

Report on the Commission on Rites and Sacraments, submitted by Rev. Dr. Axel Schwaigert, Chair.

Dear Rev. Moderator,

Dear Governing Board,

I am happy to submit this first report on the work of the Commission on Rites and Sacraments of Metropolitan Community Church.

Following last General Conference the process of forming a Commission in Rites and Sacraments was begun. This Commission follows the work of the Commission on the Statement of Faith. The Commission on the Statement of Faith originally was intended to look at the whole section in the MCC Bylaws that dealt with the Statement of Faith and the rules and regulations regarding Rites and Sacraments. It very quickly became clear, that such a huge task could not be done by one commission in the given timeframe. So it was decided that there should be a future, independent Commission on Rites and Sacraments.

Due to the situation at that time, that Commission was not formed until after our new moderator, Rev. Elder Cecilia Eggleston was elected and had started the process of getting familiar with the huge task of leading MCC that was presented to her.

Eventually Rev. Alford Harkey and I were asked to start a selecting process for this commission as Co-Chair-persons. Due to the pressures put upon all our churches in times of a global pandemic and due to personal situations, this process took much longer than anticipated. The other reason for this was, in addition, that both Rev. Alford-Harkey and I and Rev. Eggleston agreed, that a lot of care needed to be put into the formation of that Commission. We took the time to consult with leaders in MCC, both in the US and in the international church, to find possible candidates, that were subsequently interviewed. Our goal was to find a diverse as possible cross-section of MCC as possible. In particular we looked at the following criteria, but were not limited to that: Gender, Sexual Orientation, Trans-experience, Age and Experience in MCC, both young and older, Lay and Clergy, US-based and international, academic and Non-academic experience, experience outside of MCC, diverse religious and denominational background.

I am very happy and confident, that we finally succeeded to gather an amazing group of people, which were confirmed by the Governing Board. We also decided, that the members of this Commission will work "only" as Core-Group, and we will bring in participants and advisers for specific task and questions as necessary.

Due to personal reasons Rev. Alford-Harkey decided to step down from the position as Vice-Chair, but remained in the Commission. It is our intention to fill this position again and have a Co-Chair Structure again, soon.

We now face the challenge to bring together this diverse group that lives in many different time zones, and often have secular commitments, too.

In our first direct meeting on Zoom we started to outline the task ahead of us. These are the areas of work we outlined so far:

- We plan to conduct a “Descriptive Theology Survey” as one of our first tasks, to identify where MCC is in the present, and what is practice and best practice in our diverse MCC congregations. For example: it is clear that the practice of an Open Table in MCC, outlined among other things in the Statement of Faith, is not what the current Bylaws formulate.
- We will develop a very clear and transparent form of communication with the church, both in telling the church what we do, and listening to the voice of the church. This can be done through a regular newsletter, surveys, direct communication with individual, just to mention a few ideas.
- We identified already some fields we will work on, but that list is just in its initial stage:
  - o Formulate our radical believe of an Open Table. This is especially exciting, in regard to our experience of non-synchronous and online worship situation. Here we see huge potential for a contribution of MCC to the ecumenical conversation.
  - o Baptism
  - o The question of the meaning of ordination in the context of the Priesthood of all believers, as stated in the Statement of Faith
  - o The challenge to express our theology in a clear way, that is representative of the diversity of MCC
  - o The meaning of marriage in a time of equal marriage that was not even imaginable to the authors of the Bylaws.
- We imagine our work to produce a new formulation of the Statement of Faith as well as a in depth collection of theological and liturgical texts.

The charge of the Commission, as far as the members of the Commission understand it now, is one of huge trust and hope and faith from the side of MCC Leadership. On behalf of the Commission I want to thank the Leadership for that trust.

It is my hope that the Commission will be able to present first results of our work in the near future. Those will be, most likely more questions and challenges, before results may be able to be presented. But we work and live by trusting in the work of the Spirit in this task.

We thank the Rev. Moderator and the Governing board for their trust and support and ask for your continuing prayers.

Respectfully submitted

27. April 2022

Rev. Dr. Axel Schwaigert, Chair (until a Co-Chair is elected)