

Metropolitan Community Church

Organisation and Church Life

Church Organisation

The local church is financially and organisationally independent. Members of the church meet in Annual General Meeting (September in Brisbane) to elect a Board of Directors, receive financial and other reports and vote on issues of major importance, including changes to the church bylaws. The church, through the Board of Directors, hires staff, including the pastor, and negotiates a mutually acceptable contract. Each church has a Lay Delegate, who is a member of the Board of Directors.

Churches in a region form a network – churches in Australia and New Zealand belong to the Australasian Network. The next combined meeting of this network is in July 2017 in Brisbane.

Local MCC churches are affiliated with the worldwide United Fellowship of Metropolitan Community Churches (UFMCC), which has an office in Sarasota, Florida, USA. Clergy and Lay Delegates from each local church meet every three years to conduct the business of the ministries, bylaws and leadership structure of MCC. The most recent General Conference was in July 2016 in Victoria, Canada.

The General Conference elects the Moderator for a six-year term. To assist the Moderator, the Governing Board, consisting of eight members (four clergy and four laity) is authorised by the General Conference to carry on the governance of the MCC between General Conferences, including finances, legal matters and church operations. The members of the Governing Board are elected by the General Conference and are volunteers.

The Moderator appoints the Council of Elders. The elders provide pastoral leadership and spiritual oversight. They also provide resources and counsel to churches, and represent the church in an official capacity. Currently there are 10 elders. There are three departments within the church to provide specific support:

1. *Formation and Leadership Development* provides training for clergy and lay leaders
2. *Emerging Ministries* provides resources for evangelism and outreach
3. *Church Life and Health* provides resources and support to local churches.

Church Services

Services of the church include the following:

1. Baptism – is an affirmation of faith by the believer and is conducted by the pastor. The believer accepts Jesus Christ as personal Saviour and affirms the desire to accept and participate in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus. By baptism, a person is admitted to membership of the church.
2. Communion – is a reminder of the sacrifice of Christ on our behalf, fulfilling the penalty for our sins. The bread is a symbol of Jesus' body given on the cross for everyone, and the unfermented grape juice (wine) is a symbol of Jesus' blood, or life, that was given for us and forms our only righteousness. Communion is sometimes known as "The Eucharist" or "The Lord's Supper" and is celebrated every week.
3. Holy Union – is the religious blessing by the church of two people who wish to join their lives for life. While not providing any legal recognition in Australia, the ceremony affirms the church's recognition of the union and provides the opportunity for friends and family to celebrate the couple's love and commitment.
4. Ordination – setting aside by prayer and laying on of hands of new clergy to the service of God.
5. Membership – the formal acceptance of new members into the fellowship of the local church.
6. Anointing – special prayer for the sick by the pastor and other church leaders as requested.
7. Funeral – the celebration of the life of a person who has died.

Progressive Christianity

Many MCC members, but by no means all, embrace progressive Christianity, meaning a willingness to question tradition and accept human diversity. Progressive Christianity places emphasis on social justice, care for the poor and the oppressed, and the environmental stewardship of the Earth.

Some characteristics of progressive Christianity include:

- A spiritual vitality and variety of expression, including participatory and arts-infused worship
- Intellectual integrity and creativity, including being open to questions
- Thoughtful interpretation of the Scripture
- Acceptance of people who have differing understandings of the concept of "God"
- An affirmation of Christian beliefs

- Respect for values present in other religions and belief systems
- An affirmation of both human spiritual unity and social diversity
- Solidarity with the poor as subjects of their own emancipation
- Compassion for all living beings.

Inclusive Life

MCC encourages everyone to be inclusive in language, attitudes and actions. Neither God nor church leaders are referred to with only male pronouns. Documents, official statements and sermons are prepared using inclusive, nonsexist language. Inclusive life is demonstrated as an attitude of mutual openness toward others. We recognise everyone's right of equal access to a spiritual experience and wholeness. MCC is committed to removing barriers between individuals and among communities that deny such access.

Inclusive language seeks to overcome barriers between individuals and communities in such areas as gender, race, class, age, physical differences, nationality, theological beliefs, culture and lifestyle. Examples of inclusive language include: humankind (instead of "mankind"), people of God (instead of "brothers and sisters"), chair (instead of "chairman"), spouse or partner (instead of "husband and wife), a person with a disability (instead of a disabled person), and developing countries (instead of "third world").

We urge people to use language that people call themselves. Take time to find out what labels or words a person or group uses for their identities and experiences rather than making assumptions. Always respect the language a person uses to self identify, for example the pronouns he, his, she and hers.

Social Justice

From the earliest origins of MCC, social justice has been high on our list of priorities. The Bible asks the question: "What does the LORD require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God" (Micah 6:8) Social justice is the compact between individual and society for the right to live life fully. Social justice cares for the poor, sick, enslaved, addicted, marginalised and imprisoned. Social justice demands equal rights to education, health care, social security, employment, public services and taxation equality. Every one deserves equal justice before the law and to enjoy equality and dignity, free of all discrimination. We are called as Christians to:

- stand with the marginalized and oppressed
- be partners in working for change
- call attention to human rights abuses
- be a voice in the international community for justice
- lift up new generations of remarkable, far-reaching spiritual activists
- build on hope and create our future.

Stewardship

God has given us time, talents and resources. We are called upon to be good managers (or stewards) of those gifts. We spend our time wisely, knowing that we are accountable to God for wasted time, or time spent on frivolous pursuits that will have no eternal impact. We should use our God-given talents in the best way we can, working in service for fellow human beings, seeking to lift up God's name and extend the message of salvation to those who need to hear it. We need to allocate our resources in the best way possible, including the financial support of the poor, the sick and needy, and the church's ministry. The Bible encourages Christians to give their tithes and offerings to support God's work on earth but urges us to put our "treasure in heaven." MCC operates only by the generosity of individuals regularly giving as God has blessed them.

Membership in MCC Brisbane

According to MCC Brisbane Bylaws, membership is open to any baptised Christian who, for a period of six months or more:

1. attends worship regularly
2. provides financial support
3. makes a service contribution
4. demonstrates interest and loyalty.

Membership is usually offered after completing membership preparation (e.g. class). To become a member, the person must be recommended by an existing member and be voted into membership by a majority of the Board of Directors. Membership is maintained by continuing to fulfil the criteria listed above (points 1-4).