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## Metropolitan Community Churches

Tearing Down Walls. Building Up Hope.

October 2008



A few days ago, I rummaged through some old files, journals and records. I was on a search for the names of MCC members and clergy who had died with AIDS, for a World AIDS Day project Joshua Love was working on.



I found lots of names - and I found lots of other things! One was a set of notes for a workshop titled, "*Tough Times, Tough Talk About Money*" from the former South Central District Conference held in 2000. Maybe you were there!

I was looking through the notes and found myself laughing out loud as I thought, "*Tough times? In 2000? Oh my, you should see 2008!*"

I recently heard Paul Krugman, the Nobel laureate in economics, say he hadn't seen this financial crisis coming, and that made me feel a bit better, in a way. Still, it does seem hard to believe the depth of denial among both experts and ordinary folks.

Pastors and Boards of MCC, as you are looking at this week's plate and next year's budget projections, I know you are asking yourself some hard questions. Even if things are going very well, and you are over budget this year, maybe you are wondering or worrying. Maybe you are feeling the clutch of fear. Maybe you are asking, how do we prepare? And for what?

People are struggling in all of the countries in which MCC is present. Some have never not been struggling, at least not in our lifetimes.

I live in Florida, where seniors who thought they could retire comfortably now find that they have to continue working, get part-time jobs, or worry about having to move. Some are losing their jobs, some their homes. Others are alright for now, but are wondering what the next year will bring. Some are dealing with the needs of elderly parents, or of children on their way to college.

MCC leaders are facing enormous challenges - even as we see our opportunities, vision and mission grow, we are struggling to manage our cash flow, to budget more conservatively, to constantly ask what are realistic expectations, how can we work more efficiently, squeeze more out of every tithe dollar?

### ***How do we prepare for uncertain times ahead, with faith and with our feet on the ground?***

Historically, some of the greatest levels of creativity and productivity have come in times of economic downturn and crisis. I know this will be true for us, today, as well.

Our world is facing the first, real, true 21st century-style financial panic, born of a combination of globalization, greed, lack of understanding of the consequences of decisions of the past few years, and so much more. I thank God for a Board of Elders, Board of Administration, Executive Director and staff who have been taking steps to improve the health of our finances for years.

As people of faith who are called to "*let perfect love cast out fear*" (1 John 4:18), how are we to respond? **How do we get our minds, hearts, congregations and budgets around all of this?**

In the face of changing external situations, solid principles can provide the guidance and direction we need to survive and thrive. So today, I want to share with you some of the principles found in those recently-dusted-off workshop notes from 2000, slightly edited, and with some additional thoughts:

**Gratitude.** It is one of the greatest spiritual practices! Give thanks to God in all things, give thanks for life, and for who you are. If you are seeped in gratitude, fear has no room. Be grateful today for your life, your ministry, the victories we are seeing, the challenges we are offered. Be thankful for Jesus, for good news to preach and a community that is hungry for it. Be thankful for our 40 years of service, and for our international justice ministry. Be thankful! for faith, and hope, and love: for doors and minds opening at your church. For family, colleagues, friends; and for our children.

**Whose money is it?** As people of faith and followers of Jesus, who told us to "*surrender to Caesar what is Caesar's and God what is God's*" (Matthew 22: 21), all we have and all we are is God's. It's not about trusting God with our money. It is about God trusting us, our trustworthiness with the Creator's resources. How do we honor the gifts, monies, and resources that abound, even in uncertain times?



### **Vision/Mission/Ministry first, money follows.**

*"Without a vision the people perish"* Proverbs 29:18. With a God-given vision, everything is possible! If you say yes to God, God will work with you to get the job done, even through the hard times. MCC started 40 years ago with \$3.14 (USD) - and nothing in the bank. Thousands of years of Christian history - and a wholly separate cloud of witnesses from those of faith - told us our task was impossible. But here's what made the difference: a God-given vision combined with the courage to take one step forward, and then another, and then another. That's made all the difference. Here's what I've witnessed throughout my ministry: even in tough times, people want to give of themselves and their resources to

something that really makes a difference.

**Reality is your friend, even if many banks aren't.**

We all need to get a grip on reality, especially those of us in the Western world. That means our personal finances, our local church finances, our MCC denominational finances. Faith and reality are not enemies; reality and optimism are not opposites. Facing realities with courage builds our faith. We have lived through a time of easy credit, when we've been encouraged to solve our problems by "shopping." Now we're called to a time of sobering up - and living joyfully, simply, and powerfully within our means. Some versions of the "prosperity-and-abundance gospel" have gone to our heads and played into our weaknesses. Living in true abundance begins with appreciating what we have, and then building on that. There are times it is appropriate to take a financial leap of faith, but let that leap never get so far from reality that it causes harm.



**Jesus was poor, but, like Paul, he knew how to "abase and abound."** Jesus did not let circumstances determine his self-worth - that came from God! Jesus called all people, rich and poor, to follow him. If you are sharing good news and embodying it, you will have much to share. MCC's own heritage is rooted in Liberation Theology, with its gospel perspective of the poor as an "advantage." Now, as then, the God of Jesus' gospel takes the side of the poor -- today's prophets who speak out for "making poverty history" are speaking up for the same God who called MCC into being!

**There is enough to do everything we are called to do.** Earlier today, I drove past a church sign that read, "God Is Enough." I know that message was meant for me, and for us. There is enough food in the world today to feed everyone. There is enough creativity and imagination to solve so many of the world's problems. In every local MCC, there is enough today -- enough to do justice, to tear down walls, to build up hope. **There is enough to get the job done!** All we need is the leadership, the will and the faith.

**Leverage our assets!** MCC, you have so much to offer our world. In the aggregate, we own more than 100 million dollars (USD) worth of property. **But our people are MCC's greatest asset!** We run non-profit social service agencies, shelters for homeless youth, and charities. We are at the heart of great civil rights campaigns and human rights efforts. Metropolitan Community Churches is reaching out to people in places no one has dared to go, for justice and human rights and an inclusive gospel, and we're asking, "Would Jesus discriminate?" We are increasingly global and diverse. We have courage and creativity; we have a legacy and a reputation. We have been tested and we have prevailed. We have prayer chains and soup kitchens, talent and energy, commitment and determination. We are LGBT, queer, straight and interesting. **No one does church quite like us!**

**Teach and reward generosity in all things.** The early Christian message talked about radical generosity and giving of oneself over and above the expected. The process of spiritual growth and maturing involves learning to let go and giving with joy and peace. For some of us, giving comes easily; for others, it is a learning process. We have to trust that as we give, our needs will be met. And someday we won't care so much about clinging to what is ours.



**Persevere:** "So let us not grow weary in well doing, for we will reap if we do not lose heart" Galatians 6:9. Here's a great story: In 1994, MCC Los Angeles' building collapsed in an earthquake. My friend, Carol Wood ("Woody"), was a church member who had served on the Board for a long time, and an attorney who gave unstintingly. In the five years following the quake, we worked tirelessly with FEMA (the U.S. Federal Emergency Management Agency). We had sheltered a public high school for queer kids in our church building and had continued to provide them with space after the quake, so this government agency encouraged us to apply for funds after our building collapsed.

Every time we thought we had complied with their guidelines, we would be given some new - and, it often seemed to us, bizarre - requirement. For example, they asked us to provide architectural drawings of a renovated version of the old building on the old site as if it included space for the school - even though we knew we were not going to rebuild there! Then they decided to ignore that and wanted something completely different. This happened again and again.

One day after yet another meeting with yet another FEMA official (who had laid out yet another requirement), we looked at each other and Woody said, "What do we do now?" I said, "Well, I think we comply one more time, and then we put it into God's hands." So that's what we did. And very shortly thereafter we received a check for \$600,000 (USD) - funds that helped us refinance the property for MCC and MCC Los Angeles at a critical time. That's what I call a "Don't-quit-before-you-get-the-blessing" moment. You probably have a story, too!

**Don't do it alone; it's all about relationships.** These days, it is all about partnership, cooperation, and working with others to accomplish what we could never do alone. Today, MCC accomplishes so much thanks to partners such as Human Rights Watch, The Fellowship, Souforce, ILGA, Commission on Human Rights, Other Sheep, Human Rights Campaign and GLSEN. That is also true in your local community! The deep friendships and relationships we nurture personally and in our churches make all the differences as we face the huge challenges today.



**Choose faith over fear every time.** The troubles of today are not eternal, they are not what will last. What really lasts? Changed lives. Faith. Hope. And love - the love we offer each day, every Sunday in worship, every time we open our doors. This is what lasts, this is what really matters.



**Be grateful.** Begin and end with gratitude in your prayers every day. "Thank you God, for the privilege of serving in these times." Will you join me in that prayer today?

I want you to know I am praying for you, your local church, your pastor and staff, your

volunteers, and for your vision, your mission and your finances.

If you have a special need or intention that you would like me to pray for, e-mail me at [RevNancyWilson@MCCchurch.net](mailto:RevNancyWilson@MCCchurch.net). No request is too small or too great.

In turn, I ask for your prayers for the MCC Board of Elders and our whole leadership, as we lead MCC through these times.

Please pray that we will choose faith over fear every time, and that we will lead with wisdom and courage.

Grace and peace,

**+Nancy**

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