

Special Anniversary Edition



Logo by Lucetta Kanetzke

Please Write to Us about MCC's 40th!

The Ad Hoc Anniversary Group needs your input about MCC's 40th anniversary! There's no way we can contact all of the MCC veterans for individual interviews, and we **do** want to hear from you, whether you're a current or former member. Choose any or all of these questions and email up to a page of comments to Emily Wixson,

ewixson@library.wisc.edu, or Mary Bowman, mvbowman@tds.net, by March 1st.

What are the most important things MCC has given you? Describe.

Describe some of the most satisfying (or improbable) accomplishments you've been involved in at MCC.

What do you see as the greatest strengths and/or challenges for MCC as it moves ahead?

Is there anything else you'd like to say about our anniversary? THANKS!

February 2009 Good Word – 40th Anniversary – Community of Hope Recollections
By Mary Bowman

[Note: This article covers recollections of some long-term Community of Hope members: Howard and Lucetta Kanetzke; Mary and Art Nack; Chuck and Jean Pfeifer, and Arthur Dodd. We hope the comments of this group inspire others

of you to provide additional thoughts and observations on your experience of MCC over the years. Many people have talked about our education programs, which will be addressed in a future article. MVB]

What Was Different About the MCC?

Arthur Dodd, who joined Community of Hope around the mid-1970's, grew up in England, in a drastically different worship environment than that of the MCC. His experience of the Church of England (Anglican Church) was formalistic: "Sunday was about ritual and not much more... Everyone sat in a pew, very quiet. The vicar would come in and conduct the service; then the congregational went out and went home."

(While there are presumably communicative and welcoming Anglican congregations now, Art visited a village church back home just five years ago. The vicar had a private path from his residence to the church; a private door to enter the church; and a private pew to sit in.)

When Art and his wife, Marie, moved to Madison in 1956, Art began to discover the real potential of church community. They joined Covenant Presbyterian, which Art describes as "the first time in my life I experienced getting to know the pastor and the church members." He enjoyed experiences as a deacon, then an elder, then moderator.

Art had met MCC people during their sojourn with Covenant in 1969-70 and had attended several MCC education programs in the new building. He and several other Covenant fami-

lies, including Harry and Donna Fisker, moved to Community of Hope in the mid-'70s. Through his immediate involvement in MCC groups, such as the adult education committee, Art got to know many Advent members, and especially enjoyed his interactions with Andrew Rogness.

"I don't get too excited about being a member of a particular denomination," Art commented. He's known of a few people in the MCC who wouldn't attend joint worship services, preferring their own denomination. "To me, that's crazy," he says. "The MCC is the overriding thing, and that has to be nurtured."

The Kanetzkes had an essentially seamless transition to the United Church of Christ, since they were both raised American Baptist, a "very socially conscious" denomination (not to be confused with Southern Baptists or German Baptists). They came to the MCC from Memorial UCC after Advent's pastor, Ray Lester, knocked on their door when Howard was off work recuperating from surgery. Howard liked Ray immensely and thought, "Now *here's* a Lutheran church that's really reaching out ecumenically."

You'll notice in contemporary news articles about the formation of the MCC that Advent's sister congregation is simply referred to as "the UCC." It didn't get named right away. Lucetta still remembers meeting with her fellow church members to name themselves. Her own suggestion was "Concorde UCC." Others suggested "Peace UCC," "Hope UCC," and "Community of Peace," while Barb Schmiechen suggested Community of Hope. Lucetta also recalls everyone, especially Kaye Exo, working hard at the process of writing the COH Statement of Purpose. "We were seeking to do the will of God as each is called to do it."

Chuck and Jean Pfeifer were attracted to the spirit of innovation and informality; the emphasis on education; and the child-friendliness of the MCC. They had two children under age 3; their son, Tim, attended Church Day Nursery there; and the opportunity to get involved in developing alternative forms of religious education excited both parents. They became active in various committees and groups. An MCC Marriage Support Group was so bonded, Jean half-

joked, that "you had to get divorced or leave the congregation to leave the couples group."

She was excited to have the chance to help write liturgies, and valued the high level of lay leadership in the MCC. The COH was mostly couples in their 30's, while Advent had more age diversity.

Early Worship Services. The not-yet-named COH first worshipped in the new MCC building the week before it opened formally. A small circle of chairs sat near the front of the uncarpeted sanctuary (now the Covenant Room). Mary Nack and Lucetta remember birds flying in and out through upper windows that had no glass yet.

Jean Pfeifer loved the massive wooden cross in the sanctuary. It was in the front right corner, with the chairs oriented toward it, and the kids used to climb and play around the base of it. She was sorry to see the Dauck farm silo removed when the Blessing Room was added. The MCC also lost some of its intimacy, Jean and Chuck feel, when the congregations no longer had to share the same sanctuary.

MCC was definitely out in the country, Mary Nack recalls. "Farmer Dauck's" house was still nearby. He would leave his door unlocked so MCC folks could come in on Sundays, take their weekly eggs from the refrigerator, and leave their money. Many members planted gardens, back when watering them presented major challenges. Mary still has copies of MCC ads developed in the mid-70's (copy attached), when it appeared that westward-expanding churches might compete for members.

It was exciting and engaging to write the youth-friendly Joyona education curriculum, Mary says, and she had previous experience in church education. However, it became hard to recruit teachers because they had to do so much homework themselves to prepare the lessons.

Everyone seems to recall having to keep their coats on for some winter services, because the furnace kept going out. "It was so frustrating," Howard says. "We kept having the heating people out to fix the furnace; they'd 'fix' it; and it would go out again." It was Andrew Rogness

who figured out in 1975 that the wind would come down what Howard called “that ski slope of a roof” and blow out the pilot light. Andrew built an extension for the chimney and went up on the roof to install it, solving that problem.

Women in the Community of Hope. During the feminist upsurge of the ‘60s and ‘70s, Lucetta saw a “strong feminine influence” in the COH. She credits Barb Schmiechen as an unsung force who kept everything working at home, so that Dan could devote extraordinary hours to his church work. Mary Nack felt a little uneasy becoming the second moderator of COH, after Kaye Exo, wondering if it might appear too feminist. But, Lucetta points out, Ginger Long followed Mary, “and then we thought maybe we should consider a man” for the post.

Remember how hard it was, during the MCC growth years of the ‘80s, to manage potlucks and food events from the little basement kitchen that now inhabits Middleton Pre-School? It turns out that it was minimal by design. Mary says that “a number” of the MCC women were “quite vocal” about *not* wanting a well-functioning church kitchen, for fear they’d be relegated to cooking, serving, and cleaning up.

What Feels Different Now? “We were young then,” says Jean Pfeifer, and very involved, attending 2 to 3 church functions a week. “There was almost a frenzy – a passion – to make it [the partnership] work,” according to Howard, because “in the 60’s [some people] considered the MCC quite radical....very strange. Now it works.”

Howard felt less urgency to make the partnership work “when the money got better.” He recalls treasurer Tom Kunes pushing to balance the budgets, with their money situation turning from “uncontrolled” toward “manageable.” The partnership had stopped repaying principal on their building loan from the UCC Board of Homeland Ministries, and on occasion even failed to pay interest. They were still committing funds to benevolence, even when the pastors’ salaries and health insurance were uncertain.

Money was a source of tension between the congregations, Howard says, partly because of their different traditions of budgeting. In the UCC (and in the American Baptist Church), money that peo-

ple gave for benevolence “couldn’t be touched.” The Lutheran tradition involved an integrated budget. “It’s a very emotional subject,” Howard observes. How individuals and churches handle money is a faith statement, and the COH approach was to approve requests, for example, from even an empty Special Fund, on the conviction that “the money will be there when needed.” [Your Scribe can remember wondering, as an Advent member in the 80’s, how the COH could keep proposing budgets that routinely pledged benevolence money the MCC didn’t have.]

If “the money will be there” seems a shaky approach to budgeting, Howard says, take a look at the Church of the Savior, a long-standing ecumenical partnership in Washington DC, where every member is expected to tithe. That church’s Ministry of Money “is the best there is,” according to Howard – “really tough, ...no pabulum. It says ... you can tell a lot about people’s faith by looking through their check registers...Dan preached a sermon on that.”

The Church of the Savior started the concept of reverse mission trips, Howard says; our own Haiti Partners developed from a Church of the Savior program.

Money and Membership (do we have enough?) are long-standing COH issues, according to Chuck Pfeifer. Some of the tensions: “How do you stay on the cutting edge and still be solvent? We have something special here and don’t want to dilute it to get more members,” but we also need members to provide time, talents, and money, in the interest of “institutional preservation.” As the years passed after 1968, it became clear that COH simply would not have the numbers of people to match Advent’s dollar contributions to the MCC, once Advent replaced its initial losses of more traditional members with a growing new membership.

Chuck’s thoughts on the nature of our ecumenical partnership should provide seed for further exchanges of ideas:

1. The MCC is “two yoked congregations” – not a Lutheran and a UCC congregation sharing a building. It’s an ecumenical community.
2. “Historically co-pastorates [where there is

no higher authority to appeal to] don't work." Someone has to have the final word. Here we have two autonomous congregations, from two different faith traditions. The COH and Advent have been forced to address this tension constantly.

3. Diversity is a major value for the UCC, but you have to balance the value of diversity with the value of unity, a general agreement that "this is who we are." It's been important for each congregation and the MCC to ask, "how do you stay open to innovation and still maintain stability?"

4. The UCC has always had a heavy emphasis on social action, on asking hard questions about people in society, but we also need to honor and nurture the inner journey. Our current MCC task force on spiritual practices explicitly recognizes that dichotomy.

5. Lutherans have a longer history, more tradition, and far more members than the United Church of Christ. These imbalances have stressed the MCC, but we find similar imbal-

ances outside this community, at the local, national, and global levels. One of the biggest lessons we all have to learn is how to get along with differences. Our commitment to staying in this MCC partnership provides a training ground for dealing with diversity in creative ways.

[Corrections to the November and December 2008 anniversary articles: Advent's second pastor in the MCC, Rev. Bob Brown, was a called pastor, not an interim. My reference to Jean Oliverson's daughter, Ellen, in the December issue, deprived her of some hard-earned years. She's in her 50's, not her 30's. In the same issue I said the congregations worshipped jointly all summer. They worshipped at the same time, 9:30, with one upstairs and one in the basement education room, except for several joint services. MVB]