

Opinion

Rev. Elder Gill Storey addresses MCC-Columbia's possible disaffiliation

I wish Metropolitan Community Church of Columbia the very best as they seek divine guidance for their future as a worshipping community and as they decide which ecclesiastical organization is best suited to their needs, goals, and vision.

However, I am saddened that they are considering leaving MCC. It would be possible for them to have dual affiliation with both MCC and another denomination; but to take a church completely out of MCC that has been built with the love, labors and generosity of members, friends, and supporters of the Metropolitan Community Church movement is something that grieves me deeply. If they are unhappy with MCC, then they could have requested mediation. If their vision included a dual affiliation, then that too would be a possibility. But to completely leave the denomination that has nurtured them to this point is something that I would hope to be both unnecessary and avoidable.

I also very much regret the way our denomination learned of our Columbia congregation's possible desire to disaffiliate. We received no direct word from the pastor or board of directors, but rather read of their plans in the press. A more

direct and communicative approach might have offered more possibilities, or at least offered appropriate closure as a parish and its parent denomination parted company. That all parties were denied such closure is something that I regard as unfortunate.

My final concern and regret over the situation is that the United Church of Christ did not contact the Universal Fellowship of Metropolitan Community Churches regarding our church in Columbia. Had the UCC used us as an information resource in this process, we could have shared information that the UCC might have found useful.



As recently as July of 2002, Andy Sidden stood for election to MCC's Board of Elders, our denomination's spiritual leadership body. Mr. Sidden failed to achieve the required votes in both the Lay and Clergy houses to be elected and soon thereafter became the pastor of his present church. So it has only been three years since Mr. Sidden went from wanting to help lead the denomination to possibly leading a parish out of the denomination.

It might also be noted that MCC-Columbia didn't seek references from UFMCC when Mr. Sidden was applying to

be their pastor. Whereas it may certainly be the case that Mr. Sidden has served his congregation well and to their satisfaction, I can't help but believe that all parties would have been better served by a process of direct dealing and open dialogue. As it is, we are facing the loss of a beloved congregation, and per MCC's policies, Mr. Sidden's leading a church out of our Fellowship will be considered a de facto resignation of his MCC clergy credentials.

To paraphrase the vision of Metropolitan Community Churches, we as God's liberated people boldly reclaim our holy identity, believing that our sexuality is a holy gift from God so we no longer distance our bodies from our experience with God. We believe we are called to the work of social justice and action. We are committed to telling the story of God's transforming grace. We nurture the value of community by living out the message that no one is excluded from the family of God. And we in MCC are bridge builders who, though Christian followers of Jesus, are also believers in everyone's holy privilege to work out their own salvation. We respect those of other faith traditions and work with them to free all who have been oppressed by hate, disre-

gard and violence.

That is who MCC strives to be, and in

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—Rev. Elder Gill Storey
Metropolitan Community Church

support of that sacred vision, we value each of our congregations and every individual who supports our churches with time, talent, and treasure. We therefore very much wish for every MCC to remain part of our work and to prosper in their local communities.

Finally, whereas I believe mistakes have been made in this process and that more open and direct communication would have served all parties well, nevertheless I will conclude as I began, affirming MCC-Columbia's right to prayerfully choose their own direction. If they leave MCC, they will be greatly missed. But whatever they choose, we acknowledge them as our sisters and brothers and as children of our loving and all-inclusive God.

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