

## **International Task Force Proposals Being Forwarded to General Conference 25 by the Governing Board**

### **A Message from the Governing Board**

Dear MCC Lay Delegates and Clergy:

One of the first commitments made by your new Governing Board, in this triennium, was to tackle some of the more challenging aspects of growing a global MCC community. We asked our current Vice-Chair of the Governing Board, Raquel Benítez-Rojas, to undertake the implementation of the commitment to an International Task Force (ITF) that the General Conference mandated.

As we appointed an International Task Force, we empowered them to research and make recommendations to our Moderator, Senior Leadership Team (staff) and to ourselves, to enhance our global sensitivity, awareness, and concrete expressions of collaboration. The results are impressive, including recommendations that we are already implementing, new staffing commitments and priorities, and some work for the future. We hope you will carefully review the process, results, commitments, and the proposals for work that will continue beyond this General Conference.

As volunteers ourselves, as a Governing Board, we want to thank those MCC volunteers from the International Task Force for the extraordinary commitments they made, especially the Steering Committee! We also want to thank our Senior Leadership Team and staff for all the extra hours of work, bringing the ITF up to speed, and helping to refine their proposals with feedback. Without Connie Meadows' early help, this would not have gotten off the ground. We are grateful for Marina Laws' consistent, efficient staff support. Finally, special thanks to the Project Manager, Linda Brenner-Beckstead, who came along mid-stream to help us complete this awesome task, just as she was beginning her new role as the Moderator's assistant.

### **Preamble: Rev. Dr. Nancy Wilson, Moderator**

As we prepare for our 25<sup>th</sup> General Conference, MCC wrestles with two impulses: to ground ourselves in our founding narrative and to open ourselves to the Holy Spirit reinventing us! This

requires of us a deep trust in the God who called us in the first place and in Whom we not only “believe” but “live, move and have our being!” It requires a new connection to the Jesus who taught and embodied amazing grace, as well as to the people of the world who need us.

The International Task Force came into being as a part of a structure change the General Conference embraced two years ago. As the Strategic Review Team proposed changes in our structure (electing a new Governing Board, establishing Networks, etc), it also pointed to future work: really grappling with the emerging, global nature of MCC, effectively and faithfully.

After General Conference in 2010, the Governing Board sent out applications and went through an exhaustive search for members of the ITF. We also set out a plan and parameters, which are described in this document. We were looking for people, mostly from outside the U.S., who had demonstrated leadership in their local church or area, who had expertise but not pre-conceptions. While the Structure Review Team had been composed mostly of people with a long denominational history, most of the people on the ITF had little denominational level experience, or baggage, though they had a devotion to the mission and vision of MCC. We were so thrilled at the number and quality of the applicants and gave them a huge task, as described in this document.

Challenges and opportunities related to being an international denomination/movement are not new. I remember visiting Rev. Elder Jean White in London in the early 1980s. Through her eyes, I experienced what it was like to be in a relatively small MCC with a few other small churches and thousands of miles away from the U.S., where MCC was clearly centered. I felt the isolation and the frustration. Jean, herself, using only mail -- and on occasion, precious, costly phone calls -- ran what we called “World Church Extension” out of her home, corresponding with those seeking hope in so many places -- in Africa, Indonesia, and Latin America. She was a voice in the wilderness and a lifeline of one to many who were just emerging from the shadows.

What has changed is not the need, nor the impulse to be global, but the world itself is new. We live in a world of instant, global, fast-paced communication, where people travel (though it is still so expensive) at the drop of a hat. We are aware of, and in touch with, a global LGBT human rights movement, and with people of faith in so many places struggling with lethal homophobia and transphobia. Since my trip 30 years ago, the global village has gotten smaller and the problems more complex. We have more opportunities to fulfill our Destiny. And, yet, the world economy means that all of us who do this work struggle for resources.

As people of faith, we are also so aware of the ways in which churches and missionary movements were a “project” of colonialism for so many centuries. We, in MCC, want to shed the negativity of that past -- shed the racism and oppressive practices -- while finding healthy and holy ways to connect to brothers and sisters around the world. This is not as easy as it sounds. Assumptions, and ways of thinking and doing, persevere. Money and inequality of access re-create old patterns.

People in emerging areas in MCC want what we want: justice, hope, and the freedom to be ourselves, to practice our faith, to have community, safely. How can we do that while not imposing our U.S. -- our Northern/Western culture -- and allowing MCC to emerge in indigenous ways? And can we allow ourselves, MCC, to be changed in the process?

Transformation is a key value of MCC. We say we are “transformed by grace,” and, in turn, we have transformed lives, the world, the church, and history. As we change and grow, we find new ways to change the world.

What the ITF surely discovered is that people are hungry, all over the world, for authentic community and connection. Our question is always, “How?” How do we make room in our hearts, in our movement, for what is coming towards us from the future God is calling us to co-create?

As we explore what inclusion really means, we are learning, in this virtual world, that one thing it means is “access.” How do we access more people and more communities? How do people access our message, our ministry, and our denomination? How do we relinquish control and allow MCC to take shape in new ways? What are the barriers to access, in our structures and ministries, and how can we overcome them? How do we empower people to connect with MCC?

More than anything, the ITF engaged in a ministry of listening and learning. They struggled with the fact that they embodied the very challenges we face globally as MCC: the challenges of language, cultures, times zones, theological differences, and resources. Though we allocated significant resources by MCC terms, the ITF largely worked by phone, Skype, and email. A face-to-face meeting of the whole task force proved to be beyond our resources. There were people who struggled, for reasons of their own situations, to even be able to meet by phone or respond to email. Members of the ITF, and MCC staff, learned so much about each other’s

situations and circumstances. The realities of being MCC, or an MCC pastor, in very different contexts, became so apparent.

The frustrations that the ITF experienced are the frustrations of being MCC today, in our emerging global context. And, there were corresponding moments of wonder, awe, and amazement, which blessed them and will bless us.

The Steering Committee had a lot of steering to do. They spent many hundreds of hours listening, learning, interviewing, asking questions, seeking more information, and raising more questions. They sought expert, outside help from Dr. Christopher Duraisingh, a professor of cross-cultural “missions” at The Episcopal Divinity School, who asked them to more deeply listen for the “Missio Dei” of MCC: what God is doing, and how we can be part of it.

This listening and learning has to become a deeper part of MCC’s ongoing vocation. The ITF has started something that must find new ways to continue. What they are sharing with us is not only a product but also a process that can be transformational. We have to find ways that our leadership and our people can be encouraged to listen and learn together about our present and our future.

My deepest thanks to the members of the ITF, the very hard-working Steering Committee: Mark, Jochen, and Carol; to Raquel for your vision, and for connecting the ITF and me and the Governing Board; to Marina and Héctor who provided unending staff support; and to Linda for jumping in as project manager to help us all get to this point. Thank you for your time, patience, creativity, inspiration, and investment of yourself in this work. May God bless and use this effort as we open up to God’s future for us.

***Motion #1: “Moved to received the Final Report from the International Task Force with gratitude; and to thank the Steering Committee of the ITF: Dr. Mark Dalglish (UK/Australia), Mr. Jochen Gewecke (Germany), and Dr. Carol Scherfenberg M.D. (USA); and all who participated over the last two years in this process: Rev. Ceejay Agbayani (Philippines), Rev. Tom Decker (Canada), Rev. Araceli Ezzatti (Uruguay), Rev. Paul Mokgethi-Heath (South Africa), Dr. Roger Nascimento (Brazil/UK), Mr. Henry Onzem (Australia), Ms. Sarah-Jane Ramage (UK), and Rev. Dr. Neil Thomas (USA/UK), in addition to MCC staff: Linda Brenner-Beckstead, Project Manager; and Marina Laws, Rev. Elder***

***Héctor Gutiérrez, Connie Meadows, Leah Sloan.” The report, in its entirety, will be shared with all those voting at General Conference, a public document.***

**Proposals from the ITF Final Report that have already been incorporated into the life and ministry of MCC thus far:**

- We held our first, successful Virtual General Conference in 2012, with more participation from places that usually do not get to vote at face-to-face conferences.
- Improved virtual participation is planned at General Conference 25 in Chicago, including virtual registration and voting for the Governing Board on the first ballot; virtual viewing of the conference for virtual registrants; some virtual participation in worship. All of this has been inspired by the work of the ITF.
- What we have learned from the success in Latin and Ibero-America is being incorporated into the work of our new Office of Emerging Ministries and the team responsible for new church starts.
- The Office of Formation and Leadership Development is proceeding with developing local/regional protocols in cooperation with leaders in those areas so that the credentialing process has both an overall, universal set of values and principles, but is culturally appropriate in its details and implementation in each locale. So far, OFLD protocols have been developed in the United Kingdom, Australasia, Germany, Latin America, Canada, and the United States; Africa protocols are in process, and in other areas of the world, we work on a case-by-case basis, creating individual credentialing “MAPS” until a protocol is in place.
- The Office of Emerging Ministries has included in its scope of work to improve MCC’s cultural competency throughout our system and to build staff and volunteers to take that mandate seriously.
- Communications have improved a great deal in the last year and include a more global, accessible Headline News, improvements to our current website, and a new, global website design that will be implemented before General Conference.

**Proposals from the ITF Final Report that the MCC Governing Board and Senior Leadership Team have included in our present goals and Strategic Plan:**

- Communications: Our new website design will be truly global, not U.S. with add-ons, or only external websites for other places – we will integrate and connect to websites in other languages appropriately.
- Our branding and marketing materials will be available in more languages than English and have been tested in a variety of ways for cultural appropriateness.
- The Moderator is working with the Council of Elders and Governing Board on succession planning and expanding the number of Elders while ensuring there is a diversity of gifts, culture, and location represented in our Leadership.

- We are piloting the “Denominational Minute” at General Conference. (See *ITF Final Report to the Governing Board*, page 69.)
- MCC leadership training programs are increasingly being offered in many countries and locations around the world and adapted for cultural relevance.
- We are holding our first, face-to-face, global Network Leader training in 2013.
- We are working to prioritize and fund the translation of key resources so they can be available to all who need them.
- So that more people might have access to MCC, we are in the process of designing and staffing a Virtual Church to which MCCers can belong, and we intend to focus resources on teaching local churches to be more competent in virtual participation and technology.

**By-Laws Changes Arising from the ITF Report for the 25<sup>th</sup> General Conference 2013**  
(Presented during the By-laws portion of the General Conference Agenda):

- A By-law to make clear the option of virtual membership in MCC

**Follow Up/Next Steps by Governing Board and SLT:**

***Motion #2: Moved to ask the Moderator and Governing Board to appoint and fund a Global Covenant Team that will serve from late 2013 through the 2016 General Conference, and their purpose will be:***

- ***To create a Global Covenant for MCC churches, as our identity, statement of values and theological commitments that will be our primary document of alignment, which will be ratified by the churches in preparation for General Conference 26 in 2016, and approved by General Conference as we move towards our 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary. This Team will be accountable to the Governing Board and will reflect the diversity and global nature of our denomination.***

***Rationale: At the present time, it appears that the MCC bylaws (with a very U.S. cultural bias) are the only document that unites us. We believe that it is our core vision, mission, values, inclusive theology, and commitment to justice that really unites us. We believe that a contemporary, 21<sup>st</sup> Century, Global Covenant would be a wonderful expression of our unity and would be very useful in helping everyone understand who we are and how we want to include more people.***

***Motion #3: Moved to ask the Moderator and Governing Board to appoint a special task force to review, renew, and update our MCC Statement of Faith. This task force will include representatives from the Council of Elders and from the Theologies Team, as well as those representing the theological, cultural, and global diversity of MCC. It will also seek consultation from resources inside and outside of MCC. The document they***

***bring forth will need to be approved by 2/3 of the General Conference of MCC, at the soonest, by General Conference 2016.***

***Rationale: The ITF wrestled with the fact that our Statement of Faith is dated in its language and not used very much in MCC churches. That document will always be a part of our legacy and our history. It was forged in General Conference meetings long ago where often we reached compromises in language just to “get us through to the next General Conference.” It has embedded in it many important and precious concepts, but no one would debate that it is not artfully composed, or even very complete. The ITF wondered if it would not be a valuable investment to have a Statement of Faith that reflected our 45 years of experience, our theological genius and diversity, and grounded us in our Christian commitment; one that we could use in liturgies and in membership classes with pride and joy. The ITF believes MCC has the maturity, talent, and will to do this important work as we approach our 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary, and the Governing Board unanimously agrees. We also want to give the Task Force enough time and resources to do the very best for the future of MCC.***