



*Tearing Down Walls.
Building Up Hope.*

A Ministry Update from Metropolitan Community Churches

Metropolitan Community Churches Announces Five Foundation Grants
*Grant Funds Will Combat Anti-LGBT Violence in Jamaica, Advance
Human Rights in Eastern Europe, Underwrite Ministry Scholarships,
Create HIV/AIDS and Meth Abuse Resources*

Metropolitan Community Churches and the Euroregional Center For Public Initiatives, an NGO MCC founded in Eastern Europe have received grants to advance projects central to its core mission of "Tearing Down Walls. Building Up Hope."

Founded in 1968, MCC is an international human rights movement and ministry serving as a Christian denomination in 25 countries around the world. MCC is the world's largest and oldest Christian denomination with a primary affirming ministry to lesbians, gays, bisexuals, and transgender persons.

The grants will fund priority projects, including combating religion-based, anti-LGBT violence in Jamaica, advancing LGBT human and reproductive rights in Eastern Europe, providing educational scholarships to ministry candidates called to serve small congregations and plant new MCC churches, and creating resources to address the HIV/AIDS pandemic and crystal meth abuse and addiction.

Irma Bauer-Levesque, MCC's director of development, announced the following grants:

Educational Scholarships for Church Planters and Small Church Pastors

The **E. Rhodes & Leona B. Carpenter Foundation** has awarded MCC a grant of \$70,000 (US) for 2010. This grant will establish a pilot scholarship program for qualified MCC seminarians and provide support for the work of the MCC Office for Formation and Leadership Development.

The pilot scholarship program will provide educational funding assistance to MCC seminarians called to serve small congregations and to plant new MCC churches.

According to Rev. Nancy Wilson, moderator of Metropolitan Community Churches, "MCC has long known that pastors encumbered by educational debt, face extraordinary difficulties accepting calls to small congregations or to plant new MCCs where there is a demonstrated need. We are thankful that the Carpenter Foundation recognizes the urgent need to raise up, equip and incentivize a new generation of bold leadership, unencumbered by educational debt."

This grant also provides MCC with the opportunity to raise additional funds for MCC scholarships named for MCC pioneers at partner schools as well as raise our own endowed scholarship fund. The scholarship funds will be administered through the Office for Formation and Leadership Development.

The E. Rhodes and Leona B. Carpenter Foundation provides grants for initiatives and projects in theological education in the United States.

Combating Religion-based Anti-LGBT Violence in Jamaica

The Religion and Values program of the **The Arcus Foundation** has awarded Metropolitan Community Churches a grant of \$30,000 (US) to create a multi-faceted strategic plan to end religiously-sanctioned violence against LGBT people in Jamaica and to develop and train leadership to implement the plan.

Leaders from Sunshine Cathedral MCC Jamaica and Sunshine Cathedral MCC (Fort Lauderdale, Florida) will direct the planning project, with assistance from MCC's Global Justice Team, the Office of Formation and Leadership Development, MCC's Moderator, Rev. Nancy Wilson, and other international allies.

In making the announcement, MCC's Irma Bauer-Levesque noted, "This grant will make it possible for a planning team and advisory committee to meet regularly over nine months to build an actionable plan that will include leadership training, coalition building, and resource development. The team will formulate the core components of a program to challenge religious and societal homophobia within Jamaica and promote respect for LGBT human rights and dignity. As we always do, MCC will frame LGBT rights in Jamaica as a fundamental human right and a moral and religious imperative."

MCC brings a strong background to the Jamaica anti-violence project. Rev. Robert Griffin of Sunshine Cathedral MCC and Rev. Pat Bumgardner, chair of the MCC Global Justice Team, have been

working with a strong and experienced Jamaican leadership team over the past five years.

The Arcus Foundation funds efforts to achieve social justice inclusive of sexual orientation, gender identity and race. Grants provided through its Religion & Values Program are targeted to:

- 1. change exclusionary denominational policies that prevent LGBT individuals from expressing their faith;*
- 2. build a faith-based progressive social justice movement that is inclusive of LGBT human rights;*
- 3. refute beliefs that portray gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender people as sinful and immoral.*

We are enormously grateful to the Religion and Values Program of the Arcus Foundation for supporting MCC's efforts to combat religiously sanctioned violence and homophobia in Jamaica.

Advancing Human Rights In Eastern Europe

The Euroregional Center For Public Initiatives, an NGO established in Romania and founded by Metropolitan Community Churches, has received a two-year grant of \$110,000 (US) from the **Open Society Institute** to organize and train activists to promote sexual and reproductive rights in Eastern European countries.

George Soros, founder of the Open Society Institute, has long supported efforts to increase democracy and build civil societies in countries of the former Soviet Union and Eastern bloc. The grant will provide funding to organize and convene at least one human rights conference in Eastern Europe, provide materials, train activists, and establish a network of progressive organizations and individuals to promote human, civil and reproductive rights for women and sexual minorities in Romania and Moldova. It will assist organizations in responding to the oppressive reality of religious extremists.

It was in Eastern Europe that Metropolitan Community Churches first became known as "The Human Rights Church," due to its bold stand on behalf of the human rights of women, LGBT people, and other individuals and groups marginalized and oppressed by religious extremists and governmental and political antipathy.

Creating HIV/AIDS Resources

An earlier grant to Metropolitan Community Churches from the **Rainbow Endowment** provided funds to create resources addressing the current global HIV/AIDS pandemic through MCC's Global HIV/AIDS Ministry. The outcome of that collaboration is a new resource titled *Uncommon Hope*.

The book, *Uncommon Hope*, authored by MCC's Joshua Love, provides curriculum and supporting materials for use by churches and faith communities, local and regional HIV/AIDS groups, community organizations, PWAs, and concerned individuals. The book, which will soon include a companion DVD, is now in print and available through the MCC office and Amazon.

The mission of the Rainbow Endowment is to provide funding to increase resources, expand opportunities, and promote the health, social well-being and full participation of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) individuals and their families.

Addressing The Crystal Meth Epidemic

Last December, MCC received a grant from the **Elton John AIDS Foundation** to develop "Deconstructing Meth/Deconstructing Me," a program to provide resources to churches, faith groups, community organizations and interested individuals who care for people struggling with crystal meth abuse and addiction.

Workshops and training programs based upon the "Deconstructing Meth/Deconstructing Me" materials were scheduled for presentation in public forums in ten cities across the U.S. and Canada during 2009 and 2010 and are now nearing completion.

A curriculum and companion DVD based upon the "Deconstructing Meth/Deconstructing Me" workshops is being developed to help others who are looking for ways to support individuals struggling with methamphetamine addiction, as well as their affected families and communities.

The Elton John AIDS Foundation provides funding support for community-based prevention programs, harm reduction programs, public education to reduce the stigma of HIV/AIDS, advocacy to improve AIDS-related public policy, and direct services to persons living with HIV/AIDS, especially populations with special needs.

A Brief Message in Closing From Rev. Nancy Wilson, MCC Moderator

"We are deeply thankful to each of these foundations for their partnerships with Metropolitan Community Churches, and to the incredible work of Irma Bauer-Levesque of the MCC Development Office and the supportive network of MCCers around the world that have contributed to these accomplishments. Each of these funding organizations is making it possible for MCC to create resources, train activists, and establish programs that address significant - and often life-threatening - needs. These grants make it possible for us to touch

and impact the lives of real people at their point of need, and provide the opportunity for MCC to live out its mission: "Tearing Down Walls. Building Up Hope."

Grace and Peace,

+*Nancy*

Rev. Elder Nancy Wilson
Moderator Metropolitan Community Churches

About Metropolitan Community Churches (MCC)

Metropolitan Community Churches is a 41-year old human rights movement and ministry operating as a Christian denomination in 25 countries around the world. MCC is a leading advocate for vulnerable people in places where religious orthodoxy, sexism and homophobia can result in violence and death. MCC's promise is stated in its mission "Tearing Down Walls. Building Up Hope." For more information about MCC, <http://www.mccchurch.org>.



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