

MCC Richmond Delegate Report

UFMCC General Conference July 2022

Summary

The Government of the Universal Fellowship of Metropolitan Community Churches (UFMCC) is vested in the General Conference (Bylaws V.A.2)

General Conference is not only a big business meeting to elect people to the Governing Board and optionally change the bylaws. We were asked to “imagine a General Conference where we, as MCC, truly live out our commitment to inclusion and justice. Where as many MCCers from around the world participate as possible, experience the strength of being in community, and share the joy of being spiritually transformed.”

GC Motto: Be Not Conformed. Be Transformed (Romans 12:1-2)

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Conference Format

- This was the very first time ever that UFMCC held a completely online conference.
- Transformational Weekend took place July 1- 3 and consisted of worship services, keynote speakers, workshops, and online community forums and message boards.
- Business of the meeting took place in four stages through June and July: Discussion Circles, a forum, a meeting, and two rounds of virtual voting.

MCC Richmond Participation

MCC Richmond Delegates

- No Clergy Delegate from MCC Richmond was present at the 2022 General Conference (as MCC Richmond is within a pastoral gap period).
- MCC Richmond elected two lay delegates at our November 2019 Congregational Meeting:
 - Philip Adams (he/him), 1st Lay Delegate
 - John Pall (he/him), 2nd Lay Delegate
- Special thanks to our two elected alternate lay delegates, who would have served, if needed:
 - Felicia Miller (she/her), Alternate Lay Delegate
 - Les Quintana-Branch (he/him), Alternate Lay Delegate

Watch Parties

Local churches have been encouraged to watch some of the worship services, keynotes, and workshops for inspiration and ideas. Please see the appendix to the report for videos available. A watch party can be planned by working with a lay delegate, and the videos may be made publicly available at some point.

Moderator's Message

Our July 3rd worship service featured a sermon by our Fellowship Moderator, Cecilia Eggleston (available on YouTube and the MCC Richmond App).

Voting

- MCC Richmond Lay Delegates are the voice and representation of our MCC Richmond Church at General Conference.
- For seventeen days (June 29 - July 16) MCC Richmond church members voiced opinion for who and what our delegates should vote. Feedback was asked for within Sunday worship service, at ministry meetings, and by e-blast. Ten people responded by electronic poll, or by phone, or e-mail.
- Ranked Choice voting allowed delegates to reflexively respond to MCC Richmond's preference in 2nd Round voting, as some candidates were eliminated.
- As requested by MCC Richmond, our delegates voted for...
 - 1st Round Voting
 - Lay Governing Board Candidates:
 - Chad Hobbs
 - Claire Coughlin
 - Clergy Governing Board Candidates:
 - Rev. Elder Diane Fischer
 - Rev. Doretha Williams-Flournoy
 - Bylaw Amendment to V.B.2.e: AGAINST
 - 2nd Round Voting
 - Clergy Governing Board Candidates:
 - Rev. Elder Diane Fischer
 - Rev. Beulah Durrheim
- Vote count result information is available, by request, for the MCC Richmond Voting or the UFMCC Voting.

Business Results

- Four Governing Board members were elected:
 - Lay – Chad Hobbs and Leo Rossetti
 - Clergy – Rev. Beulah Durrheim and Christopher Joseph San Jose
- Four Bylaw Amendments were proposed
 - Three of the proposed amendments were tabled for further consideration.

- An amendment to V.B.2.e was passed.

This effectively allows the Council of Elders and Governing Board to establish the Fellowship's rules and practices of church disaffiliation without vote of the General Conference; it has removed the disaffiliation rules from the bylaws, and an addendum will be added in the future.

Next General Conference:

- May be held in July 2025...
- No time or place for the next conference was announced...
A study is being performed on the success and effectiveness of holding conference online, as well as the length of time (3 years) between conferences.
- Notice will be given at least 90 days before the next general conference about its time, place, and nature (Bylaw VIII.A.1).

Delegate Reports / Notes

First Lay Delegate Report

Prepared by Philip Adams, MCC Richmond First Lay Delegate

The General Conference for the Universal Fellowship of Metropolitan Community Churches was held Friday, July 1 through Sunday, July 3. I attended the following sessions on Friday, July 1:

10:00 a.m. – Devotional by Elder Velma Garcia

11:00 a.m. – Welcome to General Conference – Rev. Elder Cecilia Eggleston

UFMCC is still in the land of firsts. We continue to adapt and transform. General instructions and introductions. Thanks for conference leaders. Information related to Business Forum. Introduction of graphic recordings by Jacqueline as visual depictions of each Keynote Session to provide learning reinforcement.

12:00 noon – Keynote #1 – “Be Energized by the Spirit” - Dr. Kwok Pui Lan

The Pandemic and the People of God

Move from chaos to healing

Acknowledgement of separation, disruption and the need for re-entry

Need for spiritual leaders who are not afraid of liminal space

We don't want to go back to what was normal because in many ways, what was normal was not working

Need to be energized by the Spirit – depicted in Acts as fire and rushing wind. What a queer thing! We need to be energized by the Queer Spirit.

Practice pushing forward and back; practice pushing heaven and earth

Embody Christian values with an understanding of corporeal spirituality

Eros is not less than agape

Eros equals power and energy

Eros is better than sexuality as it says “yes” to life, not just sex

Pentecost was the breaking of language, cultural and religious boundaries

Pentecost was an opening to see the world through the ears of others

Realize that the truth may be encountered in more than one way. Be humble enough to listen to see that the Queer Spirit inspires other tongues

Participate with the Queer Spirit; don't stand on the sidelines

Hope is a process

We cannot rely on another to save us and lead us to the Promised Land; we must be embodied in community for hopefulness to be a daily spiritual practice

Exercise goodness so that you will not forget hope. Exercise agency to do good. Do not be conformed, but be transformed

The Queer Spirit is defiant against conforming; it challenges systems in liminal space toward a brighter future

Affirm the Body of God – not one single body, but all bodies

Hope never ceases! Recall the monumental experiences of your lives. There is no excuse not to continue. Giving up is fatalism! Keep on struggling for another day.

Generations will remove the mountain even if tablespoon by tablespoon. Don't give up. Hope is the “deepest yes!”

3:00 p.m. – Entering the 5 Gates of Sorrow – Scott Hardin-Nieri

Eco-grief circles include climate change, anti-racism, hunger, poverty, immigration and the marginalized. This is heart-breaking work. Sorrow is powerful. It lets us know we have loved. Grief leads us back to love. We are not closed off from the world; we are an integral part.

Pain is the consciousness which leads to collective healing

Our suffering for the world is an indicator of our love for the world.

Life is an apprenticeship with sorrow. Grief is an emotion as well as a skill. It takes courage to face loss.

5 Gates of Sorrow

All we love will be lost (family, health, youth, security, accomplishments, life).

Places in us without love inhabit guilt and shame (sexuality, childhood abuse, failure, falsehood, hiding in shame, outside of love and/or compassion).

Collective sorrows include us all (financial, unforgiveness, selfishness, hatred, lack of compassion, marginalization, evil intent, climate change, racism, sexism, trauma, illness, poverty, economic sorrows, natural sorrows).

Unmet desires are what was expected and not received (sense of acceptance, fulfillment, satisfaction, love, respect).

Ancestral grief is painful memories carried in our bodies (family sorrow, alcoholism, suicide, generational hand-me-downs, rites of passage).

Sorrow and grief lead to gratitude and joy.

How is the Spirit of God moving within your grief?

Bless sorrow with lovingkindness.

Sorrow is holy ground. Sorrow is love. Sorrow is a rite of passage.

The prayer of our souls is made up of voices of longing, hunger, the unexpected, memories, voices near and lost, the future.

Challenge your own blindness.

Grief is individually expressed and corporately heard. Receive and give the gift of listening. Don't try to fix it or minimize it. Hear it. Hold the space.

4:00 p.m. – Keynote #2 – “Be Moved” – Dr. Angel F. Mendez Montoya

Dance and theology complement each other. Dance and theology integrate.

Dancing opens the body to light and freedom. Giving up control allows the music to move us as we permit ourselves to be moved. Dance moves us beyond the body and also within the body. Dance transcends the body. All bodies are dancing bodies.

God is not solitary. God shares divine love in the Trinity. God is a community. God is a dance of love. The movement of God is a choreography of the indwelling of Parent, Son and Spirit.

Creation expresses God's movement beyond God's self. This movement is perpetual.

The ritual of dance is communication with the body-spirit connection.

We have silenced dance in Christianity. We must recover dance in worship. Politics about which bodies matter is about who is included and who is excluded in church today.

We are moved by nature, by something outside of ourselves. Bring theology into dance and dance into theology. Planetary eco-kinesis is being moved by a dancing planet. Care for mother-earth.

7:00 p.m. – Opening Worship Service (available on the MCC Richmond app)

8:30 p.m. – Elder Sanctuary Space with Rev. Elder Maxwell Reay

Saturday, July 2

8:30 a.m. – Eastern Region Meet and Greet – Hosted by Rev. Cathy Alexander. Last in person meeting was 2018. Ready to start fellowshipping again.

10:00 a.m. – Devotional with Rev. Elder Goudy

God is present and God will bless. To devote is to give oneself entirely to an activity. Note the inclusive Spirit that God will pour out on all mankind. All have a place at the table. God calls us to discern the Spirit; to study Christ; to be theologians; to be pneumatologists. The Holy Spirit calls us to act against the spirit of our time (Howard Thurman).

What is the Spirit calling me to do? What is the Spirit saying to the churches?

11:00 a.m. – Keynote #3 – “Be With” – Rev. Dr. Claudio Carvalhaes

Ignite your imagination. Bear witness to the gospel of inclusion and truth. Work against hatred. The world is better, but it is also worse. The reversal of right and wrong builds injustice. God sends a loud invitation to love.

Aging is a battleground as violence is done to our bodies. We need places to face the evils of our time. We must shift and change and start again as the Church!

Engage being with each other. Who is our “we”? Who are our collectives and the circuits of our affections? I think, therefore I am is a lie! We are feeling beings! We are feeling, thinking beings.

There is no such thing as a self-made person. The rise of capitalism has taken away the communal ownership of the land. Capitalism has been normalized in opposition to the Gospel.

We are taught to fear. We are filled with fear fueled by competition, greed and jealousy. There should not be hierarchy or pay inequity in the church. The Bible’s response to fear is love. Move from fear to love. Be against domination and oppression. The fruits we bear will show if love is there.

Detachment is sovereignty and lack of inclusion. It is a destroyer of diversity. Capitalism puts things down so they can serve us. COVID was disconnection. We have lost the larger sense of belonging. Things have become what we use, not what we honor.

We don’t live in a universe, but a multiplex of verses – a plexiverse.

Be with the land. Be with each other. Have a relationship with the land. Mutual belonging means we belong to each other. We are responsible for 7 generations – 3 before us, ours, and 3 after us. We need to change our affections. Ubuntu is a form of social living. My village is myself. The tree we worship under is myself. The pressure of independence and self-reliance makes us ill.

The good old days are over. Bring in the good new days!

2:00 p.m. – Keynote #4 – Be Holy: Holy Reclamation of Black Identity – Moderated by Rev. Dr. Fowlkes of MCC Baltimore – dismantling racism and fighting oppression

Reclaim one’s blackness. Black restoration is reconnecting and reacquainting ourselves with our blackness. We inhabit our blackness.

Black is beautiful! Seek the liberation of blackness. Reclaim black roots. Celebrate your history. Celebrate who you are.

Be the hope and dreams of your ancestors. Claiming blackness is a mode of resistance.

African-Americans are a different kind of people uprooted from their original home and then, denied full rights in their new home.

It is time for other folks to be uncomfortable. God is black!

3:00 p.m. – Trust the Process: A Six Year Book Writing Journey – Angeline Jackson

Trust the process. Use writing as a spiritual practice. Be aware that your situation helps someone else. Your story is impactful to others.

4:00 p.m. – Worldwide Worship Service – Mourn the Pandemic

Mourn the loss of life.

Mourn the loss of those close to us.

Mourn the loss of those working to save others.

Mourn the loss of the life of our planet.

Mourn the loss of livelihood.

Mourn the loss of lives lost to violence.

Mourn the loss of our ability to accept our differences.

Mourn the loss of brown and black lives.

Mourn the loss of love.

Mourn the loss of those who have taken their own lives.

Mourn the loss of safe spaces.

We believe in the light and the light is coming! This is the light of hope!

7:00 p.m. – UFMCC Board of Pensions Presentation

Sunday, July 3

11:00 a.m. – Worldwide Worship – Rev. Elder Cecilia Eggleston (viewed during MCC Richmond church)

1:00 p.m. – Making These Stained Glass Walls Talk: Tending to Spiritual Trauma in our Faith – Indhira Udofia

Spiritual Trauma are stops to humankind's need to connect with the Divine. The church is a Sanctuary of the Seeking. It is our need to connect with the Creator God or "Other". Spiritual trauma in the church is common among LGBTQIA+. Evidence is seen in anger, dissensions, power plays, lying, seeking attention, violence, abuse, trauma, adverse religious

experiences, acting on belief; use of communities; psychological damage as a result of these. This is the aftermath to exposure to abuse and violence.

Church is an institution and an entity that participates in people's lives. It is an intimate space. Church becomes where God is. This is marred by abuse of authority, intimidation and verbal attacks. There is a cycle – tension, incident, reconciliation, calm, tension...

In some cases, there should be no reconciliation when abuse ends, but removal.

Trauma is an emotional response to accidents, rape, natural disasters. Acute trauma may be a single experience. Complex trauma represents multiple traumas. Historical trauma is collective trauma.

One's perception, intention and impact affect any trauma encounter. It can result in emotional disconnectedness or emotional saturation. There is no time limit to the impact of trauma.

Faith can provide a journey of healing trauma. With Religious Trauma Syndrome, one has to reverse the damage of indoctrination by unlearning and undoing the results.

The negative abilities concept is contributed to by black and white thinking, depression, anxiety, loss of meaning, punishment, discipline, not feeling connected, dysfunctional thinking, PTSD, triggers, flashbacks, purity culture, passive aggressive behaviors.

Shelley Rambo defines trauma as a story that does not go away. We should seek acceptance and resurrection; minimize suffering; give people permission and agency to name their grief and their truth.

Scrupulosity is a religious OCD with compulsions and obsessions. It is demonstrated by a need for control, ascetic practices, doubts and obsessions. Post Traumatic Church Syndrome is when we are wounded by God's people and we need healing in spiritual places. We can do this by mending wounds in healing pathways. Treat everyone as if they have trauma because most likely they do.

2:00 p.m. – Keynote #5 – Be Peace – Padraig O'Tuama

The Gospel of Mary is an extraordinary gospel. It is in the Gnostic tradition where matter is evil. Mary Magdalene is presented as a teacher. It is written in Coptic and would not have been Mary, the mother of Jesus, because the early church did not spell out her name. It was unknown until the end of the 19th century and was published in 1955. The translation was held up by WWII. It was written in the late 100s and was therefore, representative of the Gnostic thought during that time.

Initially, the disciples reject Mary's message. This is unusual because the content comes from a woman. This is about the experience of hearing God's message. There is a comparison between the way Jesus loved the disciples and the way he loved women. Peter operates from a

patriarchal model and so, he is most likely to reject the words of a woman. This is about misogyny and exclusion and power.

Understand about resistance. There is resistance toward gay people in larger society; within the gay community and the gay community of faith. There are leadership squabbles. Keep in mind that the expression of resistance is a right and an expression of freedom.

Society gets into our DNA and it comes out in various ways. Avoid sectarianism. It creates divisiveness. Jealousy is when I want to be a part of what you are doing. Envy is when I want to destroy what you are doing. The desire to destroy is already present in the community within our humanity. There is no need for an evil influence.

There is a deep anthropology present. It is not about heaven, but humanity. Putting down individuals damages community and introduces violence. Elevation of theology and intellect are present as the disciples struggle to understand the words and the power of Mary Magdalene. There is a conflict between Levi and Peter. Levi's correction of Peter was accepted. Pain from and within community is great. What does it mean to have an open heart to the hope of change? What does it mean to turn consistently toward the face of the good?

What sustains Mary in the face of conflict and disbelief? She is nurtured by recollections of conversations with Jesus. She is nurtured by intellect and a deep knowledge of the truth. Find what nurtures you to be human. Speak what you know to be true. Live in creative ways. Read Emily Dickinson!

Saturday, July 16 – Business Meeting

Resulted in the approval of one Bylaw Amendment and the election of 2 Clergy Representatives and 2 Lay representatives to the Board of Governors.

Clergy – Rev. Beulah Durrheim and Christopher Joseph San Jose

Lay – Chad Hobbs and Leo Rossetti

Second Lay Delegate Notes

Prepared by John Pall, MCC Richmond Second Lay Delegate

- Conference videos for worship services, keynotes, and workshop may be made available through watch-parties. They are listed in the Appendix below. If there is a topic you find interesting or helpful for you as an individual or for a ministry you serve, a lay delegate can arrange for time to watch a video.
- The online format of this general conference had many benefits, including:

- Attendance accessibility to many people who wouldn't otherwise be able to pay for or travel to a conventional conference.
 - Translation availability into four languages (English, German, Portuguese, and Spanish) available through advance planning and dedication of resources.
 - Flexibility to rewatch recorded sessions that may have been missed.
- With hope, the Fellowship will continue to be mindful of accessibility to the conference, holding technical and conference orientations, and help all people attend regardless of ability.
- Great appreciation should be given to conference co-chairs, Mike Haase (All God's Children MCC - Minneapolis) and Rev. Lauren Bennett (MCC St. Louis), as well as to their team, to setting up and running MCC's first ever online conference. Given the challenges of this event, it ran remarkably smoothly, and the team was available 24/7 for any issues or questions.
- MCC Richmond may wish to review the passed Bylaw amendment to decide if any change may be needed to the MCC Richmond Bylaws.
- Church disaffiliation will now be controlled by proposals of the Council of Elders (CoE), approved by the Governing Board (GB). Disaffiliation is no longer in the bylaws and is NOT voted on by the General Conference. The reasoning was to give the CoE and GB flexibility, to be able to lengthen the time it takes to disaffiliate, and to have both Affiliation and Disaffiliation within the addendum. However, there may be a need for a future Bylaw Amendment to set limits on what may be passed into the Addendum. Even in the 2022 discussion circles, there was disagreement on disaffiliation details...how long should it take to disaffiliate (1 month, 3, 6, 12)? Should a church's assets be surrendered upon disaffiliation (0%, 5, 10, 50, 100%)? Does a church need to go through and pay for mandatory 3rd party arbitration with the Fellowship before disaffiliation?
- MCC Richmond Voting:
 - Next general conference, it would be good to have a forum for MCC Richmond overviewing the governing board candidates and bylaw amendments, if possible. That way, it may be more accommodating for people to learn the issues, as well as spark discussion before people vote. The team had agreed that this year a forum was not possible because of the late notice, the church involvement with the pastoral transition and ceremony of release, and because of the COVID-19 pandemic.
 - The online poll worked well because anyone could take it from an electronic device and the ranked choice voting was especially good because of voting past round 1 and knowing which candidates to vote for when some were removed. The poll was through Church Community Builder / Pushpay, but it could have also been created in Google Forms or Survey Monkey.
- Orgena Rose created a new theme song, "We Are MCC" for the fellowship. It's pretty upbeat and groovy. Stay tuned for "MCC—the Musical"...

Appendix: Conference Presentations

Keynotes:

- Be Energized by the Spirit: Dr. Kwok Pui Lan (Keynote #1)
- Be Moved: Dr. Angel F. Méndez Montoya (Keynote #2)
- Be With: Rev. Dr. Cláudio Carvalhaes (Keynote #3)
- Be Holy: Holy Reclamation of Black Identity (Keynote #4)
- Be Peace: Padraig O'Tuama (Keynote #5)

Workshops:

- Being Transformed: Building an Anti-Oppressive Justice Community
- Building Rainbow Bridges: MCC Spiritual Advocacy with People on the Inside
- Change Cycle as a Backdrop for the Pandemic
- Children's Church Space
- Contemplation: Experiencing God's Presence in Daily Life
- Creating a Writing Ministry
- Entering the Five Gates of Sorrow
- Foundations of Diversity and Inclusion
- What They Don't Tell You About Funerals
- Generating Generosity - Looking Beyond Stewardship
- Lived Theology and the World Church as Public Priesthood
- Making These Stained Glass Walls Talk: Tending to Spiritual Trauma in our Faith
- Now Recruiting! MCC Chaplains in the U.S. Armed Forces and in the VA
- Online Church Hybrid Worship
- Queer Spirituality
- Trust the Process: A Six-Year Book Writing Journey
- UFMCC Board of Pensions (USA) Presentation

Worship Services:

All worship services here are offered on the "Metropolitan Community Churches" YouTube Channel under the playlist '2022 General Conference.'

- Opening Worship Service
- Synchronous Worldwide Worship Service
- Unified Global Sunday Worship Service
- 2022 General Conference Sunday Sermon - Rev. Elder Cecilia Eggleston, Preaching