

**FROM COOPERATION TO COLLABORATION:
GROWING RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN MCC AND THE FELLOWSHIP**

Background

On September 11, 2007, the MCC Board of Elders hosted the leadership of The Fellowship in a historic meeting that marked the official beginning of intentional relationship-building between the two faith-based groups.

The Fellowship is a cross-denominational fellowship of primarily African-American Christian leaders representing churches and faith-based organizations from diverse geographic and theological backgrounds. The overriding purpose of The Fellowship is to support religious leaders, both clergy and laity, in moving towards a theology of radical inclusivity which, by its very nature, requires an equally radical social ministry reaching to the furthest margins of society to serve all in need without prejudice or discrimination. The Fellowship works to create, sustain and celebrate community on the margins. www.RadicallyInclusive.com

Founded in 1968, Metropolitan Community Churches (MCC) is the world's largest and oldest Christian denomination with a primary, affirming ministry to lesbians, gays, bisexuals, and transgender individuals. Known as the "Human Rights Church" for its commitment to social justice, local MCC congregations can be found in 28 countries around the world. www.MCCchurch.org

The MCC/Fellowship leadership body declared solidarity and committed to work in unity on three objectives.

FIRST JOINT OBJECTIVE:

-- Resistance to and healing of religious and spiritual violence perpetrated against people who have traditionally lived at the margins of society, including people suffering from substance abuse; people living with HIV/AIDS and lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer and inter-sex people;

SECOND JOINT OBJECTIVE:

-- Radical and full inclusion of all people living at the margins of communities of faith and spiritual practice;

THIRD JOINT OBJECTIVE:

-- Commitment to the deep and challenging work toward reconciling the historical divisions in faith and religious communities created by racism, sexism, classism, serophobia and homophobia.

Presiding Bishop Yvette A. Flunder of The Fellowship and Moderator Rev. Elder Nancy Wilson of Metropolitan Community Churches facilitated discussion among their respective organizational leaders, resulting in the following public declaration:

**JOINT DECLARATION BY
Bishop Yvette Flunder, Presiding Bishop of The Fellowship and
Rev. Elder Nancy Wilson, Moderator of Metropolitan Community Churches**

September 2007

The Fellowship and Metropolitan Community Churches (MCC) lift up to the world our commitment and intention to challenge major fundamental, deep-seated religious beliefs, doctrines and theologies of the oppressive dominant culture. This culture treats people on society's margins as enemies of God and routinely mistreats, oppresses and excludes people from the community of faith and its institutions. We further confirm that these acts defeat the Christian commonwealth and we claim a season of refreshment, repentance and reconciliation.

Our organizations recognize the powerful opportunity to leverage our mutual ministries and movements toward full inclusion of all people and to provide networking and deepening of our common commitments...

Both organizations have agreed to facilitate 10 major city gatherings of open and affirming congregations in 2008 to listen and learn, share approaches and challenges in overcoming spiritual violence, discrimination, and racism and to unite people in prayer for true peace in the community and in the world.

As leaders, we have agreed to model solidarity among churches and people who live in the context of, and respond to, particularly painful experiences of violence.

As leaders, we have agreed to share insights and effective approaches for overcoming violence.

As leaders, we have agreed to deepen ecumenical contacts among the churches, national councils of churches, and related organizations and networks.

As leaders, we have agreed to work with intention to connect congregations, student and youth groups, theological and other church-related institutions in the search for a global declaration of the radically inclusive love of God for all people.

As leaders, we have agreed to promote interdependence while maintaining independence. Neither organization seeks to be an instrument of ecclesiastical restraint in the sense of diminishing the member church or ministry's individual calling.

As leaders, we have agreed to establish and maintain strong relationships vital to our ministries and movement. As we make every effort to strengthen one another we recognize the importance of knowing one another, respecting one another and esteeming each member highly. As people of God working to uphold and advance the radically inclusive love of Jesus Christ, we will face the onslaught of opposition and we will do so together. We will encourage and strengthen our respective member churches and ministries through the sharing of our experiences. Our aim is to give insight as well as inspiration.

We believe associating and assembling together are vital in building relationship. The Bible tells us that the assembling of the saints should not be forsaken. Therefore, we make every effort to come together as we have the opportunity for healing, corporate prayer, worship, fellowship and edifying one another in the Lord.

/signed/

Bishop Yvette A. Flunder
Presiding Bishop
The Fellowship

The Rev. Elder Nancy L. Wilson
Moderator
Metropolitan Community Churches



**Rev. Nancy L. Wilson (L), Bishop Yvette A. Flunder (R)
Photo taken on September 11, 2007, at DaySpring Conference Center
in Florida (USA) during discussions that led to the historic joint commitment
to work for "radical inclusivity."**

Starting even before September 2007, MCC Elders, clergy, and lay people have regularly attended and presented at The Fellowship's two annual national conferences and Bishop Flunder and others from The Fellowship have often participated in MCC General Conferences and MCC Conferences for People of African Descent. For several years, Rev. Elder Jim Mitulski and Joshua Love (MCC's Director of HIV/AIDS Ministry) have organized MCC's support of and participation in trips to Mother of Peace Orphanage for children impacted by HIV/AIDS in Zimbabwe, which is a special project of The Fellowship. In February 2008, the MCC Clergy Conference was held in conjunction with The Fellowship's annual leadership retreat, as will happen again in 2009. In June 2008, the ministries of two MCC clergy (Rev. Elder Darlene Garner and Rev. Dr. Penny Nixon) were recognized by The Fellowship through the granting of ministerial standing with The Fellowship to the Revs. Garner and Nixon.

The Fellowship is encouraging its membership to attend and participate fully in the 2010 MCC General Conference, including as workshop presenters and worship participants. Space at the conference site will be provided so that The Fellowship can gather on its own. In addition, Special Observer Status at the business meeting will be granted to leaders from The Fellowship who attend.

Next Steps: Joint MCC/Fellowship Collaboration Team

In November 2008, Rev. Elder Nancy Wilson and Rev. Elder Darlene Garner (MCC Moderator and Vice-Moderator, respectively) met again with Bishop Yvette Flunder to prepare the way for strengthening and deepening the organizational relationship. An outcome of that conversation was the decision to create a joint 12-person MCC/Fellowship Collaboration Team.

The charge to the joint MCC/Fellowship Collaboration Team is to carve out clear steps and decisions that will bring about mutually-beneficial collaboration between the two organizations. The intention is that their work will be completed by and reported to the 2010 MCC General Conference.

The potential areas for collaboration that the Team will explore include, but are not limited to, the following:

- Recognition of clergy standing
- Affiliation of local congregations
- Support of local churches and church leaders, both laity and clergy
- Conference planning
- Strengthening of relationships between local MCC and Fellowship congregations
- Collaboration on social justice and human rights efforts, including but not limited to marriage equality and HIV/AIDS
- Shared administrative and personnel services

Six members of MCC were recently appointed by the Moderator and Vice-Moderator to serve on the Joint MCC/Fellowship Collaboration Team. The representatives from MCC are:

Ms. Kathy Beasley, Team Leader (MCC staff and member of Joy MCC in Orlando, FL)

Mr. DeWayne Davis (member of MCC Washington, DC)

Mr. Robert Ferguson (Deacon and member of Jesus MCC in Indianapolis, IN)

Rev. Dr. Cindi Love (MCC Executive Director)

Rev. Dr. Mona West (MCC Director of Formation and Leadership Development)

Rev. Phil Mathews (Pastor of Imani MCC in Durham, NC)

We are eager to receive feedback from you about these next steps as MCC and The Fellowship move from cooperation to collaboration. You can contact us at

RevNancyWilson@MCCchurch.net and RevDarleneGarner@MCCchurch.net.

In closing, we invite you to join us in prayer that God will bless the work of the Joint MCC/Fellowship Collaboration Team so that we might all grow from strength to strength in our commitment to radical inclusivity.

Grace and Peace,

The Rev. Nancy Wilson, Moderator

The Rev. Darlene Garner, Vice-Moderator

Metropolitan Community Churches

www.MCCchurch.org