

UFMCC'S FIRST QUARTER CENTURY

BY REV. KITTREDGE CHERRY

THE EARLY YEARS (1968-72)

The story of Universal Fellowship of Metropolitan Community Churches begins with one man, defrocked by his Pentecostal church for homosexuality and recovering from a suicide attempt, who dared to believe God's promise of love and justice for *all* people. UFMCC was conceived when Troy Perry, then 27, shared his faith with a friend who had just been arrested in police harassment of a gay bar. "Nobody cares!" his friend Tony Valdez lamented.

"God cares," Troy said. This is the essence of UFMCC's message, an idea so powerful that in the next quarter of a century it would spawn more than 290 churches in 17 countries. But Troy had trouble convincing Tony, who said he needed a church to help him communicate with God, and every church they knew denounced homosexuals as sinners. When Tony left, Troy knelt and prayed for a church that affirmed gay men, lesbians and all other outcasts. Then, like an electric spark in his mind, understanding burst forth: God was calling Troy Perry to start a church for all people!



Rev. Perry stands amid the ruins after fire destroyed the first church owned by MCC in January 1973.

Photo by Anthony Enton Friedkin

UFMCC was born several months later on Oct. 6, 1968, when Rev. Perry led 11 men and one woman in the first worship service of what was to become Metropolitan Community Church of Los Angeles. Foreshadowing the diversity that was to flower in the next 25 years, the congregation that morning included one person of color (a Latino), one Jew and one heterosexual couple, their backgrounds both Catholic and Protestant.

The church quickly outgrew its first meeting space, a pink duplex in Huntington Park where Rev. Perry lived with Willie Smith. They met in many locations, including the Huntington Park Women's Club and the Embassy Auditorium. At each place, as soon as the nature of their group was discovered, they were asked to leave. They moved to the Encore Theatre, where Rev. Smith worked as a projectionist, for seven months before purchasing a deserted church building at 2201 S. Union Streets in 1970, exactly two years after the first worship service. The purchase made MCC Los Angeles the world's first lesbian and gay organization to own property. MCC continued worshipping there until January 27, 1973, when the building was destroyed by what the Fire Department called a fire "of suspicious origin."

Within months of the first worship service, Rev. Perry began receiving letters and visits from people who wanted to start Metropolitan Community Churches in other cities. MCC groups from eight cities were represented at the first General Conference in 1970: Los Angeles, San Francisco, San Diego, and Costa Mesa, CA; Chicago, IL; Phoenix, AZ; Kaneone, HI; and Dallas, TX. An MCC group existed in Miami, FL, but did not send a delegate. More than 600 people attended Sunday morning worship at the conference.

UFMCC's self-understanding in relation to established churches has changed dramatically since 1968. In the early years, UFMCC leaders thought MCC would "preach itself out of business," lasting briefly before established churches revised their homophobic theology and began welcoming gay and lesbian people. At an emotional worship service at the 1972 General Conference, Rev. James Sandmire preached that "dissolution of MCC under any circumstances would be a terrible tragedy," causing leaders of UFMCC's 35 churches to reach a new consensus that the Fellowship is a permanent denomination.

The year 1973 catapulted UFMCC into a new and larger sense of itself: All in the same year, the first church building burned to the ground and a new home was found, the first General Conference was held outside Los Angeles, the bylaws were almost totally rewritten, the first delegate from England attended a General Conference, and the first churches were founded outside the United States — in Great Britain and Canada.

In its first quarter century, UFMCC saved countless lives and made an impact on hundreds of thousands more with its life-giving message. UFMCC has stood firm since its founding against religious bigots who conjure up an atmo-

sphere of hate that results in gay-bashing and a high suicide rate among lesbian and gay youth. Through UFMCC, many people have experienced healing of psychological and spiritual wounds inflicted by churches that preach homosexuality is sin. The denomination has spread across the world by meeting human need in its many forms; special programs operated through World Church Extension include an orphanage in the Dominican Republic, a primary health clinic in Nigeria, a community center in the Philippines, and a residential facility in New Zealand. The multiple facets of UFMCC's growth will be treated in the following sections.

WORSHIP, RITES AND SACRAMENTS

Many elements characteristic of UFMCC worship can be traced back to the first worship service at 1:30 p.m. Oct. 6, 1968. Aspects of the first service that have become basic to all UFMCC worship include an open communion, the combining of diverse religious traditions (for example, Rev. Perry preached in his Pentecostal style while wearing a black liturgical robe), the joyous tears of the congregation and, of course, the message preached. (The first sermon was titled "Be True to You" and included the concept that in 1989 became the General Council's mission statement: "UFMCC empowers people to bring Christian salvation, Christian community and Christian social action to the world.") The next Sunday, Rev. Perry opened the service by enthusiastically shouting the line that has since become his trademark: "If you love the Lord, would you say 'Amen!'"

Many MCCs begin worship with a rousing period of singing and clapping known as "singspiration." This tradition originated in the Seventh Day Adventist church and was brought to UFMCC by one of its former members, Rev. Willie Smith. Among the first hymns written by and for UFMCC are "I'm Not Afraid Anymore" by Michael Mank, which was adopted as the UFMCC hymn in 1974, and "Our God is Like an Eagle" by Rev. Larry Bernier, which made its General Conference debut in 1976.

Although the language used to name them has changed, UFMCC has always had two sacraments, baptism and holy communion, and six rites: ordination, membership, holy union or matrimony, funeral or memorial service, laying on of hands and blessing.

Newcomers to UFMCC worship almost always comment that communion is the most moving and unique part of the service. The usual UFMCC style of serving communion involves inviting people to receive either individually, as a couple or in a small group. After presenting the bread and cup, the communion server gently embraces the worshippers and offers a personalized prayer of blessing. The goal is to affirm relationships and the goodness of physical contact during communion. Other styles of serving communion have been developed by some UFMCC churches outside the United States. UFMCC communion had a particularly powerful effect at a service held in conjunction with the National Council of Churches (USA) meeting in San Francisco, CA in May 1983. The NCC requested a typical UFMCC service, so the organizers naturally included communion — unaware that NCC members never received communion together because they couldn't agree on whose tradition to follow.



Larry Rodriguez serves communion in UFMCC style at the 1993 March on Washington.

Photo by William To-

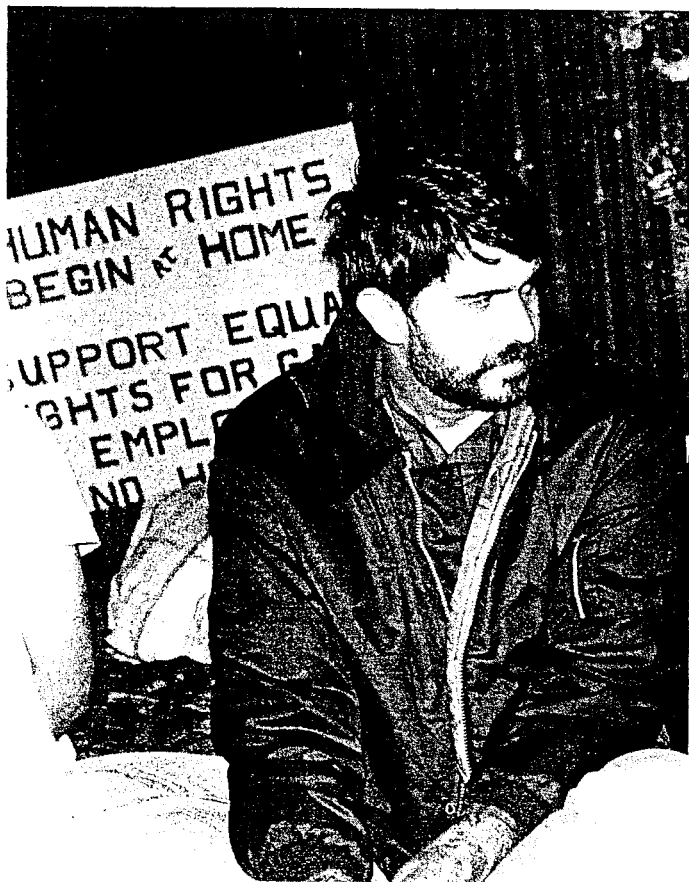
NCC Governing Board members received communion together for the first and perhaps the only time at that UFMCC service where it was consecrated by two lesbian ministers, Revs. Nancy Wilson and Freda Smith. UFMCC has always recognized all three forms of baptism (emersion, pouring and sprinkling) which may be administered to people of any age.

The first same-sex marriage was performed by Rev. Perry for two Mexican American men on Dec. 3, 1968, in Los Angeles. The term "Holy Union" was added to the bylaws at the 1971 General Conference on a motion by Rev. Arthur Green, who thought he could be jailed for performing a service of Holy Matrimony for two people of the same sex. Since then UFMCC clergy have united thousands of lesbian and gay couples in Holy Union.

CHRISTIAN SOCIAL ACTION

UFMCC has preached Christian social action since its first worship service. The commitment to social action was first put into action in April 1969, when Rev. Perry led a group of eight MCC-LA members in a peaceful demonstration in front of the Los Angeles offices of State Steamship Lines, which had fired a man for publicly declaring his homosexuality.

UFMCC has also used fasting and marches as non-violent means of achieving social justice. On June 28, 1970, right after Los Angeles' first lesbian and gay pride parade (which Rev. Perry helped organize), he sat on the corner of



Rev. Troy Perry fasted for 16 days to launch the "No on 6" campaign in 1977.

Hollywood Boulevard and Las Palmas Avenue and began a fast for meaningful dialogue about changing unjust laws that discriminate against lesbians and gay men. Two women sat with him, Carol Shepherd from Daughters of Bilitis and Kelly from Homophile Effort for Legal Protection. All three of them were arrested that day for "maliciously obstructing a sidewalk." After spending the night in jail, Rev. Perry continued his fast in front of the Los Angeles Federal Building for 10 days, when three city council members came and committed themselves to meaningful dialogue.

The fast and arrest stunned the MCC-LA congregation, prompting the board of directors to try to fire Rev. Perry. He took his case to the congregation and asked for a vote of confidence. The membership voted to support him by an overwhelming 111-10, and social action became firmly established as a foundation of UFMCC practice. Rev. Perry deliberately chose three people who had voted against him to serve with him as the first Board of Elders.

In September 1977, Rev. Perry returned to the Federal Building and fasted to raise \$100,000 to begin the fight against the Briggs initiative, which would have banned gay men and lesbians from teaching in California public schools. The measure was part of a rising tide of homophobic laws being proposed throughout the United States. Within 16 days, contributions from across the nation allowed Rev. Perry to end his fast. UFMCC organized and educated voters by working with other leaders of the lesbian and gay

community, including David Mixner, who later became advisor to President Bill Clinton. The measure, also known as Proposition 6, was overwhelmingly defeated by California voters in November 1978.

UFMCC actively participated in all three Marches on Washington for lesbian and gay rights, in 1979, 1987 and 1993. At all the marches, UFMCC sponsored worship services at the Lincoln Memorial. Another highlight of the 1993 March was "The Wedding," sponsored by UFMCC as a demonstration for lesbian and gay couples rights and a celebration of their love. More than 2,200 couples registered for the event.

A Fellowship-level Commission of Social Action was created at the first General Conference in 1970 and functioned through 1985. Its first chair was Rev. Don Hoffman, followed by Rev. Howard Williams, Rev. Beau McDaniels and Adam DeBaugh.

UFMCC opened a Field Office in Washington, DC, on Oct. 29, 1975 to initiate and lobby for social action. It was staffed jointly by Rev. Roy Birchard and Adam DeBaugh until 1977, when Rev. Birchard was replaced by Steve Endean. The 1981 General Conference upheld the elders' decision to close the Washington office.

The 1972 General Conference formed the National Prison Ministry (renamed Board of Institutional Ministry in 1975 and Office of Institutional Ministry in 1979) to provide ministry and counseling for the imprisoned and parole support for convicts being released. Its first director was Rev. Joseph Gilbert, who was succeeded by Revs. Richard Mickley and Bob Arthur until the office was closed in 1981. The California Medical Facility in Vacaville, CA, became the site of a landmark legal battle for UFMCC. In 1972 Rev. Gilbert asked permission to provide UFMCC worship, counseling and rap sessions at CMF. When the request was denied, UFMCC sued. In 1975 the Northern California District Court issued a consent decree stating that the Department of Corrections recognized UFMCC as a Christian denomination with the same right of access as any other denomination; the precedent became legally binding nationwide after two other district courts followed suit. UFMCC clergy continue to conduct prison ministries in various locations. In 1993 the California Medical Facility hired Rev. Jack Isbell as the first UFMCC clergy to serve as a full-time prison chaplain; he works primarily in the HIV/AIDS unit.

The 1990s brought new social action challenges for the lesbian and gay community. UFMCC's most powerful social action in 1992-93 has been its effort to lift the ban on lesbians and gay men in the U.S. military. In 1992 UFMCC asked the U.S. Defense Department to recognize its clergy as military chaplains, beginning with Rev. Dusty Pruitt, who was discharged from the Army after she declared her lesbianism in a news article. UFMCC is continuing to carry out plans made in March 1993 at its national strategy summit on gays and lesbians in the military and other social justice issues.

UFMCC's social action efforts circle the globe. In Argentina, Rev. Roberto Gonzalez was among a group that chained themselves to the door of the Vatican Embassy, in 1992 to protest the homophobic pronouncements of the Archbishop of Buenos Aires. In New Zealand, MCCs are

working with other lesbian and gay organizations to include sexual orientation in a national anti-discrimination act to be considered by parliament in late 1993. In France, Rev. Jean White called for a full investigation of the brutal 1990 murder of gay pastor Joseph Douce by police. These are just a few of the ways that UFMCC leaders around the world are promoting human rights. UFMCC engages in worldwide cooperative efforts for justice through participation in the International Lesbian and Gay Association.

As a result of its prophetic stand for social justice, UFMCC has been the target of hate crimes. Eighteen MCCs experienced major losses due to arson between 1971-85, and firebombings and other violent attacks continue. The most tragic was in June 1973 in New Orleans, LA, when a gay bar that MCC had formerly used for worship services was destroyed by arson, resulting in the loss of 32 lives, including that of Rev. William Larson, pastor, and 12 UFMCC mem-

FAITH AND THEOLOGY

Theological tensions over the meaning and implications of God's continuing revelation have always been an integral part of life in MCC. UFMCC's Statement of Faith is a living document that has evolved over the years while remaining true to basic Christian beliefs. The first version was drafted by Rev. John Hose based on historic creeds. In general, the language has become more contemporary, ecumenical and inclusive. Other changes in the statement of faith include the addition of trinitarian references to God (1973), elimination of the term "mass" to refer to communion (1973), and replacing "wine" with "fruit of the vine" (1981). The statement has not been altered since 1981, when major inclusive language editing was done.

One of UFMCC's earliest theological debates concerned whether communion was a symbol or transubstantiation. In 1973, UFMCC leaders agreed that it could be *both* and incorporated the Matthew 26 description of communion into the bylaws. The rites and sacraments of UFMCC have remained the same, although some of the language describing them in the bylaws has been revised.

The Commission on Faith, Fellowship and Order was formed in 1973 to study the doctrine, beliefs and ministry of UFMCC in response to disagreements over how to revise the Statement of Faith. Rev. Howard Wells was named the first FFO chair. He has been succeeded by Revs. Bill Taylor, Brenda Hunt, Jennie Boyd Bull, Janet Pierce, Clarence Crossman, and the present chair, Steve Torrence. At the 1976 General Conference, FFO presented a groundbreaking report with results of its Fellowship-wide grassroots study of six questions related to theology and ministry in UFMCC.

An eternal theological question discussed in UFMCC is: What are the legitimate limits of diversity? An effort to open UFMCC membership to non-Christians was defeated by the 1977 General Conference, thereby affirming the "Christian" nature of the Fellowship. Healthy tensions around these issues persist, as evidenced by a 1991 non-binding resolution calling for workshops "reflecting the theological and spiritual diversity" at the 1993 General Conference.

BYLAWS AND STRUCTURE

In its 25-year history, UFMCC has grown from a loose federation of local church groups governed by a Board of Elders and clearly led by MCC Los Angeles to a bona fide denomination that is increasingly large, diverse and democratic. It has always been structured hierarchically in the sense that binding decisions are made by elected representatives at various levels, and clergy status automatically grants conference voting rights.

The original Fellowship bylaws were based on the bylaws of its first congregation, MCC Los Angeles. Rev. Perry began writing the MCC-LA bylaws even before holding the first worship service, and completed them soon after. His resources were his knowledge of his former church and the bylaws of Hyde Park Congregational Church, a Los Angeles church pastored by one of his friends. The MCC-LA bylaws were modified into the original UFMCC bylaws by Revs. Perry, Richard Ploen, John Hose and Lou Loynes.



UFMCC members in Nigeria meet with Rev. Jean White.

bers. In February 1986, Rev. Virgil Scott, pastor of MCC Stockton, CA, was severely beaten and stabbed to death; his murder remains unsolved. Until 1985, UFMCC had never completed a General Conference without a bomb threat.

UFMCC's commitment to social action has long been expressed through its vision of an inclusive church. In its report to the 1972 General Conference, the Social Action Committee wrote, "The committee with a sense of urgency, calls attention to the need of Affirmative Action programs with Women, Blacks, Chicanos, Young People, Heterosexuals and the Aged. We are in danger of defining 'mainstream' in the bylaws to mean White, Male, Middle-class, Young or Middle-Aged experience."



Norberto D'Amico, National Ecumenical Officer of Argentina, protests for human rights in his country in 1992.

These four white men, all serving on the MCC-LA board of directors, became UFMCC's original four elders at the first General Conference in 1970. The bylaws were being drafted at about the time of the first moon landing, and Rev. Perry and Rev. Richard Ploen embodied the exuberance of the era by proposing to name the new denomination "Universal Fellowship" to reflect the possibility of taking the Gospel to the universe. The name and bylaws were adopted at the first General Conference.

Under the first bylaws, government consisted of the local church, the annual General Conference, and the elders, whose functions were all business-related. They were subject to a vote of confidence every four years. Each church gave 5% of its income to the elders (not UFMCC) and set aside 5% locally for missions. The 1971 General Conference amended the bylaws to divide the congregations into seven districts, appoint district coordinators, establish district conferences, and establish District Boards of Home Missions (forerunner of today's District Committees).

The bylaws were revised almost totally in 1973, providing UFMCC with the denominational structure that supported a period of diversification and intense U.S. growth. The term of office for elders was set at three years (extended to four years in 1977), the Board of Elders was expanded to its present seven members, and bicameral voting in clergy and lay houses was established. These trends continued

over the next decade, as General Conferences became biennial (1977) and the quorum was reduced from 75 to 66% (1979).

UFMCC assumed its present form in a major restructuring approved at the 1985 General Conference. The new organization shifted much authority to the districts, UFMCC's intermediate level of government. The General Council, comprised of the elders and district coordinators, was created to govern UFMCC between General Conferences. The General Council became responsible for proposing the budget, so that program planning and budget preparation were done together for the first time. This restructuring was proposed by the Commission on Government Structures and Systems, first chaired by Rev. Ken Martin in 1976-77. Other GSS chairs were Al Smithson, Rev. Don Eastman and Rev. John Gill. GSS was dissolved when its proposals were adopted. The Elders' Task Force on Structures and Systems was created in 1990 to recommend the next structural developments in UFMCC. The first ETFSS chair was Rev. David Farrell, followed by Rev. Wendy Foxworth.

INTERNATIONAL GROWTH

UFMCC's mission as a church for all people has led to the founding of MCCs all over the world and to the development of an increasingly global vision throughout the Fellowship. At the end of its first quarter century, UFMCC has churches in 17 countries.

In 1972 the National Board of Evangelism and World Mission (renamed World Church Extension in 1975) was founded with Rev. Lee Carlton as its first executive secretary. Its original mission was "the implementing of new churches, conservation of existing missions, encouragement of spiritual renewal in congregations, and establishing special ministries to prisoners and other particular groups." Others who have headed WCE include Rev. Freda Smith, and, since 1981, Rev. Jean White. In 1990, WCE hired Rev. Louis Kavar as its first full-time field director.

UFMCC welcomed its first churches from outside the United States in 1973. That year marked the founding of the first Canadian congregation, MCC Toronto, by Rev. Robert Wolfe and the first British church, MCC London. In 1974, Rev. Carlton travelled to two continents, planting the seeds that have grown into some of the oldest churches in the Fellowship. Rev. Carlton toured Australia with Rev. Perry, and shortly thereafter three missions joined UFMCC from Adelaide, Melbourne and Sydney. Rev. Carlton also visited Nigeria in 1974 on the invitation of Rev. Sylvanus Maduka. Two gay men in Nigeria had read an article condemning UFMCC in the Jehovah's Witness publication, *Awake*, then sought out Rev. Maduka, a former Methodist clergyman, and encouraged him to establish a church open to all people. Rev. Maduka, a Nigerian, became the first person from outside the United States to be licensed in 1974.

UFMCC continues to move into new countries and achieve new international "first's." The first elder from outside the United States, Rev. Jean White, was elected in 1979. The 1983 General Conference in Toronto was the first and only General Conference held outside the United States. The 1985 conference was the first with equipment to trans-



Rev. Freda Smith speaks to thousands at "The Wedding" during the 1993 March on Washington.

Photo by William Tom

late proceedings into Spanish.

By 1993, Metropolitan Community Churches owned property throughout the United States, as well as in Canada, the Dominican Republic, Mexico, New Zealand, the United Kingdom and the Philippines, where MCC is co-owner of a building that is a restaurant and community center.

Although the majority of new churches continue to be founded in the United States, the rate of international growth began to outpace growth in the United States in the mid-1980s. From 1985-91, the number of churches outside the United States nearly doubled from 30 to 55, while the U.S. growth rate for the six-year period slowed to 43%, with the number of churches rising from 149 to 214. One out of five MCC churches is now outside the United States, and 1992 marked the first year that a district conference was held in a country where English was not the first language (Hamburg, Germany). International growth is putting new systemic pressures on UFMCC, and the Elders' Task Force on Structures and Systems is developing recommendations on international structures that will nurture and serve local church bodies in the future.

GENDER EQUALITY

Equality between the sexes has been embraced as a vision and a dawning reality in UFMCC. The most visible leaders in UFMCC's early years were men, but women have always been active in the life of the Fellowship. Women participated in the first General Conference in 1970 as both deacons and attenders. The following year there were two women, Rev. Alice Naumoff of San Francisco and Rev. Ruth (Rob) Shivers of Dallas, TX, attending the General Conference as licensed ministers, a position that had much less authority than it carries in 1993. (For example, licensed ministers were not allowed to administer sacraments and rites until 1973.)

By 1973, the number of women had grown to the point where a spokeswoman emerged and was affirmed by the Fellowship as a whole. Rev. Freda Smith made a major impact on the 1973 General Conference, where 10% of those present were women. Rev. Smith led the conference in a line-

by-line revision of the bylaws by standing and making a motion every time the word "he" appeared to change it to "he and she." The process was slow, but all the changes were approved. Conference delegates were so impressed by Rev. Smith that she was nominated from the floor for the position of elder and won on the first ballot to become UFMCC's first woman elder. She also became the first ordained woman in UFMCC that year.

As an outgrowth of the conference's affirmative action position, the elders appointed Rev. Smith to organize and chair a Women's Commission to study the status of women in UFMCC, and to propose, implement and report on programs to encourage women's participation. She was succeeded by Rev. Ann Montague. The commission's report to the 1974 General Conference recommended development of guidelines for non-sexist worship and an inclusive hymnal. The commission's work resulted in a unanimous vote at the 1975 General Conference to recommend that every member church work toward the use of inclusive language. However, debate on inclusive language intensified and became the focal point for Fellowship-wide debate about relations between men and women.

Starting in 1976, concern for equality between men and women began to be addressed by the Task Force on Men and the Task Force on Women, both operating within the Commission on Christian Social Action. The Task Force on Men, chaired by Rev. Frank Murr, reported to the 1976 General Conference, "We will no longer strain and compete to live up to an impossible oppressive masculine image. We no longer need to perform sexually, socially, or in any way live up to an imposed male role, either from tradition society, or the 'gay sub-culture.'" On the recommendation of the chair of the Christian Social Action Commission, the elders disbanded all its individual task forces in 1978 and gave the overall responsibility for addressing gender equality to the commission.

The inclusive language debate climaxed at the 1981 General Conference. The conference amended and approved the report of the Task Force on Inclusive Language, chaired by Rev. Brent Hawkes. The report included basic definitions and guidelines for inclusive language and amendment of the Statement of Faith according to those guidelines.

The continuing need to address the concerns of women resulted in the creation of the Women's Secretariat by the 1989 General Conference. Rev. Coni Staff serves as its first chair. The percentage of women clergy in UFMCC has grown steadily over the years, so that 43% of UFMCC's 305 clergy were women in 1991.

Further questions about gender equality have been raised in UFMCC by transsexuality. The first General Conference action on transsexuality came in 1979, when a resolution was passed stating, "It is the sense of the UFMCC that male-to-female transsexuals are women and shall be accepted and treated in all respects as women; and that female-to-male transsexuals are men and shall be accepted and treated in all respects as men." Rev. Heather Anderson later known as Rev. Sky Anderson, is probably the first transsexual licensed by UFMCC, receiving clergy credentials in 1975. The first transsexual elder is Rev. Willem Hein, also known as Rev. Renee Hein, elected in 1991.

RACIAL EQUALITY

UFMCC has increasingly challenged itself to achieve equality among people of every race and ethnic background. Its founder and first elders were white, but people of color have been active as lay leaders in UFMCC from the beginning. More than a dozen people of color attended the first General Conference in 1971, including those of Latino, African and Asian heritage. The report of the Christian Social Action Committee to the 1973 General Conference declared, "Rather than procrastinate any further by waiting for our ethnic minority groups to search us out, it is time for us to actively seek them out to share in Christian fellowship with them."

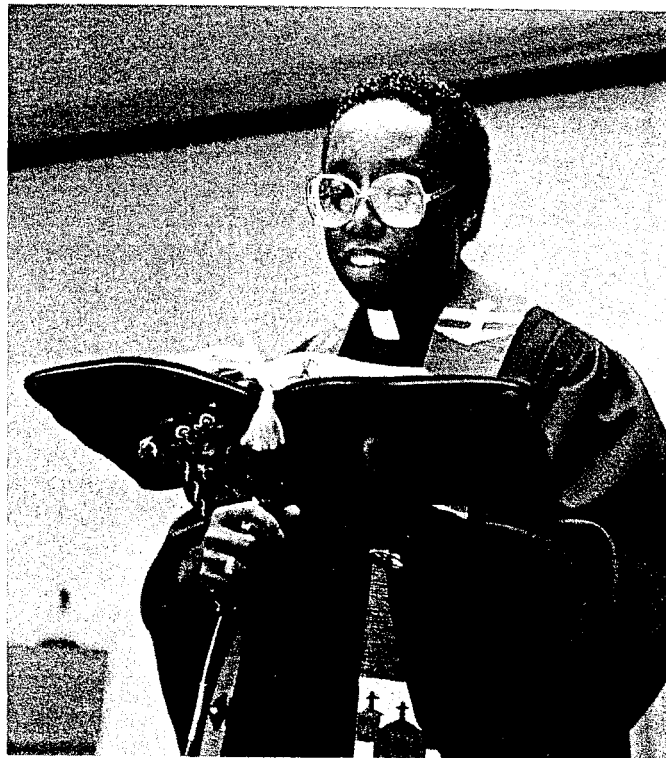
The following year UFMCC licensed its first clergy of color, Revs. Sylvanus Maduka and Jose Mojica. The first elder of color was Rev. Jeri Ann Harvey, a Native American elected in 1979. The first African American licensed was Rev. Delores Jackson in 1976, and the first Asian licensed was Rev. Hong Tan in 1981. The percentage of people of color among UFMCC clergy has grown, but remained well below 10% in 1993.

A racism workshop was offered for the first time at the 1975 General Conference. A Racism Task Force was formed within the Commission on Christian Social Action the same year. A separate Department of Race Relations was established by the 1981 General Conference. It was renamed Department of Third World Ministries, then Department of People of Color, revised to Colors. Rev. Renee McCoy was its first executive director, serving from 1979-85, followed by Rev. Yolanda Allen, Rev. Sandra Robinson, Rev. LaPaula Turner and, since 1992, Bernard Barbour.

The 1981 General Conference called for UFMCC's first Third World Gay and Lesbian Christian Conference, which was held in Washington, DC in 1982 and has continued biennially since then. More than 50 people attended the first conference, which focused on identifying needs, developing ways to articulate concerns in hope of creating alliances, celebrating God's love and building a network of "Third World" lesbians and gays. The 1992 People of Color Conference was one of the largest and most spirited ever with 131 registered. The Fund for Overcoming Racism, established in 1989, continues to grow and provide scholarships toward leadership development of people of color in UFMCC.

OTHER ASPECTS OF DIVERSITY

UFMCC has tried to serve differently abled people since its earliest years. Around 1969 MCC-LA offered an American sign language class, taught by Rev. Ploen, and a "silent choir" that signed hymns, as well as classes for the hearing impaired. Efforts to reach the differently abled were reported at General Conferences starting in the early 1970s. Equipment to aid the hearing-impaired was first used at a General Conference in 1985. The now defunct Commission on Innovative Ministries (later called Special Ministries), was responsible at various times for ministry related to aging, chemical dependency, disabilities, transsexuality, and death and dying.



Rev. Charlotte Strayhorn preaches at the 1992 People of Color Conference.
Photo by Rev. Kittredge Cherry

Over the years concern has also been expressed at the Fellowship level to minister to children and youth. The 1991 General Conference was the first to provide a full program for children, and UFMCC's first Youth Assembly is being held in conjunction with the 1993 General Conference.

UFMCC has affirmed ministry by heterosexuals, a minority group within the Fellowship, although no program unit focuses specifically on the needs of heterosexual members. In 1973, UFMCC licensed its first heterosexual clergy, Rev. June Norris.

CHRISTIAN EDUCATION

Education has always been a cornerstone of UFMCC. Heated discussion at the first General Conference in 1970 about the inability of existing seminaries to train UFMCC clergy led to the establishment of Samaritan Bible Seminary that year, with Rev. Ploen as dean. The dream was to create an educational institution dedicated to one of humankind's noblest aspirations: the liberation of an oppressed people. Samaritan's task is to generate study and reflection about the uniquely prophetic task of the UFMCC in proclaiming an inclusive Christianity while developing a theology of sexuality and liberation so that people are able to relate the Gospel to their own lives with sensitivity, clarity and power. Samaritan cherishes the human potential of each student. It strives to awaken this potential for the sake of the enrichment and productivity of the individual, the liberation of the people, and the health of the community.

Classes began in September 1970, with Revs. Ploen and Hose as the first instructors. Two large rooms in the parsonage of MCC Los Angeles were allocated as classrooms. People helped the school start by donating desks, chairs, a chalkboard and a lectern. Sixteen students attended the first year; the first student from outside California enrolled in 1971. The donation of 1,000 volumes by Claremont Theological School in 1971 formed the heart of the Samaritan library. Samaritan's first commencement was held in July 1973, with three students graduating. By that time, Samaritan's enrollment had reached 64.

Samaritan has continually re-invented itself in an effort to meet the needs of its students. It was renamed Samaritan Bible School, then Samaritan Theological Institute (1975), then Samaritan Education Center (1981), and now Samaritan College. It began offering correspondence courses in 1975, when "The Life and Teaching of Jesus" and "Old Testament Prophets" were added to the curriculum. In 1984 it introduced "Orientation to MCC Pastoring," a six-week intensive program for clergy preparation which continues to be well attended.

Samaritan operated out of MCC-LA and/or the Fellowship offices for most of its history. Its other homes included 3327 Beverly Blvd. and 5930 Comey Ave. in Los Angeles. Samaritan moved to Dallas, TX in 1993. Up until January 1976, all Samaritan teachers, trustees and administrators were volunteers; the one paid position was dean, which was only a token salary. In recent years the growth of the college has enabled it to pay a small stipend to teachers and to employ a full-time president and registrar. Those who followed Rev. Ploen as dean of Samaritan include Rev. Don Pedersen, Karen Wheeler, Rev. Jeff Pulling, Rev. Dennis "Pepper" Shields (dean of extended studies), Dr. Richard Follett (dean of resident college), Rev. Lucia Chappelle, Rev. Sherre Boothman, Rev. Sandra Robinson, and Frank Scott (principal of Samaritan in Europe). Current deans are Dr. Mona West (academic), Rev. Cliff Connors (Australian Samaritan Education), Rev. Tomas Garcia (Mexico) and Rev. Paul Whiting (Samaritan in Europe). Samaritan's first president was Revs. John Hose, followed by Jim Sandmire, Jim Dykes, Richard Vincent, Sherre Boothman and Sandra Robinson.

The Office of Ministry Resources grew out of work on adult education being done for Samaritan College by Rev. Jeffrey Pulling. Rev. Pulling directed OMR throughout its existence as a separate UFMCC program from 1987-90. OMR provided resources for local congregations and clergy, including the monthly *Salt of the Earth Resources* bulletin.

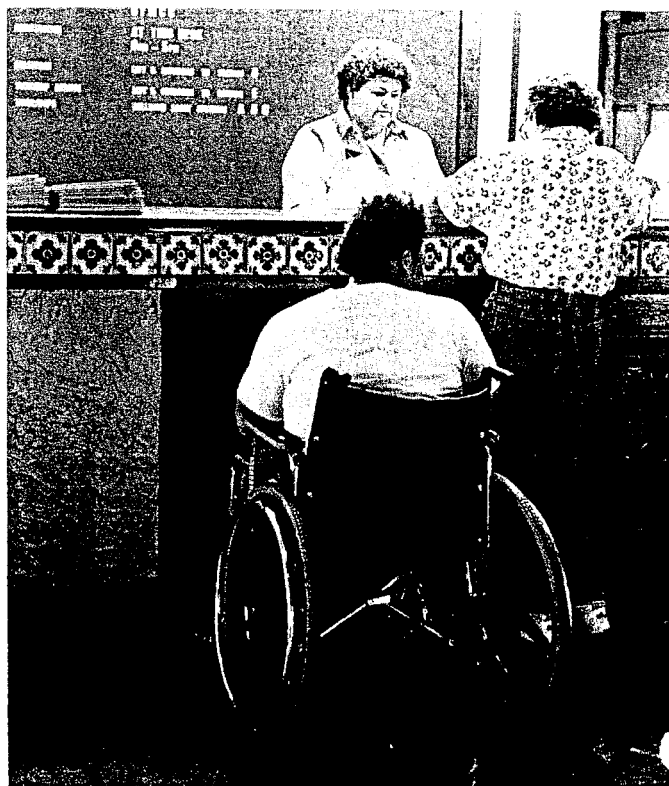
Excel International, UFMCC's lay-oriented Christian spiritual renewal program, was introduced by Rev. Richard Mickley. He was familiar with the Cursillo movement, which began in Spain in 1949, and thought it could be adapted for UFMCC. He first presented the new weekend program, named Excel for "Exercise in Christian Community Living" in Los Angeles in 1976. In 1992, Excel International achieved its goal of having an Excel weekend in every district. An Excel weekend was also conducted in Spanish in Mexico. Those who headed Excel International after Rev. Mickley included Rev. Jeff Pulling, Terry Stiles, Jane Sandmeier, Brenda Blizzard and Keith Apple, the current

executive director who served in the same capacity in 1982-84.

CLERGY AND LAY CONCERNS

UFMCC's understanding of ministry has developed since its founding to empower the laity while demanding higher standards for clergy. Rev. Perry relied on the intuitive discernment process from his Pentecostal background to guide him in ordaining the first UFMCC clergy. He and others soon recognized the need for a more formal credentialing process, and the Ministerial Credentials and Affairs Committee was created in 1971 (and renamed Clergy Credentials and Concerns Committee in 1981). Educational and experiential requirements were set and continually raised over time. The first MCAC chair was Rev. Rodger Harrison, followed by Revs. Austin Amerine, John Hose, Charles Larsen, Robert Cunningham, Robert Wolfe, Jim Dykes, Larry Uhrig, Claudia Vierra, Jim Lewey and current chair Candace Shultis.

A strong identification with clergy was expressed at the first General Conference in 1970. A layperson, Lou Loynes, was elected elder and immediately ordained as clergy. The first bylaws called for ordination of deacons, exhorters (a term from Rev. Perry's background, changed to "student clergy" in 1981), licensed ministers and ordained ministers. Only the ordained ministers could consecrate communion, except by permission in remote places. In 1973, the bylaws were revised to say that ordination was for "professional clergy" only. The possibility of UFMCC religious orders, including a cloistered order, was explored the Commission on Religious Orders from 1973-78.



Wheelchair accessibility was a priority as Nancy Fackrell of the UFMCC staff handled registration at the 1992 People of Color Conference.

Photo by Rev. Kittredge Cherry

UFMCC's policy on clergy attire, still in effect in 1993, was adopted by the 1974 General Conference at the suggestion of the Social Action Committee, which wrote, "Let not diversity become chaos. We feel that a simple, non-burdensome delineation of the orders within MCC would improve recognition in the community and ease the introduction of new members or visitors to the church... We suggest that a plain white collar or any non-collar clerical attire (such as Geneva bos) be reserved for licensed or ordained ministers. One bar on the collar (often called a 'split' or 'broken' collar) would be an Exhorter's insignia, and two bars would indicate a Deacon."

Despite the early emphasis on ranking, the first years of UFMCC allowed lay people some opportunities that were later taken away, to be reinstated only recently. The first "National Minister's Conferences" were held in 1973, open to deacons and exhorters as well as licensed and ordained ministers. Later the conference was renamed Clergy Conference, with lay people barred from attending. In 1992 when it was opened to everyone and renamed Leadership Conference.

The formation of the Committee on Lay Concerns (renamed the Commission on Laity) "to enhance the flow of communication" between laity and clergy was approved by the elders in 1977. Francis Joachim became the first chair. Others who have served as COL chair include Jean Gralley, Jackie Walker, Chuck Harvey, Gary McCroskey and current chair JoNee Shelton.

A variety of structural changes were made for lay empowerment from 1973-84, including allowing lay people to serve as district coordinator and adding one lay representative to each District Board of Home Missions. Discussion of clergy-lay issues seemed to climax in 1981, when Michael Mank was elected as the first lay elder and a bylaws revision affirmed "the universal priesthood of all believers." Until 1981, the standards for credentialing clergy were the exclusive domain of other clergy; thereafter they had to be approved by General Conference. The 1983 General Conference affirmed "the right of all UFMCC ministers, clergy and lay, to celebrate and consecrate communion with equal validity."

The Board of Pensions was established by the 1983 General Conference to provide a retirement plan for UFMCC clergy in the United States. Its first president, serving until 1991, was Rev. Arthur Green, followed by Leon Hampton.

Clergy conduct has been an ongoing concern, as reflected in disciplinary procedures outlined in the bylaws from the very beginning. In recent years, the need for more explicit guidelines has led to the drafting of a Code of Conduct, which is still being discussed and revised.

INTERNATIONAL HEADQUARTERS

The International Headquarters of UFMCC is the communications hub for the entire Fellowship. It has supported the growth of the denomination over the years, eventually moving the Fellowship toward decentralization by delegating some administrative functions to the present network of district offices. The headquarters exists only to serve local congregations, the General Conference, General Council and UFMCC programs by providing necessary administrative support as determined by approved policies and budgets.

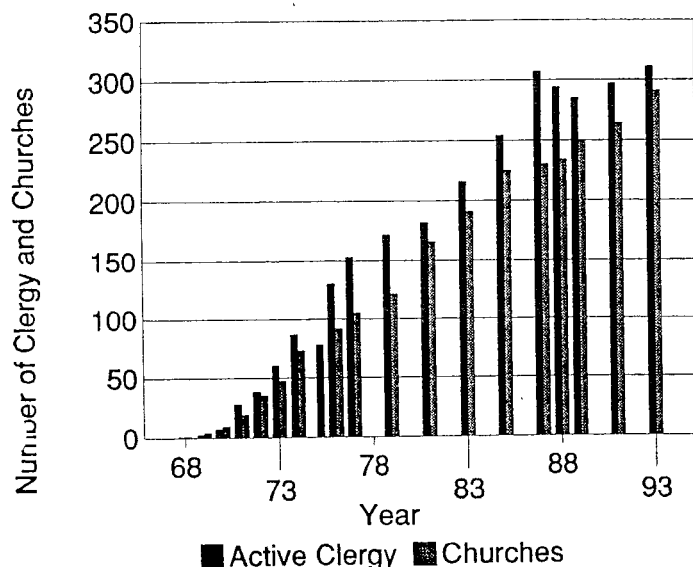
The headquarters has two components: The Executive Offices and the Administrative Offices. In the 1991-93 biennium, UFMCC had 17 full-time employees; seven serving UFMCC programs, six in the Administrative Offices and four in the Executive Offices. This represents steady growth since 1983, when there were only 10 full-time positions, one serving a program, three in the Executive Offices and six in the Administrative Offices.

Since 1974, the Executive Offices have consisted of the moderator, the executive elder and their assistant(s). The Administrative Offices, consisting of the administrative and program staff, provide services ranging from financial accounting and conference planning to production and mailing of a wide range of documents essential to the smooth functioning of the Fellowship: all UFMCC publications and all materials related to General Conference, Leadership Conference, General Council, Board of Elders, Church Services and Executive Offices, as well as most program materials. The Administrative Offices also manages local church statistics, provides administrative and staff support for conferences, manages media relations, and implements fundraising activities for World Church Extension.

From time to time the International Headquarters has shared space with various UFMCC program units, including Samaritan College and the Board of Prison Ministry. Programs that are currently based in the International Headquarters include Clergy Credentials and Concerns Committee, Department of Ecumenical Witness and Ministry and AIDS Ministry.

The position of Director of Administration was created in 1983 to oversee the Administrative Offices, which administer the UFMCC budget and coordinate UFMCC communications. In 1983, Ravi Verma left a successful career in research management to serve as UFMCC's first director of administration. The Board of Elders commended Mr. Verma for "the highly competent staff and vastly improved efficiency at UFMCC's headquarters" this year as he celebrates his 10th anniversary in the position. Aside from Rev. Perry, the headquarters staff member with the most

UFMCC CLERGY AND CHURCH GROWTH





The International Headquarters staff, as of January 1993, are pictured in front of the building where UFMCC is based. They are, from left: front row, Gene Van Horn, D.J. Bowling, Frank Zerilli, Ro Halford; second row, Nancy Fackrell, Rev. Stephen Pieters, Rev. Kittredge Cherry; third row, Troy Fernandez, Dave Martin, Ravi Verma; fourth row, Nathan Meckley, Farley Peterson; top row, Rev. Don Eastman, Rev. Troy Perry, Erik Topp.

seniority is Frank Zerilli, Rev. Perry's assistant since December 1974.

The first executive elder was Rev. Richard Vincent, followed by Revs. Jim Sandmire, Carol Cureton, Nancy Wilson and, since 1986, Don Eastman. These elders have served variously as corporate officers such as clerk or treasurer in addition to performing a wide range of executive functions.

UFMCC's International Headquarters began as an adjunct to MCC Los Angeles and evolved into a true denominational office with its own separate space, staff and identity. The International Headquarters grew in size and complexity to match the growth of the UFMCC budget, which has soared from \$3,058 in 1971 to \$1.4 million proposed for 1994.

Los Angeles has always been home for the International Headquarters, although it has occupied many different locations since it first separated from MCC-LA in 1973. At that time the headquarters, then consisting of Rev. Perry and a secretary, moved into a small office on Western Avenue near Beverly. The headquarters relocated back to MCC-LA when the church purchased property at 11th and Hill in 1974, but left in October 1975 to move into the Gay Community Services Center at 1213 N. Highland Ave. In 1976-78, the offices were located two blocks from MCC-LA on the sixth floor of a 12-story building at 318 W. Ninth St. Since 1978, the Fellowship has rented office space in a four-story building at 5300 Santa Monica Blvd. Rev. Perry has been quoted on numerous occasions as stating that it's time for UFMCC to seriously consider buying its own property for the International Headquarters.

PUBLICATIONS, MEDIA RELATIONS

Right from the beginning, UFMCC has not hesitated to declare its mission publicly. The first worship service was advertised in *The Advocate*, the Los Angeles-based gay magazine. UFMCC has told its story over the years through a variety of its own magazines and brochures, as well as the

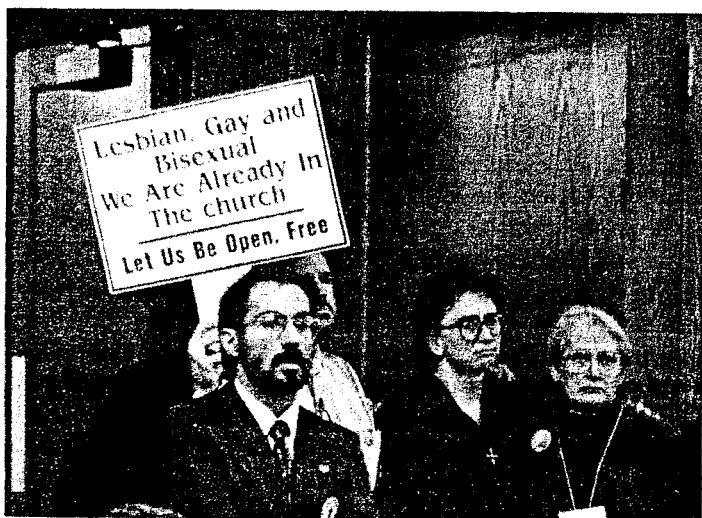
official video documentary, "God, Gays and the Gospel," which debuted at the 1985 General Conference. UFMCC publications and media relations are coordinated by staff at the International Headquarters.

Countless print and broadcast reporters have covered UFMCC throughout its first quarter century. The first article about MCC in the mainstream press was "A Church for Homosexuals" in the Dec. 8, 1969 issue of the *Los Angeles Times*. One aspect of UFMCC's public image that has remained constant is the UFMCC logo, which was designed by Al Correa of MCC Los Angeles and adopted at the 1971 General Conference. The logo features a Chi Rho cross based on the Greek spelling of Christ, and has been used ever since.

UFMCC publications trace their origin to April 1970, when MCC-LA began publishing a national monthly magazine, *In Unity*, with Robert Ennis Jr. as editor. After four issues, it became the Fellowship magazine and publication continued through 1982. From 1983-86, UFMCC published a news magazine named *Journey*. Publication of UFMCC's theological journal *The Gay Christian* began in March 1976 as a section in *Journey* and continued sporadically for several years. *Keeping in Touch* was established as a monthly newsletter around 1980, and was expanded in 1991 with the hiring of Rev. Kittredge Cherry as editor and as UFMCC's first public relations associate. Others who served as editor or co-editor of these UFMCC periodicals include Pat Rardin, Connie Vaughn, Milton Breedlove, Tom Taylor, Rev. Richard Mickley, Rev. Larry Bernier, Jay Deacon, Donna Wade, T. Earlye Scott, Steven Preston, Steve Wilkins, Paula Schoenwether, Rev. Grant Ford, and David Day.

Over the years resources have been produced by many program units of UFMCC, including various Christian Education committees. In 1976-77, the elders approved the organization of Universal Fellowship Press consisting of a Department of Publications to produce all of UFMCC written materials and a Department of Church Services to control inventory and shipping of publications. The Church Services department has continued operation to the present, but publications are no longer handled by a separate depart-

ment. In addition to *Keeping in Touch*, UFMCC currently publishes two specialized newsletters, *Alert: News from the UFMCC on AIDS Legislation, Education, Research and Treatment*, edited by Rev. Stephen Pieters, and *Global Outreach: The Quarterly Newsletter of World Church Extension*, edited by Rev. Louis Kavar. UFMCC has brochures available in English, Spanish, French, Dutch, Polish, German, Chinese and Italian.



Rev. Nancy Wilson, center, led protestors at the National Council of Churches (USA) meeting in 1992.

Photo by Rev. Kittredge Cherry

ECUMENICAL RELATIONS

Building relations with other communities of faith has been an integral part of UFMCC's mission from the start. UFMCC is often viewed as an outsider, even an intruder, in the ecumenical movement because of its emphasis on Christ's love for *all* people, regardless of sexual orientation. At the same time, UFMCC is in itself an ecumenical movement, for the Fellowship draws members and worship elements from every Christian tradition.

The General Conference voted in 1974 to apply for membership in the National Council of Churches (USA) and the World Council of Churches. Dialogue with the NCC has been the primary focus of UFMCC's ecumenical efforts throughout its history, although in recent years emphasis has shifted to the World Council of Churches.

The Department of Ecumenical Relations (later renamed Ecumenical Witness and Ministry) was created by the 1979 General Conference to work with people in four areas: ecumenical organizations, other denominations and faith groups, lesbian and gay caucuses of other churches, and lesbian and gay seminarians. Its first co-directors were Rev. Nancy Wilson and Adam DeBaugh, and one of their first actions was to write to the NCC applying for membership in September 1981. The NCC's Constituent Membership Committee voted unanimously in March 1982 that UFMCC met all the membership requirements, a ruling that the NCC Governing Board like a bombshell. In perhaps the most highly publicized meeting in its history, the NCC Governing Board voted in November 1983 to "postpone

indefinitely" a vote on UFMCC's eligibility and membership. What followed was a series of study processes, which initially ignited the passion and intellect of UFMCC leaders who rose to the challenge of theological dialogue. The NCC studies generated progressively less enthusiasm from UFMCC as the years passed and NCC members repeatedly failed to keep their promise to engage in dialogue while the NCC's own budget and staff shrank.

The painful conclusion to UFMCC's 12-year effort to establish an official relationship with the NCC came in November 1993, when the NCC General Board voted 90-81 to "take no action" on UFMCC's request for observer status, but to "consider the means by which further discussion might be pursued." Rev. Wilson led a dramatic demonstration in which MCCers and members of 15 other lesbian/gay Christian groups seized the microphones and described the church's oppression of and God's love for lesbians and gay men. "It's easier to get into heaven than the NCC!" Rev. Wilson declared. UFMCC has decided not to pursue another dialogue with NCC at this time, but will continue to have a presence at all NCC General Board meetings. Rev. Wilson has continued as Chief Ecumenical Officer to the present; others who have directed the department with her are Rev. Sandra Robinson and, since 1991, Rev. Kittredge Cherry.

Meanwhile, the Department of Ecumenical Witness and Ministry is playing a more active role in the World Council of Churches, where UFMCC was granted observer status in 1991 to attend the WCC Assembly in Canberra, Australia. At the Assembly, the UFMCC delegation organized a multinational meeting of lesbians, gay men and supporters, which resulted in a landmark petition calling for the WCC to address human rights violations based on sexual orientation. Much the department's work is now being carried out by National Ecumenical Officers and National Ecumenical Liaisons in each country with an MCC.

UFMCC was represented for the first time at the Conference of European Churches when Rev. Ian Westby, National Ecumenical Officer of the United Kingdom, attended the CEC Assembly in Prague, Czechoslovakia in 1992. Rev. Westby is also coordinating UFMCC's efforts to become a national member of Churches Together in England. Canadian National Ecumenical Officer Lydia Segal has attended various denominational meetings and the 25-member General Council of the Canadian Council of Churches, Canada's largest denomination, worshipped at MCC Toronto in 1993. Rev. Sylvanus Maduka, National Ecumenical Liaison of Nigeria, represented UFMCC at a 1992 clergy conference in Lagos with an attendance of 5,000. UFMCC is successfully building ecumenical relations in a wide variety of other countries.

AIDS MINISTRY

UFMCC has risen to the unforeseen challenges presented by the AIDS/HIV health crisis starting in the early 1980s. AIDS has made a tremendous impact on the life and ministry of UFMCC. The death of an estimated 4,500 UFMCC members from AIDS since 1982 has placed extreme demands upon the resources of UFMCC and its members.



Elders and former elders who gathered at UFMCC's 20th anniversary in 1988 were, from left, Rev. Charlie Arehart, Rev. Jean White, Rev. Jeri Ann Harvey, Rev. Nancy Wilson, Rev. John Gill, Rev. Don Eastman, Larry Rodriguez, Rev. John Hose, Rev. Jim Sandmire, Rev. Freda Smith and Rev. Troy Perry.

Increasing numbers of people affected by AIDS seek the solace and service provided by UFMCC.

In many communities, local Metropolitan Community Churches were on the forefront of ministry among people with AIDS in the early 1980s and their efforts led to the founding of countless local AIDS service organizations. The pastoral and practical care for people with AIDS provided by MCC's continues to be invaluable on a local level, especially in small towns where there are no other lesbian and gay-oriented organizations. UFMCC's local pastors and congregations across the world have provided AIDS ministry. Recent efforts include sponsoring the first city-wide AIDS Prayer Service in Manila, the Philippines (1993); and helping found "Sanctuary," a residence for people with AIDS in Bournemouth, England. Rev. Greg Smith, Australian District Coordinator, received a standing ovation when he preached on how the church should not exclude "HIV Lepers" to 5,000 people at the National Christian Youth Convention in Canberra, Australia in 1993.

The first action on AIDS by a General Conference came in 1983, when a resolution was passed stating, "We commit ourselves to be vigilant, outspoken opponents of any theology that even suggests that any disease is God's divine earthly retribution against any individual or group; and we resolve to preach, teach and proclaim God's loving, healing power and desire for our health and happiness." The conference further called the Fellowship to active pastoral care and leadership in education and political action in response to the AIDS crisis. A proposal from the elders for creating AIDS ministry at all levels of the Fellowship was passed by the 1985 General Conference. It called for leadership training, information dissemination and program sharing. The first program head for AIDS ministry was Rev. Don Eastman, with Rev. Stephen Pieters as the first field director; both continue to serve in these positions. In 1989 the General Conference directed that the AIDS Ministry field director position be funded on a full-time basis.

UFMCC's most prominent advocate for AIDS-related issues has been Rev. Pieters, whose AIDS diagnosis in 1983 made him first UFMCC clergy with AIDS. Unfortunately, he was not the last. As of May 1993, at least 23 UFMCC clergy and former clergy have died from complications due to AIDS. UFMCC AIDS ministry programs continue to embody God's love in the AIDS crisis by providing pastoral care, information and public policy advocacy. In addition, the need to incorporate other health concerns, such as breast cancer, is being discussed.

IN CONCLUSION

UFMCC, its churches and programs, stand as a testament to the longings and courage of an international lesbian and gay community that will no longer accept its own invisibility and invalidation.

Everyone who has ever been a member or friend of UFMCC has contributed to its history. Countless activities behind the scenes and in out-of-the-way places provide the foundation for UFMCC's most celebrated achievements. The prayers and passion of the people have been indispensable in building a denomination that strives to follow Christ faithfully into the 21st century. Guided by the Holy Spirit, UFMCC will be making history for years to come.

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