



The MCC Statement of Faith

with Brief Commentary

**As adopted 5 July 2016 at General Conference XXVI,
Victoria, British Columbia, Canada**

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MCC
Sydney

TRANSFORMING OURSELVES AS WE TRANSFORM THE WORLD

MCC Statement of Faith

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Preamble

Metropolitan Community Churches is one chapter in the story of the Church, the Body of Christ. We are people on a journey, learning to live into our spirituality, while affirming our bodies, our genders, our sexualities. We don't all believe exactly the same things. And yet in the midst of our diversity, we build community, grounded in God's radically inclusive love for all people. We are part of an ongoing conversation on matters of belief and faith, shaped by scripture and the historic creeds, building on those who have come before us. Our chapter begins when God says to us: "Come, taste, and see."

A much longer version of this document exists titled "*Companion Guide to the 2016 MCC Statement of Faith*." It contains an additional one hundred or so pages of supporting information, notes on historical texts that have shaped MCC identity, MCC publications, other faith statements from MCC churches, newsletters, and suggestions for further reading.

Our Faith

"Come, taste, and see." Jesus Christ, You invite all people to Your open table. You make us Your people, a beloved community. You restore the joy of our relationship with God, even in the midst of loneliness, despair, and degradation. We are each unique and we all belong, a priesthood of all believers. Baptised and filled with Your Holy Spirit, You empower us to be Your healing presence in a hurting world.

We expect to see Your reign on earth as it is in heaven as we work toward a world where everyone has enough, wars cease, and all creation lives in harmony. We affirm Your charge to all of humanity to care for the land, sea, and air. Therefore, we will actively resist systems and structures which are destroying Your creation.

With all of creation we worship You—every tribe, every language, every people, every nation. We know You by many names, Triune God, beyond comprehension, revealed to us in Jesus Christ, who invites us to the feast.

Amen.

Commentary on the MCC Statement of Faith

Introduction

The new Statement of Faith and this accompanying Companion Guide are meant to be a part of the ongoing openness to conversation within MCC about our faith and beliefs. MCC has long been an umbrella under which people from many different theological perspectives have found a home. We hope that the words you find here, which have been carefully and prayerfully chosen, will foster conversations which will lead us to the growing edges each of us has theologically and personally. We believe that when we are open to those possibilities, the Holy Spirit will lead us to new and exciting places in our experience of the Divine.

In the history of Christianity, statements of faith have often taken on the form of a document created for external use—a list of propositions presented to the world. They often include long explanations, citing scriptural references and the teachings of earlier Christian writers or the founders of a particular tradition.

For our revised Statement of Faith, we have chosen to forego a lengthy list of bullet points in favor of a shorter statement that can be used in worship.

The new Statement of Faith is written in the form of a prayer. We have done this for two reasons. First, MCC is committed to the use of inclusive language in reference to both humanity and God. Early on in our work, we were troubled by the awkward phrasings that resulted from our efforts to avoid gendered pronouns in our repeated references to God. By moving from speaking *about* God or specific persons of the Trinity in the third person (e.g., he, she,

it), a move to speaking *to* them in the second person (you) alleviated this problem. The second reason was that once we made the initial shift, we recognised that a prayer, offered communally, transformed the Statement of Faith from a list of propositions *about* God into an intimate communication *with* God.

About the name "Statement of Faith"

Though MCC has used the name "Statement of Faith" for a very long time, the language that has existed in the Bylaws for our first 46 years doesn't actually contain this phrase. The new Statement of Faith incorporates these words as an official title.

Preamble

The preamble sets the stage for our new Statement of Faith. It briefly reminds us of the origins of MCC and our role within the Church universal.

Metropolitan Community Churches is one chapter in the story of the Church, the Body of Christ.

Metropolitan Community Churches. We have chosen to use Metropolitan Community Churches as it is more indicative of how we are known than our legal name of Universal Fellowship of Metropolitan Community Churches.

Is one chapter in the story of the Church. By acknowledging that we are one chapter, we honour the understanding that MCC is a part of the larger story of church history. We recognise the great "cloud of witnesses" (Hebrews 12:1) who have come before us, even as we make our own contributions and foster new generations. We claim our place in the continuum of faith

communities charged with spreading God's love, providing life affirming community and connection.

The Body of Christ. A commanding image of the Church, especially in the early and undisputed letters of Paul (e.g., 1 Corinthians 12:27; Romans 12:4-5), the Body of Christ is the physical presence of Jesus in the world. As Christ's body, we continue Jesus' mission through table ministry, prophetic word and action, healing, and bringing about reconciliation between people and God.

As a body, we live in solidarity with one another. The body is many parts, each sharing in the pain and the joy of the others. Different parts have different functions, and each is given equally unique honour (1 Corinthians 12:12-31).

We are people on a journey, learning to live into our spirituality, while affirming our bodies, our genders, our sexualities.

On a journey. The language of *journey* reminds us of the Exodus, when the children of Israel left behind their bondage in Egypt to travel through the desert on their way to the Promised Land.

Many come to MCC from places of great pain. We acknowledge our roots in the good news of liberation for all God's people; and we move in faith toward God's promises for our wholeness. Like the peoples united in the story of the Exodus, the people of MCC come from many different backgrounds. We don't all believe exactly the same things; yet, we find community in the midst of our diversity.

In our interactions with one another and our encounter with God, we are transformed. The image of a journey describes this ongoing process. We haven't yet reached our destination. We are a work in progress. We're still figuring out how our life together

works. We're open to new experiences and the movement of God's Spirit among us, in the Church, and in the world.

Learning to live into our spirituality. For many, spirituality is an evolutionary and sometimes revolutionary progression. Over time, theological messages have separated body and soul or spirit. Some early church theologians elevated the soul far above the body, not only in terms of the body's finitude, but also in terms of rigorous decrees regarding sex, sexuality, chastity, virginity, intercourse, and marriage.

We acknowledge the many and varied individual and congregational journeys and expressions of embodied spirituality that comprise MCC. As a church, we strive to create safe space with life affirming messages about God's creativity, love, and Spirit. We work to recognise the dignity, value, and worth of each person as a physical-spiritual being created in the image of God.

Affirming our bodies, our genders, our sexualities. Some in the MCC community have received messages about the separation of various aspects of personal identity from spirituality. A typical question that is often internalised from without is: "Can one be a member of the LGBTQIA or queer community and Christian?" Responses to this question have also had varying impacts on individuals and communities in MCC.

Just as there are so many expressions of spirituality in MCC, there are many expressions of sex and sexuality. Living into our spirituality and affirming our whole selves also means having occasionally difficult conversations about gender identity, sexual expression, sexualities, sexual ethics, social norms, and constructs that have had damaging impacts on our lives or the lives of those in our community.

While MCC was founded during a time of great challenge for the LGBTQIA community, not everyone has the story of pain, sexual

repression, and marginalisation. The Statement of Faith and this *Companion Guide* invite us to a conversation about healthy sexual ethics, values, theologies of gender and sexuality, beliefs about sexual expression and practices, and where we believe God is at work within our individual embodied spirituality, as well as resulting actions. While “living into our spirituality and affirming our whole selves,” we are also led to inquire, consider, and talk about how the image of God (*imago dei*) might be reflected in our bodies, our sexualities, our sexual expressions, and our gender identities, when we live in integrity.

We don't all believe exactly the same things. And yet in the midst of our diversity, we build community, grounded in God's radically inclusive love for all people.

These seem like simple sentences. Yet they touch the very core of MCC. We are a people of diverse faith. No one is expected to subscribe to every single declaration in the new Statement of Faith. As a church and a community, we do not expect uniformity in our faith. Instead, we celebrate our diversity, along with the challenges and the tensions this brings.

We don't all believe the same things. Creeds, statements of faith, and dogmas have traditionally been used as fences and safeguards against all that are different. They were built up like walls against the foreign, the dangerous, and the new. Often though, such statements have only helped to keep people in line. The MCC Statement of Faith is intended to do neither. The Statement of Faith is not intended to build a fence that keeps "us" in and "them" out. MCC acknowledges the fact that there is a richness of diversity among us and this gives us strength.

In the midst of our diversity, we build community. The Statement of Faith is not the answer to end all questions and

discussion, but one step in our conversation. We hope it can be a stone for building community, shaped and reshaped by the standard of God's radically inclusive love. We practice and live this in every worship service: Together we celebrate an open table at Holy Communion, in the knowledge that the sister or brother next to us might have a different understanding of what exactly happens at the table. And still we experience community with God and with each other in this diversity.

Grounded in God's radically inclusive love for all people. God's love is radical in that we cannot contain it, hold power over it, or limit it. In God's love we dare to say: *This is how we describe our faith at this moment in our history along our collective journey.* We nurture the bonds of our community, knowing that our individual professions of faith may be different, more or less detailed, deeper, broader, challenging, at times frightening, fresh, surprising, and sometimes more traditionally worded. Yet, always, we are held in God's love. Or, as it was formulated in the Reformation: *In essentials unity, in non-essentials liberty, in all things charity.*

We are part of an ongoing conversation on matters of belief and faith, shaped by scripture and the historic creeds, building on those who have come before us.

Ongoing conversation. Within MCC we share a strong conviction that in talking about faith, not everything has already been spoken. It is always possible to go deeper to achieve a better understanding of our beliefs. We are open to frank and respectful dialogue between different perspectives. Just as we recognise that MCC is one more chapter in Christian history, we share a profound belief that our understanding of God in our stories is always developing in an ongoing conversation. We honour those in our own MCC tradition who have expressed their faith and

beliefs in both words and actions. And, we continue to build on this inclusive tradition today.

Shaped by scripture. Members of MCC come from a variety of traditions that recognise varying canons of scripture. Those with roots in historic Protestant traditions have fewer books in their bibles than those from Roman Catholic or various Eastern Orthodox communities. In addition to this, the various translations into modern languages are made from a variety of manuscript traditions. Some base their Old Testament collections on the Hebrew of the Masoretic Text, while others use the Septuagint and other Greek translations produced first by Greek-speaking Jews of the diaspora and later adopted by Greek-speaking Christians. This makes for a rich and diverse experience of scripture in MCC congregations around the world.

Today's MCC congregations continue to read from the bible. And, an increasing number of congregations and individuals also find value in an open canon that includes wisdom readings from a variety of religious traditions and contemporary writers.

The historic creeds. The original MCC Statement of Faith declares that MCC "moves in the mainstream of Christianity." While this phrase could be read as an attempt to fit into the religious landscape of North America in the early days of MCC, the Faith, Fellowship, and Order Commission had the following to say:

For to move in 'the mainstream of Christianity' does *not* mean accepting the status quo of the Christian Church as it exists today in the U.S. or elsewhere, but to reach into the fullness of Christian history and tradition, and the fullness of Christian experience worldwide among all people, and the fullness of the varied scriptural images and themes available to us.

The historic creeds referred to in the many iterations of MCC's Statement of Faith are a part of the fullness that Jennie Bull describes in the passage above.

Whether we agree or push back against them, many of us are shaped by the historic creeds. This same dynamic of attraction and struggle characterises the formation and our ongoing collective development as MCC. Previous versions of the MCC Statement of Faith have specifically listed the Apostles' Creed, the Nicene Creed, and the Athanasian Creed as having particular importance. (All three are provided in the third section of this Companion Guide.)

Our adoption and subsequent rejection of the Athanasian Creed provides a particularly clear example of both the shaping power of the historic creeds and our pushback against them. During an early general conference, delegates added the Athanasian Creed to the list of historic creeds recognised in the Bylaws. But, when the delegates went home and actually read the full text of the Athanasian Creed, they found its declaration that one cannot be saved without embracing the fullness of the creed to be more than they were willing to accept. As a result, the Athanasian Creed was removed from the list of historic creeds in the Bylaws shortly thereafter.

The historic creeds continue to shape MCC today in various ways. While some members of MCC profess full faith in these historic formulations of the Christian faith, others push against some of the declarations within them. As a non-credal denomination, there is no requirement that members or friends of MCC congregations give full assent to the positions within the creeds. Rather, we encourage open and respectful dialogue around these finer points of the Christian tradition.

Those who have come before us. We honour the two millennia of theological thought and reflection of our shared history within the Church, as well as the continual activity of the Holy Spirit that leads successive generations into reimagine faith and belief.

Our chapter begins when God says to us: "Come, taste, and see."

Chapter. We preface our Statement of Faith with the acknowledgment that MCC is not the whole Church. Our claim is modest. We locate ourselves within the trajectory of the greater arc of the Church in human history. Our chapter begins, concretely, in October of 1968.

Our Faith

"Come, taste, and see." Jesus Christ, You invite all people to your open table.

"Come, taste, and see." In the Gospel of John, Jesus calls new disciples such as Philip and Nathaniel with the words "come and see" (John 1:39). In contrast to the Synoptic invitation "follow me," and reminiscent of Psalm 34:8 which invites us to "taste and see the goodness of the Lord," this phrase is an invitation to experience Christ personally. Further, the invitation to taste and see reminds of our embodiment—a gift of God that many within our tradition are still in the process of reclaiming.

Jesus Christ. The past two hundred years of scholarship have drawn a distinction between "the historical Jesus" and "the Christ." The former, as we continue to discover with each new generation, is a shadowy figure who tends to take on the attributes of those who try to describe him. The latter sometimes becomes an abstraction that can be hard to relate to. We have deliberately chosen not to separate these two names, but rather

to acknowledge that only by holding the tension between the two facets, truly God and truly human, are we able to encounter God through Jesus Christ.

Open table. From the very beginning of MCC's story, in a worship service in the living room of his house that Sunday in 1968, Reverend Troy Perry offered an open table. Our understanding of the open table has evolved over time to generally mean that *absolutely all are welcome*. This understanding of God's radical hospitality has outpaced even our Bylaws, which at this writing still place conditions that are at variance with our practice. We recognise that we are not the only Church that offers an open table now, but this has been our practice from MCC's beginning. To offer an open table is in our very DNA. In every worship service in the far corners of the world, wherever MCC is present, we proclaim that the table is not MCC's table, but Jesus Christ's table, and that everyone is welcome to participate.

You make us Your people, a beloved community.

Beloved Community. The notion of a "Beloved Community" used here is a reminder of the expanded meaning of the phrase attributed to Reverend Doctor Martin Luther King, Jr., and engendered by many others. The King Center organisation notes that Rev. King's use of the term has come to represent a broader communion of justice seeking, nonviolent people who have equality at their core. M has this sense of a Beloved Community which is a global vision, whereby all people can share in the wealth of the earth. In the Beloved Community, poverty, hunger and homelessness will not be tolerated because international standards of human decency will not allow it. Racism and all forms of discrimination, bigotry and prejudice will be replaced by an all-inclusive spirit of kinship.

One expression of agape love in the Beloved Community is behaving justly, not for any one oppressed group, but for all people. As Dr. King often said, "Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere." The sense was that justice could not be parceled out to individuals or groups, but was the birthright of every human being in the Beloved Community.

You restore the joy of our relationship with God, even in the midst of loneliness, despair, and degradation.

Restore the joy of our relationship with God. Based on the language of Psalm 51:12, the new Statement of Faith includes language that invokes wholeness and communion with God and with one another. We replaced the word *salvation* from the psalm with the language of "relationship with God." While not a perfect match for the full range of meanings of *salvation*, we made the change in response to feedback received from an earlier version of these explanatory notes. Respondents suggested that, in our own time, the language of *salvation* has been coopted by particular elements of Christian religious fundamentalism and has become a stumbling block to many who seek a relationship with God.

Our spiritual journeys are all unique. Some interpreted our original reference to *salvation* as a reference to the doctrine of original sin. However, the commissioners attempted to offer language inclusive of several possibilities. Participants in MCC embrace a variety of narratives of fall, redemption, and divine providence, including original sin (Augustine and the Western tradition), ancestral sin (Eastern Christianity), and original blessing (Matthew Fox and creation spirituality).

We also received comments from people who report having never felt estranged from God. Yet, even in the our most intimate relationships, most of us experience periods of greater and lesser

connection. This can also be the case in our relationship with God. In keeping with the image of a spiritual journey, the language of restoring relationship speaks to the periodic renewals and spiritual growth that we experience along our various paths.

Even in the midst of loneliness, despair, and degradation. The original MCC Statement of Faith includes the phrase, "we are saved from loneliness, despair, and degradation through God's gift of grace..." In many conversations about what people like from the old Statement of Faith, we have heard that this formulation is particularly meaningful. We chose to preserve it in the revised Statement.

Like the current concern with the language of *salvation*, the authors of the earlier Statement of Faith were conscious of the many people who come to MCC who are automatically suspicious of the word *sin* because they have been labeled as unrepentant sinners. Thus, the writers of the original Statement of Faith chose words that describe the effects of sin—a break in right relationship with God and others and a loss of human dignity—while carefully avoiding words that might serve as a stumbling block.

Finally, the new statement recognises that even in the midst of God's restoring work, we are not guaranteed a life that is free of all suffering. Rather, the language of this new formulation calls us to recognise that God is with us in the midst of everything that we experience, both the good and the bad.

We are each unique and we all belong, a priesthood of all believers.

We are each unique. We are each created in the image of God (*imago dei*). Collectively we are all God's children. As individuals we each have unique gifts to offer back to God.



The psalmist writes, "I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made. Wonderful are your works; that I know very well" (Psalm 139:14). Each person has potential, and each person has something that can be offered to God.

Priesthood of all believers. In MCC we affirm a priesthood of all believers. By this we mean that in the Body of Christ, all parts are equally important, and all have a direct connection to God. While our Pastors and Elders are servants of the community, they are not intermediaries between humanity and God.

A priesthood of all believers implies that everyone who is willing and knowledgeable may fulfill a service in the church. This expressly includes all functions in our worship services, including the administering of Baptism and presiding during Holy Communion. While we are in broad ecumenical agreement regarding Baptism with many sacramental and non-sacramental traditions, our practice of empowering lay presiders at Holy Communion is unique among sacramental traditions. We base our practices on traditions in both the Hebrew Scriptures and the New Testament.

Baptised and filled with Your Holy Spirit, You empower us to be Your healing presence in a hurting world.

Baptised. MCC holds that Baptism is a sacrament, an act that confers God's grace on the individual receiving it. As a

denomination, we recognise many modes of baptism (e.g., immersion, sprinkling, pouring) and perform this sacrament for both infants and adults. Some of our members are drawn from traditions that do not include water baptism, but still recognise a spiritual baptism. As a denomination, we have chosen to live in this tension.

Filled. On the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2:1-4, cf.4:8, 13:52, etc.), Peter and the disciples were filled with the Holy Spirit. They had been a group of terrified, confused, well-meaning disciples who had not understood the reason for Jesus' ministry, and who fled when Jesus was arrested. When they were filled with the Spirit, they became a courageous and unstoppable force which transformed Jesus' tiny movement into a global religion. When they were in trouble, needed a miracle, suffering arbitrary arrest, or were being tortured or put to the death by both mobs and government authorities, the Spirit would fill them moment by moment as they needed it, supplying power. This promise and power, we affirm, is also available for MCC.

Holy Spirit. The Synoptic tradition records the coming of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2), while John's gospel recounts Jesus' gift of the Holy Spirit during a visit to the Upper Room after Jesus' resurrection. The Holy Spirit is known by several names: the Paraclete, Advocate, Comforter, Giver of Life. Christian tradition teaches that the Holy Spirit is the Third Person of the Trinity (see below).

Empower. Through Baptism and the infilling of the Holy Spirit, we do not merely become members of the Church. Rather, we are both equipped with spiritual gifts and commissioned to spread the love of God in the world. This call extends beyond elders, clergy, and ministry leaders to each and every member.

Hurting world. In the beginning God called the creation and all that is "very good." Yet, we know that the creation and humanity do not live fully into this intended goodness. In many places and many times the world has been hurt. There have been many attempts to explain why this is the case. Very often those attempts lead to accusation and blaming of others or self.

We have not attempted to formulate yet another explanation or a particular understanding of sin. Instead, we understand that it is the task of the Church and all who live in it to be Christ's presence in the world. As this presence, we work towards healing of hurt, reconciliation of brokenness, and the proclamation of God's love for all the world.

We expect to see Your reign on earth as it is in heaven, and we will work toward a world where everyone has enough, wars cease, and all creation lives in harmony.

The historic creeds are written in response to the burning questions of their particular time. The middle paragraph of the Statement of Faith responds to problems of our own time. It is an eschatological vision, an image of the coming reign of God. But, liberation theology teaches us not to simply sit idly by, waiting for the afterlife. Rather, we struggle in the here and now, even as we pray for the coming of God's reign.

On earth as it is in heaven. This phrase from the prayer which Jesus taught his disciples has been called a summary of Jesus' life and teaching. Tertullian called this prayer "an epitome of the gospel," or "the gospel in digest." It consists of two sections. One refers to the world above: God's name, reign, and will. The other refers to three earthly realities: bread, debt, and trials. Jesus' prayer calls on God to pour the grace of heaven into simple daily experiences related to material survival, until earth looks like heaven. By adopting this language, MCC distances itself from

theologies that would leave earth to "go to hell" while the Church escapes to heaven. Jesus' vision is broader: an ultimate reunification of heaven and earth, for "the dwelling of God will be with mortals" (Revelation 21:3).

Everyone has enough. In the prayer that Jesus taught the disciples, which is spoken throughout the Church, we ask: *Give us this day our daily bread.* We do not ask for wealth and treasures, but for what is needed to sustain us each day. And we ask this not only for us, but for every human being in the world. This sentence therefore is two-fold. It is a prophetic vision of a just world, where every human being has equal access to all resources and all resources are shared equally and justly. It is also the calling we have heard as a church to work towards a world of justice where, indeed, everyone has enough.

Wars cease. To live toward the world yet to come, we are called to actively engage our church and its resources toward peace on earth, at all levels of human society. As Christians we are called to bring a peaceful end to the wars of this world, between nations and states, but also between religions, tribes, families, and individuals. This work can be political, but it starts with individuals living in peace with each other.

Harmony. Here we express our understanding that we live in the hope and expectation of God's presence within the fullness of God's creation. By this we mean not just the absence of war, conflict, separation, and injustice, but something greater. This harmony for which we are created is God's *Shalom*, God's deeper peace, that is expressed in the last chapter of the New Testament, where God is seen in the midst of a new creation and all tears are consoled (Revelation 21). It is the hope and promise that one day the lion will lie with the lamb, that there will be no death or mourning, no crying and no pain. It is a new creation for the whole of creation.

We affirm Your charge to all of humanity to care for the land, sea, and air.

Land, sea, and air. In Genesis 1:26, a priestly Hebrew writer records how humanity was charged with the care of the earth, the sea, and the sky.

These three zones of creation are not brought together randomly. The waters of disordered chaos (Hebrew: *tohu wabohu*) are crafted into a good world by the establishment of a sky (expanse or firmament) in the midst of the chaotic sea on the second day, and by gathering the sea waters apart from the dry land on the third day. On the fifth day, God filled the waters and the sky with creatures. And, on the sixth day, God filled the dry land with animals and humans, at which point, we are charged with the responsibility of caring for this good order.

In MCC we affirm that justice includes care for God's creation, and that all of Adam and Eve's children are commissioned with this awesome task.

Therefore, we will actively resist systems and structures which are destroying Your creation.

This point flows from the previous one about land, sea, and sky. While we are charged with protecting God's good order of creation, "disordered chaos" also has its champions in the form of technologies, sources of energy, toxic and carbon-intensive pollution, and acts of environmental vandalism that damage the climate. These problems would be much less difficult to overcome were it not for private interests and economic factors: profit-driven economies and corporations with powerful lobbies that stand to gain greatly in the short term from the continued abuse and exploitation of the world's goodness and abundance.

In the current ecological crisis, it is prophetic that it was the violence and injustice of Adam and Eve's offspring that lead to God's good creation returning to chaos again at the time of the great flood (Genesis 6-9). Biblical theologian Gerhard von Rad describes the event as follows: "The heavenly sea, which is above the firmament, empties downward through latticed windows ... when the heavenly ocean breaks forth upon the Earth below, and the primeval sea which is beneath the earth, which is restrained by God, now freed from its bonds, gushes up through the yawning chasms onto the earth, then there is a destruction of the entire cosmic system."

The priestly author would certainly not deny the incredible creative and transformative power of chaos, but illustrates how human violence and greed can unleash its destructive potential. Injustice then leads to fragmentation, which is seen in increased anxiety, scarcity, increased fear, superficial connections, and skewed views of the world, others, and ourselves.

As a church, our prophetic calling is not merely to care for the creation in individual acts of care, but to stand in opposition to any unjust, systemic power that seeks to gain from the destruction of our environment, and to seek the transformation and ultimate redemption of those systems.

**With all of creation we worship You—every tribe,
every language, every people, every nation.**

Worship. As a church we are invited to come and worship. In this sentence we address different kinds of worship. We mean both the moment when we gather in community and when we are individually before God to sing, pray, and listen for what the Spirit is saying. These moments of worship in our congregations and meetings shall be indeed places and times where all can participate: every tribe, every language, every people, every

nation. Our worship will be inclusive, open to all who want to join in.

We also know that for the Christian life, worship is not reserved for only special holy places or times, separated from the rest of our experience. All of our life, from the rising of the sun to the place where it sets (Psalm 113:3) is meant to be worshipful. Eberhard Jüngel, a German Theologian (b. 1934), describes this worship as the music of the future that includes all creation: "It is the welcome of the new human being, no longer under the power of death. What music this must be! Not written for flutes and violins, trumpets, organ, or bass, but for the whole of creation—for every sighing creature. The entire world joins in, great and small, and even in tears, truly rejoices. Consequently, even the silent things and the hard bricks hum and buzz along. A new human being is present, mysterious and far ahead of all of us, but still present."

Every tribe, every language, every people, every nation. This phrase is inspired by similar phrases in the book of Revelation (e.g., 5:9), in which people from the whole created order come to worship the slain yet triumphant Lamb who is seated on the throne. This great crowd is a symbol of the Church which exists throughout the whole creation. Whenever Revelation emphasises this holistic created order, it uses sets of four. This may be to evoke the four directions of the compass: c.f. the four living creatures around the throne in Revelation 4:6-8.

In historical Christian thought, this evokes the "catholicity" of the church, referred to in the Nicene Creed. *Kat'holos*, in Greek, means "according to the whole." Some theological traditions reflect that unless the Church is one, holy, catholic and apostolic, it is not being the Church. This would imply that the Church is uncatholic and therefore incomplete when it only represents one

identity, such as an ethnic group, a sexual orientation, or a social class.

The Commission chose these words because they challenge us as a church. Other languages confuse us when we are used to hearing our own. Cultural practices confront us, especially when it is easy for dominant cultures to exaggerate cultural injustices. For instance, it is easy to find ourselves deeply concerned about the oppression of women in some cultural settings when those women have actually suffered more from colonialism than they ever have from traditional cultural gender roles.

In many ways, the language of *tribe, language, people, and nation* points to our disparate identities. An identity is a conceptual picture one adopts which they believe is "identical" with the Self; it is a self-image which endures in all contexts and roles in which a person may be found. Identity can be the source of conflict; identity politics can be a road to sectarianism and internal conflict when people promote the goals of their own identity-group above the common good.

Queer theologians warn us that identities are often exploited by regimes of biopower. Rather than who we truly are, they frequently serve as labels under which human beings can be collected, managed, and manipulated for the purposes of nation building and consumerism. Many identities are, in fact, founded on things toxic to human flourishing. People can find an identity in a designer clothing logo or a popular band, implying that entertainment and conspicuous consumption are at the core of who they are as a person. Others might find an identity in a form of national or cultural heritage with roots in the legacy of nationalism or racial superiority. Still others may pride themselves in being a loving husband and father, expressing this in traditional male gender roles which reinforce the oppression, submission, and passivity of women. And, sometimes women

have responded by identifying with the submissive and passive roles they have been assigned. Are we saying that these too are prone to redemption, or that God can take what is good in these identities and renew them into the image of Christ?

The boldness of this statement should not be underestimated. We believe with the book of Revelation that ALL of the created order is subject to redemption. God can speak through language barriers that divide, and can transform cultures that oppress. Fashionistas, groupies, patriarchs, supremacists, and nationalists, along with activists, worshippers, artists, and rebels will ultimately be united in the worship of the Lamb who sits upon the throne.

Within the church, the practice "putting on Christ" in Baptism provides the remedy for divisions caused by national, religious, and gender identities. In Christ these divisions are transformed (Galatians 3:27-28; Colossians 3:11). Baptism signifies our death to earthly systems of identity and our resurrection in Christ (Galatians 2:20).

We know You by many names, Triune God, beyond comprehension, revealed to us in Jesus Christ, who invites us to the feast.

We know you by many names. Throughout the scriptures, God is revealed by many images and names: *Elohim, Yahweh, El Elyon, El Shaddai*. But God is also revealed in names like Rock, Redeemer, Strength, and Fortress. In the Gospels, God is revealed in Jesus Christ, whose name Jesus (Hebrew *Yeshua*) means "Yahweh saves" or "Yahweh delivers." When we foster genuine relations with our neighbors, taking the time to truly listen to each other's stories, we hear of encounters with God under a host of other names as well. Our interactions with other religious traditions

and the stories shared by members and friends of MCC confirm that God continues to show up in unexpected places.

Triune God. At the foundation of Christian theology lies the Trinity, the paradoxical Tri-Unity of three Persons (traditionally called Father, Son, and Holy Spirit) who share all things in common in their nature and activity (e.g., co-creating, co-redeeming, co-sustaining). Yet, they are distinct from one another as revealed in their unique relationships: the First Person without origin, the Second Person begotten, and the Third Person proceeding. MCC springs from a long tradition within the Church that has encountered the Divine in Jesus Christ and the movement of the Holy Spirit. It is by Jesus' own example and the Spirit of adoption that we, too, are able to approach God as Abba, Father, Mother, and Source of us all.

Beyond comprehension. Though we recognise God's activity in our world and throughout all of creation, we confess that in our limited understanding, we cannot take in the fullness of who God is. But this doesn't stop us from exploring our relationship with God, both personally and in community, as members of the Church. We resist the easy response that suggests that in our ignorance we can say nothing at all. And, we hold our descriptions of God in tension with the reality that all that we can say falls short of a full and accurate description.

Revealed to us in Jesus Christ. MCC locates itself within the trajectory of the Christian Church. The heart of the Christian faith is the revelation of Jesus Christ, the visible image of the invisible God (Colossians 1:15). Jesus told his first disciples that to see and know him is to see and know the Creator (John 14:7-11). In seeing Jesus's earthly activities, we come to know the will and activity of God in the world.

By affirming the revelation of God through Jesus Christ, we are not suggesting that we have a corner on truth or exclusive access to God. Our congregations include many members and friends that claim multiple identities. They find spiritual value in other traditions and expressions of spirituality in addition to the Christian faith.

MCC also has a long history of inter-religious cooperation. From our very first worship service we have drawn Jewish brothers and sisters. In our first years we supported their efforts to form Metropolitan Community Temples where Jews could worship God according to the tenets of their faith, even as we continued to share spaces and cooperate on social issues. We continue similar work today with Muslims in East Asia and are presented with such opportunities in local communities throughout the world. Even as we respect and affirm our partners, our own identity remains firmly grounded in the revelation of Jesus Christ.

Who invites us to the feast. We return to the point from which we began: the table set before us by Jesus Christ. In our diversity, we find unity as friends invited to the table.

Our communion takes many forms. We remember the words recorded in scripture from the Last Supper. Here, we also look to the wedding feast recorded in Revelation 19.

MCC's tradition is that the feast be celebrated at every worship service. We do this to welcome those who have been barred from participating in Holy Communion in other churches within the Body of Christ. We also do it to keep ourselves ever in mind of the promise that Jesus Christ attached to this meal.

*MCC Sydney
is a place of inclusive and authentic worship and service
For information contact:
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Email MCC Office: (office@mccsydney.org)
Sunday Services
10am (Traditional) & 6.30pm (Contemporary)
Everyone is welcome*