown, Angel Collie and Mark Dagleish.

I voted for all three lay candidates.

3. Moderator

The election of a moderator was tricky. I had assumed that a clear front runner would emerge from the first vote. Not so. In fact, the candidate with the highest percentage in each house was Rev. Elder Diane Fisher, and that percentage was no more than 30%. A 51% affirmation in each house was necessary to elect a moderator.

I voted for Rev. Elder Darlene Garner the first vote, according to the wishes of our congregation.

On the second, third and fourth votes, it was apparent that Diane Fisher was emerging as the front runner in both houses, but still Rev. Diane did not receive the required 51% of the vote from either house.

At this point, I felt that the Holy Spirit was telling us something: We were not in any accord to elect a moderator. *When Nancy Wilson invoked the Moderator's privilege and ask us to vote on having a fifth vote, I voted "No" on this motion.* Only a small percentage (under 10% or nearly 20) in the Lay House also voted "No." A more significant number (almost 30% or nearly 50) voted "No" in the Clergy House. Since a two-thirds affirmation was needed, a fifth vote was approved.

4. The Fifth Vote for Moderator

Besides accessibility, a number of concerns were raised about a growing number of abstention votes in the Clergy House. Indeed, as the abstention votes grew, so did the concerns.

The fifth and final vote was telling. In the Lay House, Diane Fisher was the winner with 60% of the vote.

I voted for Diane Fisher during that fifth vote.

In the Clergy House, she was still the front runner but received under 40% of the vote. This was in large part because there were nearly 50 abstentions (matching the "No" votes on the motion for a fifth vote). As a result, no moderator was elected.

5. An Interim Moderator

Because no moderator was elected, the new Governing Board is now charged with appointing an Interim Moderator and MCC as a denomination will enter a period of transition for the next three years, much like MCC Richmond has previously experienced. During that that time, a new Moderator's



Nominating Committee will be appointed in order to present candidates at our next General Conference in Orlando, Florida, July 1-5, 2019. My hope and prayer is that these next three years will be a time of reflection and renewal for UFMCC as we prepare to welcome a new moderator in 2019.

L.E.A.D Program Update

I know that a number of church members were disappointed that the Richmond 4, those of us who attended the L.E.A.D. retreat in Kansas City, Missouri, in 2012, have either left the church or have not continued with the program. I am one of those four.

While I believe Rev. Robin Gorsline's resignation was one reason we dissolved as a group, I am glad I hung on and am happy to report that I made a great deal of progress with the program as our 1st Lay Delegate. In fact, I encourage anyone who is interested in learning more about our denomination to run for 1st or 2nd Lay Delegate and apply to the L.E.A.D. program.

MCC History and Polity. With the exception of the final project, I have completed all required work for MCC History and Polity, the first L.E.A.D. course I've taken since 2013. This is a bear of a class, with heavy reading and writing requirements. Surprisingly, Rev. Kenny was also taking the class and we were able to collaborate and get the work done faster. We will be completing the final project together by the end of July.

In addition, I will receive L.E.A.D. credit for attending the following workshops at General Conference:

MCC Leadership and Programming for the Future. This presentation was an overview of the innovative work that Rev. Wes Mullins, Rev. Katie Hotze-Wilton and Rev. Lillie Brock are doing at MCC St. Louis. Their new model of church programming tries to meet congregants where they are in their spiritual journeys and offers them a variety of choices for their spiritual growth. It is a model that we can bring to some degree to MCC Richmond and will take A LOT of organization. (But it's worth it!)

Story-Telling Workshop. This presentation was the first of three to help me fulfill the Worship educational requirement for L.E.A.D. While I think it was geared toward preachers, anyone who speaks in front of a group can take away some key concepts. Jade Esteban Estrada, a global entertainer, gave the presentation and pointed out the key components of any engaging story with some attention-grabbing ways to present it.

Recruiting and Training for the Worship Team. This presentation was the second of three to help me fulfill the Worship component of L.E.A.D. Dr. Marcia McFee of the Worship Design Studio was the presenter. She, along with the Worship Team, designed General Conference. What was thought provoking about this workshop was how everyone sees worship in a different way and can bring a unique set of skills to it. The takeaway is that we may be underutilizing our members when it comes to designing a more creative and thematic worship experience.



Mentoring Matters. This presentation fulfills the Developing and Equipping Others component of my L.E.A.D education. While the presenter was my least favorite, I did come to see mentorship in a new light. Mentoring is first and foremost about developing a relationship in which both parties learn from each other. It is also about trying on new hats in a safe, noncommittal way. As MCC Richmond grows, mentorship will become very important.

How to Bring General Conference Worship Home. This presentation was the third of three that I needed to complete the Worship component of the L.E.A.D. program. Members of the General Conference Worship Team gathered to discuss their role in designing the conference. As a result, the conference as a whole had an overall theme: Emerge. And each day of the conference presented its own unique theme. MCC Richmond might want to use this model to create seasonal series of worship services that would require less work week to week and inspire more attendance with surprising fresh ideas.

L.E.A.D Work left to do.

While I still have six other courses to complete, include Creating a Life the Matters (CLM), I am hopeful that my work will remain steady and I will be able to receive my L.E.A.D certificate during General Conference in 2019.

Of special note is a webinar *Best Practices of Effective Boards* that I encourage all MCC Richmond Board of Directors to watch with me.

Congregational Forums

With the approval of the Board of Directors, I am willing to put together a number of forums leading up to Advent to pass on some of the things we learned during General Conference. Here are some ideas:

General Conference Business Meeting Note. The politics involved and its ramifications. David, Rev. Kenny and I can lead this forum together.

Additional forum ideas:

MCC Leadership for the Future. Instead of a hierarchal approach to leadership, a team-based approach is proposed.

Programming and Mentoring for Ministry Leaders. Meeting the congregation where they are in their spiritual development by offering a variety of programming options and adopting mentorship as the model for ministry.

Recruiting and Design for the Worship Team. Get everyone involved in worship in some way by tapping into their passions and gaging their time commitments. While the pastor is the worship visionary, he/she relies on a core team, series teams and specialists to bring fresh innovative approaches to worship vs. the usual plug-and-play service.



Wish List

Rev. Kenny asked us to develop a wish list at the last Board of Directors working session. Here is mine.

1. Use of the *Holy Conversations* publication in small groups to discuss topics such as Sexuality and Spirituality or the Trans Experience.
2. Provide each new member with a copy of Troy Perry's *Don't Be Afraid Anymore* and follow up with a group discussion at a later date.
3. Start an HIV/AIDS affinity group Positive Friends. This group used to meet once a month but in the last few years has disbanded.
4. Create a members only area of our website where we can house member contact lists, forms, policies, and procedures.
5. Encourage different ministries to start their own Facebook pages, especially youth and children's ministries.
6. Encourage all ministry leaders to use the online Google calendar (mcc.richmond.online.ministries@gmail.com) to note their meetings and events schedules.
7. Reintroduce P.L.A.C.E. or a similar program to help new and existing members discover their spiritual gifts.
8. Start a men's group and a single's group that meets for coffee.
9. Campus ministry.
10. More meeting space.
11. An integrated AV system with TV monitors on either side of the sanctuary.
12. New carpet!
13. An annual community breakfast where we invite families in the community to the church.
14. An updated Weekly Web.
15. Use of Google Drive to collaborate on projects.
16. Training for greeters and worship leaders/speakers on how to handle newcomers. This is the most important ministry of the church!

In loving service,

Chris Kopczynski

1st Lay Delegate