



Report to the MCCRVA from Victoria, BC, Canada

– By David R Wilson

Speaking in our Richmond, VA native tongue, hi yawl, it's good to be back home among family, friends and fellow saints. Thank you all for the generous gifts and financial support that allowed us, your official delegation, to be your witness to the global gathering of Metropolitan Community Churches. I was humbled and honored to represent this community of faith on such a global stage as General Conference once again. As I looked around at those gathered, I was reminded of the impact that this congregation has had on our global movement and mission. We are a generous people who are not afraid to transform ourselves as we have helped to transform the world, again, thank you.

I am also thankful to my husband George for transporting us to and from Washington Dulles Airport for our journey.

I learned that First Lay Delegate- Chris Kopczynski is a wonderful and thoughtful travel companion, always making sure I was keeping pace negotiating kiosks, customs and gate calls. We also had many conversations about our journey in ministry with MCC. He continues to model excellence in leadership and learning as such, I continue to be a fan.

We made it to Victoria, capital city of British Columbia, Canada, Saturday afternoon and decided to take a walk around as our room was being prepared. They eventually brought up a cot for me to sleep on so we could all share the same room. Meanwhile, Rev. Kenny was traveling on his own via planes, ferries and automobiles and a few other stops thrown in on his journey. He arrived just before midnight in our seventh floor room overlooking the harbor and Welcome Center, where upon we all crashed for the night.

Sunday morning worship with Rev. Elder Freda Smith was a rare treat and later it was a privilege to introduce her to my colleagues, Rev. Kenny and Chris. The worship services were streamed live and are also available to review on the Emerge website. Afterwards we three made our way to brunch and a walk around the inner harbor. (Note: The Network Leaders had been tentatively scheduled to meet in the afternoon with the Office of Church Life and Health; a less formal meeting however took place with

Network Facilitators on Thursday morning instead.) A concert with Bobby Jo Valentine capped off the evening.

Monday July 4th and the conference officially was underway with the Opening Plenary's keynote speaker, Ani Zonneveld a progressive Muslim woman and an unconventional cultural bridge builder. We grabbed a quick (if that were possible in Victoria) bite for lunch and were off to the Business Forum. We were welcomed and opened in prayer, reviewed the agenda including the election procedures. We were presented with the report from the Moderator Nominating Committee, which I found most useful in understanding the presentation of four candidates rather than five and the way it was presented that provided clarity, using the filter of the global survey, very much like our own congregational survey provided us such a useful filter. The candidates were presented. Reports from the Governing Board Nominating Committee, the GB candidates were presented. Rev. Onetta Brooks was asked by Clergy Candidate in Care Nathan Black, to recuse herself from election in light of her perceived conflicts and dominion over the Governing Board. She did not but the request did not go unnoticed and was a reminder of some of the turmoil and resignations on the GB. The Commission on the Statement of Faith, Governing Board and the Moderator's Report were also shared in addition to the proposed Bylaw amendment proposals. I did raise-up our concern about the use of the term "priesthood" during the discussion period pertaining to the Statement of Faith, and was assured its use was intended as an inclusive, gender non-specific calling. I also asked for clarity on the rationale for moving the 'Exempt Funds' from assessments from the bylaws to the Governing Board Policy Handbook. Although I do understand the explanation, I don't agree it's a policy but rather an exemption to the Article IX- Church Finances B. Reporting requirement for receipts, and then leave the part saying "Any money transferred permanently or for a long term from any exempt fund..." without defining what that exempt fund is, in my view is confusing and ill-advised. I did not support this change even though it passed in the Business Meeting. The forum closed in prayer. The Opening Worship- Coming Out: Leaving Comfortable Places with Rev. Elder Dr. Nancy Wilson took place after dinner and was followed by a reception in her honor.

Tuesday was the big day and it began with Morning Worship- Open: Into the Light with Rev. Miak Siew of Free Community Church in Singapore. The Business Meeting followed, we got our voting devices and with the seating of the Clergy House, The Lay House, Official Visitors and Guests we were under way by welcome, opening prayer and adoption of the agenda. Honoring Clergy and Lay Delegates who have retired since 2013, acknowledging those who have died including our own Clinton Gibbs, welcoming of clergy who have been ordained, new lay leaders, acknowledge and blessing of new Network Leaders, welcome of churches affiliated, emerging churches, oasis communities, new countries that have an MCC presence since 2013 and introduction of special guests and declaration of quorum. After we adopted the GC Procedures Manual and listened to the Moderator's Address the voting began with testing the new devices. The Governing Board Elections yielded Rev. Jacob Hero, Rev. Joe Cobb for six year terms and Rev. Dr. Stephanie Burns and Rev Dr. William Knight for the unexpired three year terms, leaving Rev. Onetta Brooks as the low vote getter being voted out of office for the clergy seats. I voted consistent with the will of the congregation. Rev. Governor Clinton Crawshaw (whom I found to be quite delightful and a hoot) did not seek election to the Governing Board as he was appointed to fill the vacated chair of Rev. Elder Tony Freeman upon his appointment to the staff position, Director of the Office of Church Life and Health. The open laity seats were filled by Kimberly Brown and Dr. Mark Dalglish for six year terms and Angle Collie who was not present but away traveling, joins RJ Ramage

for the remaining unexpired term for three years, I voted for all three. The election for Moderator or lack of election of a Moderator proved once again- not to count your chickens before they hatch. Many of us thought that a clear leader would emerge during the first round of voting, but no, not this time. All four candidates started with support in both houses, but as the rounds went on, it was clear that Rev. Elder Diane Fisher and Rev Elder Darlene Garner were pulling ahead. (Chart below was created by Rev. Michael P Ellard) I voted as I represented I would in the first, second and third rounds until Rev. Elder Hector Gutierrez joined Rev Dr. Irene Laudeman in withdrawing their candidacy at that point, I then voted for Rev. Elder Darlene Garner for the fourth round and supported the Moderator's privilege to allow a fifth vote and so I voted for her then also. It was clear that there were a growing number of abstentions (which is a vote by the way) as the voting continued leaving no one with a clear majority in both houses although Rev. Elder Diane Fisher did widen her lead to a majority in the Lay house in the fourth round (56%) and (60%)by the fifth round.

First Round

Clergy House

Fisher	28%
Garner	25%
Gutierrez	17%
Laudeman	18%
Abstain	12%

Lay House

Fisher	31%
Garner	25%
Gutierrez	14%
Laudeman	22%
Abstain	9%

Second Round

Clergy House

Fisher	32%
Garner	27%
Gutierrez	12%
Laudeman	17%
Abstain	11%

Lay House

Fisher	39%
Garner	27%
Gutierrez	9%
Laudeman	15%
Abstain	8%

Third Round

Clergy House

Fisher	38%
Garner	31%
Gutierrez	6%
Laudeman	10%
Abstain	13%

Lay House

Fisher	44%
Garner	27%
Gutierrez	6%
Laudeman	12%
Abstain	9%

Fourth Round

Clergy House

Fisher	44%
Garner	39%
Abstain	16%

Lay House

Fisher	56%
Garner	32%
Abstain	10%

Fifth Round

Clergy House

Fisher	42%
Garner	30%
Abstain	26%

Lay House

Fisher	60%
Garner	26%
Abstain	12%

The provision was then called into place for the Governing Board to appoint an Interim Moderator as a temporary shepherd of our denomination (much like an Interim Pastor) for this transitional time until General Conference 2019 when we will be celebrating our 50th Golden Anniversary- year of our movement as MCC. Many of the assembly left the hall stunned by what had just happened others took it in stride. While votes were being checked and affirmed, the meeting continued a little out of order from the agenda but being good stewards of our time we pressed on. The Reports were presented and approved, Statement of Faith approved almost unanimously, bylaw proposals were all approved, awards

and acknowledgements presented and motions of courtesy and appreciation affirmed. We adjourned, sang and closed in prayer. The Evening Worship with Rev. Elder Tony Freeman seemed a bit more somber but led to a bit of comic relief courtesy of Vickie Shaw.

Wednesday, Morning Worship- Unfold: Claiming New Possibilities with Lay Pastor Brandiilnye Dear of Joshua Generation MCC in Mississippi, got us going with her evoking characters from Lewis Carroll's 'Through the looking Glass' with Alice and the Jabberwocky among others. We celebrated the leadership and journey of Rev. Elder Dr. Nancy Wilson followed by the Human Rights Plenary with Mariela Castro (daughter of the Cuban leader, Raul Castro) and Chris and I ran into her with Rev. Elder Hector in the elevator and received a personal greeting and hand shake each. We also had an impromptu personal audience with Rev. Elder Ines-Paul Baumann inquiring about our reflections of the Business Meeting and conference. We went to the Evening Worship featuring Rev Brad Rice from King of Peace MCC in St. Pete, although there was a little kerfuffle about the doors being locked, he proceeded with his sermon. We later went to the heart wrenching screening of "Upstairs Inferno," with one of the survivors of the MCC New Orleans tragedy and in a theater with many others including Rev. Elder Troy Perry and Phillip attending.

Thursday, many were becoming increasingly aware that the world we live in does not take a break from violence; try as we may to pull ourselves away from such images on the news or being in another country cannot create a buffer to such acts. I was also becoming increasingly aware just how white and privileged Victoria really is. This includes the five star- Fairmont Empress Hotel where we were staying and holding our conference. It all was really lacking in multicultural and ethnic diversity. I'm not sure how well our MCC message is perceived or our mission fulfilled to minister to those on the margins in the halls of such opulence. Yes there is a substantial Asian presence and First Nations presence but beyond that very few others. Some people were feeling disenfranchised by few visible persons of color participating in high profile leadership positions at the conference including my friend, colleague and network co-lead, wondering if Black lives really do matter including in MCC. Under this back drop Morning Worship- Let Go: Leaving behind what we don't need, with Dr. Marcia McFee and Jordan Decker of the Worship Design Studio. I noticed Rev. Angela from MCC Baltimore (a church still struggling with feelings of victimization, betrayal and abandonment) standing in front of me across the center aisle, tears rolling down her face as she appeared shell-shocked while the song, "I am free" was playing during the offering and closing. She was not feeling free in that moment, and because she wasn't feeling free, neither was I. I went over, spoke in her ear saying, "Your life matters, to me!" We hugged, cried and hugged some more, revealing some of my own issues of cultural identity. It was a full day with a plenary session and workshops/pop topics. Evening Worship with Rev. Elder Margarita Sanchez De Leon dancing the Rumba and a performance of Jade Esteban Estrada ended the evening of an emotionally draining day.

Friday, the last day of conference began with a Morning Worship- Fly Daring New Heights, with Rev Dr. Roland Stringfellow and the alter ego in full drag, Madame Butterfly emerging on to the makeshift morning club rave- carrying all on a historic rewind through our Rainbow history to the present struggles. She was fierce, flying free as the butterfly having emerged into its destiny. Awesome! Workshops/Pop topics fill the day with a march to the Provincial Capital and demonstration that Black

Lives Matter, led by Moderator, Nancy Wilson, Rev. Candy Holmes and Rev. Cathy Alexander. Closing Worship sermon was offered by Rev. Elder Dwayne Johnson and the evening was capped off by a closing reception.

Saturday, began the journey home with George picking us up at Dulles Airport on Sunday morning.

Looking back: One thing that I think has been made very clear during conference is that there is a need for MCC, locally to be that soft place to land, a sanctuary in a hurting world, and globally to keep tearing down walls that keep us from true authentic relationship with Spirit; in and around each of us. We continue to be blessed to meet and walk this journey with saints near and far. We remain a mission and a movement with a church. Let's affirm as a faith community that @ MCC RVA - ALL are Welcome!