



HOMOSEXUALITY AND RELIGION:  
AN ANTHROPOLOGICAL APPROACH<sup>1</sup>

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THE UNIVERSAL FELLOWSHIP  
An Anthem for Gay Christians

In universal love, our fellowship we proclaim;  
In unity profess our Liberator's Name.  
All persons, sexes, creeds in Christ's community;  
Confounding all ill will, our Lover sets us free.

To its forgotten fold, Christ's Church returns at last,  
Confirming to them how Christ's love still holds them fast.  
Firm in love's person-hood, released from sin's despair,  
Our Lord directs the Church, "Go forth, your task is there!"

We witness for Christ's truth, which sets all persons free;  
Embrace the captive mind in faith and unity;  
Embrace the captive flesh in love where fear restrained;  
Freed bodies and freed minds, our Lord for all ordained.

All glory be to God, to Jesus Christ our Lord,  
And to the Holy Spirit who has our faith restored.  
So at the first it was, is now and e'er shall be;  
One fellowship in Christ, through all eternity. Amen.

@1974 by K.B.

Metropolitan Community Church  
of  
from the Alternative Hymnal

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As a foreigner to the culture, you have been given sketchy information about the church you are now approaching. It is a "Methodist" church in a small New England city, and you are likely to find typical "middle-Americans" there, since the denomination is considered mainstream. Since the church is in an hispanic section of the city, an urban congregation, perhaps with an hispanic variation in style is expected.

Women and racial minorities are represented, but not as strongly as you initially expected. One particular man catches your eye; he is one of the few blacks present--in fact, one of the few who is not a white male. His head is completely shaved except for two hedges of hair running from a point at the forehead to one at the back of his neck, dividing his head into thirds. The hair is dyed purple. The rest of the congregation is in silent prayer led by a woman at the front, but this man is quickly translating the words into Spanish under his breath. You will discover later that he is from inner New York City, a hustler and transvestite prostitute--until it got too expensive to keep up two wardrobes.

Finding a seat (far from this man!) you discover a church program and realize that this is a special conference of congregations. You watch as the group proceeds to Communion, a rite you have heard much about. But there doesn't appear to be much uniformity: Is this a ritual at all?

After the service, a man asks you to hold a door while he pours the Communion wine into the ground outside. "That's the way it's supposed to be done," he says. "I'm sorry, it's just the Lutheran way." A man that is you explains that most of those present are "gay," they identify themselves as people physically and emotionally attracted to members of the same sex. This "applies" why most of the couples who were physically close during the service were same-sex couples, and why a number of the men were quite emotional; but it raises a variety of questions as well. Aren't all gay functions for sexual purposes? Why an entire congregation of people? Or even more curiously, why are there no gays involved? Isn't it true that gay men and lesbians are fairly separate groups? Don't gays hate women and lesbians hate men? Why are a set of parents in their sixteen-year-old daughter members? Why is the group of men who were ethnically and socio-economically diverse? Why are women so prominent? Why are there no women in larger male? What are relations with men like? (Is there is the extent and cause for this?) Where are the gay and lesbian religious groups? This group of members of The Universal Fellowship of Friends of the Church (called UFFWC or something) is one that doesn't have a gay organization is probably the case. Here, among people anomalous

Four people (both men and women) give Communion by tearing off hunks of bread from a loaf. Some receivers dip the bread in the wine and then eat it; others stand passively as the "minister?" places it in their mouths. Some kneel while receiving it, and most approach in small groups, huddling together after receiving the Elements while the "institutor" speaks softly to them. Afterwards, they all kiss each other in turn and return to their seats, some to kneel and some to sit in prayer, some to talk or sing quietly. The organist finds a tune which seems familiar to many church-goers, and the congregation is suddenly on its feet, clapping and singing loudly. Couples and small groups of men or women (or both) embrace and brush back tears at several points in the service. You were not expecting any of this since this was supposedly a typical, Puritan-flavored, New England Protestant church. In this part of the world, you have been told, people are supposedly led by ministers who are typical, if slightly more perfect members of the parish. One of the leaders of this largely white, male group is a woman: she is stepping down having been "called out of office as some people are called into office by God," and her replacement candidates are a black male and a blind, white male. The idiom she and others speak in is surprisingly evangelical. There is loud applause after a makeshift choir sings a hymn composed that afternoon.

After the service, a man asks you to hold a door while he pours the Communion wine into the ground outside. "That's the way it's supposed to be done," he says. "I'm sorry, it's just the Lutheran in me."

A man next to you explains that most of those present are "gay," they identify themselves as people physically and emotionally attracted to members of the same sex. This "explains" why most of the couples who were physically close during the service were same-sex couples, and why a number of the men were quite emotional: but it raises a variety of questions as well.

Aren't all gay functions for sexual purposes? Why an entire congregation of gays? Or even more curiously, why are there nongays involved too? Isn't it true that gay men and lesbians are fairly separate groups? Don't gays hate women and lesbians hate men? Why are a set of parents and their sixteen year old daughter members? Why is the group so much more ethnically and socio-economically diverse than most denominations? Why are women so prominent in an organization so largely male? What are relations with other churches like? What is the extent and cause for interaction between the gay and nongay religious groups?

This is a meeting of members of The Universal Fellowship of Metropolitan Community Churches (called UFMCC or "the Fellowship"). The organization is one that doesn't fit one's expectation of what a gay organization is probably like--if there is such a type. Here, among people anomalous

to the norm, is an association anomolous even to the expected deviances of the category.

The church certainly deserves study. If we are to assume that rationality underlies most human activity and that ritual is especially important in establishing order, this church will prove a good test. It is not primarily that what these people are doing is so odd, but that so much of it is almost familiar.

### The Anthropological Approach

What perspective will be most helpful in this investigation? Which discipline offers the best tools for inquiry, will reveal the coherence which is assumed to underlie this ritual activity? For several reasons, anthropology promises to illuminate this activity.

First, anthropology uses the alien point of view, assuming that there is a systematic foundation to ritual group behavior which may not be apparent from a superficial look at the group. The anthropologist certainly brings a part of his culture with him whenever he enters the field situation, but he tries to approach the activities of the natives from their world-view, not his. While examining elements of rituals which seem familiar to him, he allows that they may be quite different. This is a Methodist church building, but is this a Methodist congregation inside? Is the service an attempt to mimic a more traditional service, or are the participants aware of the differences?

The discipline assumes that people act rationally within their own world-view and tries to discover what the world-view is.

Secondly, the label and identity "homosexual" is stigmatic. Presumably--homosexuals do not operate from a "normal's" point of view. To the extent which this ritual is part of a subculture rather than the general culture, it is logical to assume that one must get inside the gay world-view to understand actions which are inexplicable from outside it.

The study of gay "subculture" is, however, problematic.<sup>2</sup> The stigma attached to homosexual activity is almost completely concealable, and so the stigma is not immediately obvious. Many gays can and do pass as straight, either for a significant part of each day or for months and years at a time. This presents three problems for the investigator. Firstly, observable "gay behavior" is only what some gays engage in some of the time. Without knowing a significant amount about passing techniques and the associated identifiers and disidentifiers, it is impossible to observe the everyday activities of gays. Subcultural interactions such as gay bar cruising and movie house meetings are important, but so are the more mundane occasions such as gays meeting each other in the business setting or interacting with family members. Secondly, passing not only interferes with investigation, it is an important

part of being gay and so requires investigation of its own. Lastly, many gays have been exposed to exhaustive studies of their "deviant" lifestyle. They have been subjected to innumerable surveys and probes from the social sciences and curious laymen. Many gays deliberately lie to the investigator in an attempt to shock or mislead him. Consider suggestion 4b from a pamphlet for Congregationalists wanting to better understand gays: "arrange a guided tour into the homosexual nightlife ghetto." 5c suggests you "hear testimonies of those saved from homosexuality through Christ" ("Educational Resources on Homosexuality" 1977). Perhaps better understanding of gay culture can best be gained by a close, participant/observation, nonmanipulative study.

To use the terminology of Erving Goffman (1956:144-147), church ritual is conducted by performers (pastors and deacons) for an audience (members), and outsiders are excluded. An anthropologist is an "informant" posing as a member of this audience but actually being a member of a larger audience--the social science community. The skillful fieldworker can be a "shill," a performer posing as an audience member (if he is seen as a member of the community by the "natives"; someone who can bring a unique, native perspective out to the scientific world) and a "spotter," a professional who is only posing as an average audience member. The anthropologist/participant/observer can

obtain information as a nonthreatening fellow community member but can also see things unobservable to natives who are fully entrenched in their group's ideology--and who have personal concerns as well (Turner 1964:28-29). (See Appendix A for my research methods.)

### Theoretical Approach

Two students of culture are useful guides: Victor W. Turner and Erving Goffman. Turner defines ritual as "prescribed formal behavior for occasions not given over to technological routine, having reference to beliefs in mystical beings or powers" (1964:20). Those rituals used to shape a subculture and to give boundaries to its subsociety are rich with symbols of both the over-arching society and the enclosed subsociety. The symbols are twisted and redefined to serve a new set of purposes. Turner's excellent analysis of ritual and ritual symbols (1964; 1968) is the foundation of the investigation here. He states:

[Religious ritual] actually creates, or re-creates, the categories through which men perceive reality--the axioms underlying the structure of society and the laws of the natural and moral orders. It is not a case here of life being an imitation of art, but of social life being an attempted imitation of models portrayed and animated by ritual (1968:7).

People held that they overcome all the forces that under other circumstances divide them from one another and set them at odds (8).

In explaining one Ndembu ritual and its dominant symbol, Turner asserts:

In brief, if we accept that a symbol's meaning contains how it is used, and behavior closely associated with it, mudyi [the symbol] represents not only certain salient principles of Ndembu social organization, but also the sorts of social conflicts that habitually arise in connection with those principles.... Yet despite...divisions of affiliation and interest, mudyi presides over the total ritual and represents an ultimate unity.... Both as a set of stated referents, and as an action system, mudyi is a unification of disparities, and even of opposites. This is the strength of religious symbols (20).

Turner speaks of a society operating on fundamentally opposed ideals, matrilineality and virilocality. It is logical to assume that the weaker are a community's bonds and the more conflicting are its ideals, the more important are its rituals in their role as definers of ideals and creators of a unified world-view. The community here is a gay Christian one, and so it is likely that the worship ritual and its symbols will reveal much of the community's structure.

Where there is a subsociety within a society there is a need to unify the two sets of ideals independently and with each other. Thus, there are three distinct ends for the rituals to achieve: separation of subsociety from parent society, unification of that subsociety (and its associated subculture), and definition of the bridges which remain between the two. Specifically, the local level Metropolitan Community Church (or MCC) blends the symbols of the Christian church with the style created by the gay world-view to establish a community. As Turner points

out, a ritual is not only a storehouse of symbols but a powerhouse as well. "...we are dealing with information that is regarded as authoritative, even as ultimately valid, axiomatic" (1968:2). In the case at hand, I will show that the validity of the Christian idiom has been borrowed and combined with the belief structure of the subculture to create a new, stronger, and synthetic whole. The general form is kept but the content is changed.

Another observation that Turner makes of group structure is that a transient and unstable group may be formed on enduring organizational principles (1968:10). This is essential to a cultural approach to the study of homosexuality, since the majority of the visible gay population is highly mobile. UFMCC is one of the major organizations which forms the structure of this fast-paced subsociety. In fact, we must go beyond Turner in analyzing UFMCC as a subcultural entity. It is constantly trying to shape a new order against the backdrop of an older one, one in which gays do not feel comfortable or welcome. Rather than replace the worship ritual found in straight churches, gays have altered the structure, changing the elements and allowing for greater flexibility in style of worship. I assert that the very instability in the mainstream, Protestant worship ritual which is created by the activities of the local MCC community is a structure in itself. For instance, the ways in which elements of Christian symbols

in worship have been altered or removed creates some security and order merely by upsetting the traditional order. Returning to Turner's work, we see cults of affliction cutting across the clan and village ties to help bind the entire Ndembu tribe (1968:16). I will show how individual MCC's act within the larger gay community the way the cult-associations act within the Ndembu tribe. The fellowship structure repeatedly brings together members of the category "homosexual" at various levels, turning the category into a group, the participants into community members.

Finally, Turner's thesis about the multivocality of symbols (1968:17) is useful here. A subculture will use symbols of the parent culture and symbols of its own in its rituals. It is likely that several of a symbol's possible meanings will be invoked in a subcultural ritual, either to reveal the underlying inconsistency in the symbol's meaning, or to bring in legitimacy for the subculture. This is the case with UFMCC. The Bible, for instance, is considered an authoritative ritual text, but the selected quotations which have been used against gays are pulled apart while other ones are re-enforced. The gay style of symbol manipulation and situational redefinition is known as "camp." The common subcultural practice of sexual name inversion is a special, verbal case of this.

Several of Erving Goffman's analytic ideas (1956; 1963) complement those of Turner in this analysis. Goffman's

"stage" metaphor is especially appropriate for studying people who feel they have two distinct personalities, one of which they must keep hidden in most of their interaction settings. A large part of the "gay identity" is based in the problems of dealing with both the psychological and social stigma attached to homosexuality. Goffman readily explains the difficulty most gays have with the coming out process (defined here as the development of the ability to personally and then interpersonally state "I am a homosexual") as a drastic change in the cognitive categories "gay" and "straight" (1963:37). The local MCC and the international Fellowship serve as beacons to the emerging gay, visible both within the subsociety and within the larger "straight" society. Thus, the church plays an important mediatory role, helping the closeted gay reconcile "gay" with "good" and "natural."

Goffman's work is also useful because it allows for the generalization to other stigmatized groups, and ultimately to everyone.

The most fortunate of normals is likely to have his half-hidden failing, and for every little failing there is a social occasion when it will loom large, creating a shameful gap between virtual and actual social identity. Therefore the occasionally precarious and the constantly precarious from a continuum, their situation in life analyzable by the same framework (1963:127).

For example, in an important sense there is only one completely unblemished male in America: a young, married, white, urban, northern, heterosexual Protestant father of college education, fully employed, of good complexion, weight, and

height, and a recent record in sports. Every American male tends to look out upon the world from this perspective, this constituting one sense in which one can speak of a common value system in America (128).

The general identity-values of a society may be fully entrenched nowhere, and yet they can cast some kind of shadow on the encounters encountered in daily living (128-129).

Goffman allows us to answer several of our initial questions. We see why gays seek each others' company for nonsexual reasons by noting Goffman's observation:

...during mixed contacts, the stigmatized individual is likely to feel that he is 'on' having to be self-conscious and calculating about the impressions he is making, to a degree and in areas of conduct which he assumes others are not (14).

The stigma vocabulary is very useful. We can see the management of actual and virtual identity (1), the problems of the Professional Gay (26-28), the use of prestige and stigma symbols and of disidentifiers (42-44), all kinds of secrets (1956:141-144) and can view many subsocial activities as team collusion (176).

Finally, Goffman sheds light on two of the major disrupting forces within a gay subsociety; the stratification of stigma and the legitimacy/definition battle which tears at the fabric of most stigmatized groups. This polar opposition is the central conflict of the gay subsociety today. Concerning stratification, Goffman notes that each individual in the stigmatized category tends to set up a double self-identification, judging himself normal with

respect to some and stigmatized with respect to others (1963:106-108). Identification with normals entrenches the repulsion felt toward the stigma, which produces at least some degree of shame. The individual suffers by not finding complete identification with either category. Furthermore, each personal stigma spectrum is different; each person considering different manifestations of the stigma important. Thus some gays will speak of "faggy" clothes or "flaming" vocal inflection. Some give separate identities to the various members of the subsociety who are all grouped together from the normal's point of view: the leatherman, the drag queen, the fairy, the "chicken hawk" (pederast), etc. Each is given a rung on the deviance ladder. Gays do not even benefit from a common (if problematic for its own reasons) caste-type designation of fellow members.

The second disrupting force is actually a pair of forces (Goffman 1963:114). Both are fundamental to the gay culture ideology and are evidenced in the management of stigma. One major force within the subsociety and within each individual is the striving for assimilation and integration into the main society. Gays are constantly asserting that they are not different from straights in any appreciable way. This can be seen throughout the subsociety: in demands for equal housing and employment rights, changes in immigration and survivor laws, etc. The other force

stresses the differences between straights and gays, whether presumed inherent or culturally created. When gays assert these differences, they speak of the supposed "gay sensitivity" or "sensibility," the latitude allowed in gay relationships, the ability to be friendly to the opposite sex, to uniquely understand the plight of other oppressed individuals, the opportunity to be both dominant and submissive in all aspects of a relationship, and so on. It is important to note that these are separate forces pervading the subculture, not ideological camps that members divide themselves between. Each is stressed by the same people, but at different times.

UFMCC exists as a compromise between the two drives, a symbol, so to speak, of both ideals. Although a variety of other gay congregations and caucuses within mainstream denominations exist, the Fellowship is the only gay church.<sup>3</sup> The Fellowship is unique in its balanced position between legitimation of gays-as-normals and separation of gays from straights. I will show how symbolic elements of both the main culture and subculture are used to reconcile the two in the ritual situation. The Fellowship is a non-denominational church open to anyone wishing to worship in it. Individual styles of worship are largely retained, and each local congregation determines exactly how the services are to be conducted. A Presbyterian-raised Pastor brings his denomination's style, a California congregation

has a particular flavor to its service. The message is clear: bring whatever you can to the Fellowship, we are strong in our diversity. (See Appendix C, "Many Gifts, One Spirit.") On the other hand, it is a ministry primarily of and for gays. By its own reckoning the Fellowship is the largest "international vehicle for public education about homosexuality" (Sandmire no date). Says one report:

It is likely for the foreseeable future that our congregation may be largely gay in composition. This is congruent with our call and our beginnings. But also congruent with our call is the fact that we exist for the world. Our very existence is a prophetic witness to the world and to the Church [of all Christians]. To seek to serve only the gay community is not only a misunderstanding of our call; it is a misunderstanding of our humanity. We must learn to disregard our limiting categories for human persons and recognize that in Christ there is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, straight nor gay.<sup>4</sup> ("The Universal Fellowship Today" no date, emphasis mine)

Clearly, the church has a mediatory role, allowing members of the subsociety to express their "gayness" in a predictable, structured way, but in so doing allow them to dwell wholly within the dominant straight society for most of the rest of their week. As a subsocial institution, as a "concretion within the homophile movement" (Humphreys 1972), the Fellowship has two very different and contradictory goals: to socialize gays into a subsociety, providing continual opportunity to interact on the subsocial level, and to teach both the straight and gay communities that gays are essentially no different from straights. As with many

subsocial institutions, the Fellowship has the job of showing the world that it has no reason to exist. It will triumph as an institution precisely when the need it fills vanishes. The possibilities for conflict are legion.

### Terms

Now to the terms "gay," "homosexual," "coming out," etc. An anthropological analysis of the cultural phenomenon of homosexuality needs terms which are as precise as possible. Folk definitions of the relevant terms simply cannot be used. "Heterosexuality" is defined as the attraction between members of the opposite sexes. "Homosexuality" is defined as the attraction between or engagement in sexual activity between members of the same sex. As one researcher points out (Dank 1979), an individual may engage in a homosexual act and think of himself as homosexual, heterosexual, or bisexual; in a heterosexual act and think of himself in any of the three ways; or not engage in sexual activity of any kind and think of himself in terms of any of the three categories. [The masculine pronoun has been used to encompass both sexes throughout this paper. The he/she or s/he constructions are too awkward for frequent use. The reader should assume "he" refers to a member of either sex unless otherwise contextually defined.] For instance, in a "trade" encounter ("trade" is gay slang for a sexual partner who is fellated to orgasm by the other partner without reciprocating in any way or showing any emotional

involvement) between a male prostitute and his customer, it seems typical that neither participant considers his actions homosexual. The latter escapes because of his lack of active involvement and his portrayal of the masculine/dominant role, and the former considers the encounter primarily financial rather than sexual in nature (Hoffman 1979:278). Criteria for inclusion in the social category "gay" or "homosexual," not the psychological or activity-defined categories must be established.

Interesting alternate definitions have been developed. Miller (1979) defines a "homosexual" as "a man who engages in sexual behavior with men and whose self-identity, but not public identity, is consistent with it" (244). A "trade" is a homosexually active man who in no way identifies with the gay community (242), and a "gay" is a man who engages in homosexual behavior, whose self-identity and, to a limited extent, public identity reflect acceptance, not denial, of the validity of his behavior (246).

Another, even more vague term is "gay-identified" (Nichols 1979). None of these terms by themselves are useful for the investigation here since they do not necessarily include women (or even suggest other, alternate terms for them) and do not get beneath our unnecessarily restrictive categorizations. No current terms encompass the range of human interaction, partly due to the social separation created by sexual preference differences. This is not to say that the distinction does not exist; being labelled

as a member of the gay community or the straight community has many and varied consequences. But to search for terms completely expressive of an individual's actions and identifications is to look for coherence where it does not exist.

Within the gay community itself, designation is very loose. Males who are or who seek to be homosexually active and who are self-identified with the subsociety are "gay." Men who would be so active if not for social pressure are also considered gay or "not out." "Coming out" is a term with several meanings, although it usually refers to the entire process by which someone accepts his homosexuality and enters the gay community, at least to some extent. One can also "come out" to family, friends, co-workers, etc. specifically or be "out" at home, school, in the City, and so on. "Lesbian" is the corresponding term for women, although both sexes fall in the "gay" category with such terms as "gay rights" and "gay liberation." "Homosexual" has become a slightly pejorative term, but one which can be used to express in-group solidarity or designation of normals who are present as "wise," as Goffman asserts (1963: 29-30). "homo" and "faggot" are similar terms; negative unless used privately between gays or gays and accepted "straights" (i.e. the wise). The term "straight" is usually reserved for people engaging strictly in heterosexual activity. It is a slightly to fairly negative term unless placed alongside "gay" ("Neither gay nor straight, for we are one in Christ") or qualified in some way ("He's straight, but

he doesn't hate gays"). The "straight world" or "straight scene" is that collection of interactions in which a heterosexual pretense is expected. Passing, the straight mask gays sometimes wear is required there, or various negative consequences will result. It should be noted that sexual activities of either kind are not considered proof of one's orientation, since these are considered "mere" cultural occurrences.

A simple but rarely expressed assumption underlies the development of the labels listed above; one which explains the conflicting meanings assigned the terms. This is the assumed fundamental nature of one's sexuality.

Members of the gay community believe one is either born straight or gay. Homosexuality is a basic part of human nature (so goes the folk belief) even though its expression may be long repressed or even never expressed.

There is not space here to go into a full analysis of subcultural linguistics, but the above should serve as evidence for the complexity of the issue. A complicating factor is the great emphasis placed on the sexual aspects of homosexuality by society at large. A cultural analysis must look at more than the range of sexual preference. There is a much greater difference in world-view between hetero- and homosexuals than their respective searches for sexual partners.

In this paper, "gays" will refer to both males and females who identify themselves as gay, lesbian, or homosexual,

either to themselves or to the public. Other terms will retain their folk definition described above, clarified by individual context.

### The Church

Alternately referred to as nondenominational and interdenomination, the church started as a gathering of twelve people, supposedly both straight and gay,<sup>5</sup> in a private home in California under the leadership of Reverend Troy Perry in 1968. Reverend Perry, a Baptist minister at fifteen, was removed from the church where he was pastor and was deserted by his wife and children when he revealed his homosexuality. When a friend was arrested in a routine gay bar raid, Perry supposedly "heard the call" (his words) to form the gay church when the friend said, "You see? There is no God. If there was, He wouldn't hate gays and let them suffer." (Adam 1979:294; UFMCC General Conference X Bulletin 1981; Yearwood and Weinberg 1979:305). The Universal Fellowship of Metropolitan Community Churches (as it would come to be known) was formed. Today there are over one hundred seventy congregations in the U.S., Canada, Australia, New Zealand, Denmark, Nigeria, South Africa and the United Kingdom, and the Fellowship has approximately twenty-seven thousand members. (The genesis of the Fellowship under one leader with twelve followers is compared only half-jokingly to the humble start of the Christian church with Christ and his twelve Disciples.

The MCC which I studied also started with twelve people and a leader, and the analogy is kept by the local members as well. Although the parallel may seem odd, it is quite consistent with the subtle emphasis placed on gay Christians as the "chosen people." (See Appendix C, "Lead On, O Cloud of Yahweh."<sup>6</sup>))

The Fellowship is organized on the Congregational model. The Board of Elders, presently composed of seven members, is the governing body between General Conferences held biennially in odd years. (Notes about UFMCC structure are chiefly from UFMCC By-Laws 1981.) The term of office is four years. All standing and temporary committees are under the authority of the Board. The General Conference itself is the body of licensed and ordained clergy, elders and lay delegates from local churches.

A study group or mission may send one official observer to the conference. A study group is the least organized of the officially recognized local church bodies. It comprises a group of individuals interested in becoming associated with the Fellowship and which has received initial approval from the District Coordinator (described below), and is guided by a worship coordinator rather than a pastor. A feasibility group is a group that has not yet received recognition from the district level Board of Home Missions.

A study group may become a mission when it can show capability of supporting "the work of a mission" by petitioning

the District Coordinator with a list of at least twenty-five people committed to sustaining the body. If this cannot be done, a study group may become a mission after two years if in an "area of limited numerical potential." A mission becomes a chartered church in a similar way; by petitioning the D.C. with a list of people who can financially support a Pastor and a program of church activities.

The standing Board of World Extension acts like the district Board described above, but beyond rather than within district boundaries. Churches are geographically grouped into home districts (Australian, Western Canadian, Mid-Atlantic, etc.) and Extension districts (Nigerian, South Africa, etc.) except for the Hispanic Americas area which is an ethnic grouping having churches across North America.

District Conferences are held one to three times annually. Voting participants are clergy members, one lay delegate per one hundred members of each chartered church and one delegate from each mission. A District Coordinator with an assistant, a lay representative and a Liaison Elder (from the Fellowship Board) constitute the district government between conferences.

The local MCC of this study became a study group in 1973 and was chartered as a church in June, 1975. It remains at the bare minimum financial level of a chartered

church, constantly plagued by monetary problems.<sup>7</sup> The MCC Pastor is Co-District Coordinator of the Northeast District, and there are currently thirteen local church bodies in the district which includes the New England states and New York.

The church hopes to become more and more inclusive, working on solving the issues of homophobia (fear or hate or both of homosexuals and their actions), sexism and racism first, and then expanding to serve all peoples.

A church which proclaims liberation for all, a church which extends its ministry to black and brown and yellow and white alike, a church in which there is a mingling of rich and poor, old and young, handsome and homely, transevestite and transsexual; a church which welcomes gays and heterosexuals to worship together and to work and serve together--such a church is, indeed, a rare church in the twentieth century.

But this kind of church is described in the pages of the New Testament. This is the kind of church revealed to the Rev. Troy D. Perry in the modern day revelation which led to the founding of the Metropolitan Community Church in Los Angeles on October 6, 1968 ("The Universal Fellowship Today" no date).

The Fellowship believes that it helps gay people in two indirect ways. It influences other denominations in their policies toward gay members and ministers, and it provides comfort and strength merely by being present in most American cities<sup>8</sup> (Sandmire no date).

#### An Ethnographic Look at an MCC

In order to see the conflicts within a local church body and to contrast it with other gay settings, we will

turn to a description of a short period of time in the life of one MCC and the gay community surrounding it, July 21 to August 1, 1981. Although this week and a half is not necessarily typical, it is not particularly extraordinary either. It happens to encompass the major aspects of the church's role in the everyday gay world and so will serve as ethnographic "sample" for the analysis.

The third and final New Member's Class is held on Tuesday at the Pastor's apartment. The series of classes is to familiarize prospective members with the workings of the Fellowship, the history of the local church, and to learn the church's (UFMCC's) doctrinal stance, particularly concerning interpretation of the Bible.

Candidates learn that ministers become MCC Pastors through a long process designed to accustom them to being seen as a professional gay. Several "burnouts" in the church's history pointed to the need for this process.<sup>9</sup> Ministers must be licensed clergy in order to be eligible for the Pastor position. Also discussed are the Rites of the church: Ordination, Attaining Membership, Holy Union and Matrimony, Funerals and Memorial Service, Laying on of Hands and Blessing. The Holy Union is a ceremony analogous to wedding and marriage, but between members of the same sex. The Pastor of this MCC prefers to bless relationships rather than to join the couple in Holy Union, because he thinks the latter doesn't fit the reality

of the gay world. Memorials are often performed to give gay friends of the deceased an opportunity to mourn the dead, since they are often denied participation in the funeral by the family. The Pastor stresses that all gays should have a will to allow one's lover to act in full power when one is sick, and to carry out funeral plans and dividing of the estate as the person would have wished, rather than have the family (which has often been estranged) step in and take over.<sup>10</sup> Later, the Pastor would suggest that gays should consider being baptized within the church as gay men and women.

The Friday evening coffeehouse sponsored by MCC, entitled "Somewhere," is more crowded than usual. The coffeehouse is held in the basement of a local community center. Two female folk singers perform their versions of popular ballads and gay anthems. Even well-known tunes like the Eagles' "Peaceful" ("I love the way / Your sparkling earrings lay / Against your skin so brown") gain a new dimensions when sung by one woman to another. The conflict between regular coffeehouse attenders and participants from the gay youth group held upstairs continues. The former group enjoys the mellow atmosphere the coffeehouse has developed over its six year history, while the latter is always looking for a place to dance and talk excitedly with gay peers. For one it is the alternative to "the bars," for the other, it is a replacement of them, since they are too young to legally enter them.

Several coffeehouse attendants appear at a local gay disco later that evening where a security guard gets the manager and shows him two black women leaving the bar. Both wonder how they got in since it is virtually exclusively a male gay domain, especially on weekend nights. I see a man I recognize from a neighborhood appliance store-- this time without his wedding ring. As expected, he does not acknowledge our acquaintance. On Saturday night at this bar, I overhear a friend of an MCC officer say to him, "Tonight's my last night in [this city], and I'm not sorry. The manager just said, 'Hey buddy: take your girlfriend [a girl accompanying him] and get the spot outta here.'"

From the late Saturday disco setting, we travel to an early Sunday morning discussion. After the morning Congregational service at the church I was confirmed in, I talked to the minister about UFMCC. He objected to the Fellowship because it is a "one-issue" organization. Admittedly, the local gay churches do good educational and community relations work, but the further splintering of the Protestant church can only weaken it, he says. "That's why the UCC tries to be so inclusive. When it split from its parent church, it formed the United Church of Christ." When it was pointed out that UCC split from an established church that it wasn't comfortable in, and that the Fellowship members have done the same, he replies, "I wouldn't

have even split from the Roman Catholic Church, but would've worked from within to change what I didn't like."

The gay church as a "one-issue" organization is not the impression one gets from the service itself. Before the Sunday evening MCC service, a candidate for membership explains how easy it was for him to come out. One day he just said to his mother, "I'm bringing home a--friend of mine. We're sleeping together." She simply replied, "I always thought you were gay." His lover, however, has had constant problems with his family. His mother calls him long distance weekly to "lay it on him."

The service itself is held in a side chapel of a Unitarian Meetinghouse since MCC has no building of its own. The chapel is festively decorated. Silver garland adorns the concrete walls, red candles burn on the alter next to a dish of variously colored glass tree ornaments. As worshippers enter, they leave brightly wrapped packages at the alter. Most are dressed in red, green and white or some combination of these and other colors.

### The Service

The heading of the bulletin "explains" the apparent Christmas decorations, and the service closely follows its outline. It begins:

THE METROPOLITAN COMMUNITY CHURCH OF  
The Seventh Sunday after Pentecost, Christmas  
in July; July 26, 1981, at 7:30 pm. Hymnsing  
will begin at 7:20 pm.

The bulletin and service proceed after four or five Christmas carols with the Announcements (see Appendix B) read by the Pastor who is dressed in a bright red shirt with the traditional clergy collar, white jeans and sneakers. There are twenty-five to thirty people at this service.

The Prelude, a short piano piece, follows the announcements and leads into the Welcome. A member of the congregation stands and typically says, "Hi, my name is \_\_\_\_\_. I've been coming to MCC for \_\_\_\_ years. I see a lot of new faces here tonight. I've made MCC my home, and I hope you'll feel comfortable here as well."

The Call to Worship is next and usually establishes the theme of the service. (See Appendix E for other examples.) It is read responsively:

Be not afraid; for behold, I bring you good news  
of a great joy which will come to all people;  
FOR UNTO US IS BORN IN THE CITY OF DAVID A SAVIOR,  
WHO IS CHRIST THE LORD.  
And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude  
of the heavenly host praising God and saying,  
'GLORY TO GOD IN THE HIGHEST, AND ON EARTH PEACE,  
AND GOOD WILL AMONG ALL PEOPLE.'

The Opening Hymn is "O Come All Ye Faithful" from a traditional "Pilgrim Hymnal."

The Prayer of Confession continues the Christmas theme:

O God of new life, we celebrate the ways You  
come to us in every day of our lives. But we  
confess a special joy in the spirit of Christmas,  
and we confess a need to renew that spirit in  
the long, hot days of summer. Help us to feel  
anew the peace and the Joy of caroling in the  
snow, of sharing by a glittering evergreen, of  
gathering together by candlelight to celebrate

the birth of Jesus Christ. Free us now to experience the hope and the love that we see in the manger, as we share with this, our family of Faith.

After a short "Silence," the Pastor or Deacon who led the confession says, "Lord, You have forgiven us our sins and accepted us into Your fold" or a similar few lines.

The Gloria follows and is sung:

GLORY BE TO THE ONE GOD, AND TO THE CHRIST, AND TO THE HOLY GHOST. AS IT WAS IN THE BEGINNING, IS NOW AND EVER SHALL BE, WORLD WITHOUT END. AMEN. AMEN.

The Old Testament Lesson, Isaiah 11:1-6 here, is read by a member of the congregation. The wording is always changed so that God is never referred to as "Lord" or "Father," "kingdom" is changed to "Domain," "men" to "people" and so on. (See Appendix D for other Scripture readings used by this MCC.) This reading prophesies the favorable judgment of God on the poor and weak and their being led by a "little child."

The New Testament Lesson, Luke 2:15-20, is a direct retelling of Christ's birth.

The Pastor's sermon is entitled "Summerstock, Cape Cod, and Christmas." He tells how his first Christmas in July was in a summerstock theater company on the Cape when he was pursuing an acting career. The group held a Christmas party in the middle of the exhausting, hot summer performance schedule. It was where he saw the first evidence of gay love, a handmade puppet in the likeness

of one actor given to him by another actor. "The look that passed between them was one of pure love." A Christmas in July service, the Pastor continues, allows members to spend time with "a family other than the one they see on 12/25." Many gays dread the Holidays since it means passing as straight for relatives or enduring strained familial relationships for "tradition's sake." He points out that the traditional celebration of Christmas is an arbitrarily picked day anyway and that Christ was probably born sometime in March. "The spirit of Christmas should be celebrated all year long. Why not a special service in July?"

The hymn, "What Child Is This?" follows the sermon. The Reception of New Members and Sharing of the Gifts are the only two parts of the service added for this service. Candidates stand in the front of the chapel and agree responsively to the "Church Covenant" which appears as an addendum to the local MCC's By-Laws.<sup>11</sup> They join hands in prayer and are then pronounced members by the pastor who kisses each in congratulations. The congregation applauds its new members. The Sharing of Gifts is performed by the Pastor who hands out the handmade presents at random. There are cookies, jams, handmade prints, cards, etc.

Next, a Deacon leads the Shared Concerns and Celebrations. He says some variation on; "This is the time when

we turn to our concerns, our celebrations. If something especially nice happened to you this week, or there is someone or something you are worried about, this is the time to bring it forward. What are the concerns and celebrations of the community?" Members of the congregation respond individually. Concerns are usually either about friends or relatives who are sick or recently deceased, or a specific group of gays (San Francisco arsemen victims, Dade County gays), or some other oppressed group (the people in Poland or Cuba). Celebrations are usually for personal good fortune (new job, birthday, coming out to parents, bringing children to the service), MCC's or the Fellowship's good fortune (new building, a particularly moving sermon, good party, dinner or picnic held by a church member), or simply the good of gays in general (passing a liberal law, NYC Gay Pride Parade).

A Deacon also leads the Prayers of the People. Members join hands in prayer as the Deacon begins by addressing God, saying that the people have prayers for concerns and celebrations. He ends with "Lord, hear our prayers" which the congregation joins in on. Individuals offer prayers, usually echoing subjects mentioned in Concerns and Celebrations. One of the prayers is virtually always for members of the community who are not at the service. People traveling receive special prayers as well. Each prayer ends with the unison "Lord, hear our prayers."

The Communion Hymn is sung while the Offering is collected by ushers, usually appointed by a Deacon. [A typical hymn is "Living In Us Now." See Appendix C.]

The Doxology follows, and this MCC used to use:

PRAISE GOD FROM WHOM ALL BLESSINGS FLOW. PRAISE  
GOD ALL CREATURES [or 'PEOPLE'] HERE BELOW.

PRAISE GOD ABOVE YE HEAVENLY HOST. PRAISE GOD  
AND CHRIST AND HOLY GHOST. AMEN.

It later turned to one officially sanctioned by the Fellowship, one even more unfamiliar to most worshippers:

PRAISE GOD THE SOURCE OF ALL WE KNOW. PRAISE  
JESUS CHRIST IN WHOM WE GROW. PRAISE TO THE HOLY  
SPIRIT, GIVE, THAT WE IN LOVE WITH GOD MAY LIVE.  
AMEN.

The Celebration of the Lord's Supper is as found in most churches. ("The Lord<sup>12</sup> is with you." "AND ALSO WITH YOU"...). A brief Prayer of Thanksgiving is spoken by the minister and is followed by the Words of Institution. ("On the night Jesus was betrayed...")

Next in the service is:

THE LORD'S PRAYER (Note suggested translation:)

Our God in heaven, holy be thy name. Your  
domain come, your will be done, on earth as  
it is in heaven. Give us this day, our daily  
bread, and forgive us our sins, as we forgive  
those who sin against us. Do not bring us  
to the test, but deliver us from evil. For  
the domain and the power and the glory are  
yours, now and forever. Amen.

Again, this is unfamiliar to some of the congregation, and some people speak a more traditional version.

Communion is preceded by the words printed in the bulletin:

At MCC, we practice an Open Communion. You are all invited to participate. You may receive Communion by the ancient rite of intinction, dipping the bread in the cup, or you may receive the elements separately. Grape juice is available instead of wine upon request. Come alone, with a friend, or with a group of friends, Come and celebrate the Lord's Supper with us!

As previously described, the worshippers approach the Pastor and Deacon giving Communion either alone, with a lover or with several friends. Distribution takes a variety of forms, some members crossing themselves when receiving the Host, some kneeling at their seat upon returning, etc. The distributors then give Communion to each other.

A Closing Prayer is offered by the Pastor, and all participants stand and join hands for the Closing Hymn. Keeping with the Christmas spirit, the closing hymn is "Joy to the World," although it is commonly "Let there Be Peace On Earth," or "They'll Know We Are Christians By Our love" [see Appendix C], two hymns familiar to most frequent worshippers at MCC. The singing is hearty, and people sway from side to side as they harmonize.

The Pastor steps into the circle for the Benediction, usually saying, "Remember as you leave this building; you have not been to church, you are the church..."<sup>13</sup> The Greeting of Peace, one-to-one exchanges of hugs, kisses and the verbal "Peace," concludes the service. It is followed by an informal Coffee Hour where people meet, talk and visit with one another over refreshments.<sup>14</sup>

### The Next Week

A party for new members, "board members and spouses" and staff is held during the next week. It happens to be the evening of the Royal Wedding. Several party-goers comment on how gorgeous Prince Andrew is. "Weren't there rumors that Charles is gay?" one asks. "He has to play the part of straight little royal husband" another replies. Returning to Prince Andrew, one of the hosts, a new member, asks "Why won't Andrew marry me?" A guest returns, "'Cause you couldn't bear princes and princesses'." "No," he says, "but I'd sure die tryin', honey!" A second guest adds that England will some day have a King "but there have always been queens!"

At the gay disco mentioned earlier, the party continues but the style of interaction changes drastically. Customers are met at the door by Auntie, a local male transvestite dressed in full wedding garb including a droopy white hat and elbow-length gloves. This usually Levi-Western style bar is decorated gaily for the wedding. Paper bells and pink and white streamers and flowers are everywhere. During the evening, the song Disco Divorce blasts across the dance floor, predicting the incredibly short marriage of Chuck and Di.

At the same bar on Saturday night, a woman is dragged out and thrown to the ground by a policeman, presumably for refusing to leave at the request of the management. It is unclear whether she is held and released or arrested.

### Tunerian Conflict

There are certainly several conflicting norms or ideals which are prime candidates for Tunerian resolution in ritual.

As Turner himself says:

The fact is that any kind of coherent, organised social life would be impossible without the assumption that certain values and norms, imperatives and prohibitions, are axiomatic in character, ultimately binding on everyone. But for many reasons, the axiomatic quality of these norms is difficult to maintain in practice, since in the endless variety of real life situations norms considered equally valid in abstraction are frequently found to be inconsistent with one another, and even mutually to conflict (1964: 43).

There are five main groups of such conflicts; 1) all the various religious upbringings that Fellowship members bring with them to the MCC service, 2) the widely differing social, ethnic, racial, and economic backgrounds of MCC members (as suggested by the Fellowship pamphlet "The Universal Fellowship Today" cited above)<sup>15</sup>, 3) the differing concerns of the lesbian and gay male members--their separate strivings for identity, 4) the differing concerns of members as Christians and as gays, and the aforementioned central conflict, 5) the drive to separate from the straight society versus the drive to be integrated into it.

What are the symbol-tools available for the resolution of these conflicting norms: that is, what can this sub-culture use for the definition/separation/reintegration process?

The body of hymns used in the service are one type of tool. They can powerfully emphasize the gay identity as that of an oppressed and chosen people triggering cultural associations rooted in Biblical forms. They also, however, have the effect of separating some of the denominational adherents from one another as follows: during the hymn sing before the service, members call out titles from the congregation's Alternative Hymnal which contains hymns altered to remove sexist language (see Appendix C). They also select tunes from the more traditional Pilgrim Hymnal, and at times the organist will play a hymn from his own memory, especially during Communion. Members who are familiar with the hymn immediately begin humming along or singing with it while others are at least subtly reminded of their differing religious backgrounds.<sup>16</sup> The emphasis on nonsexist language unites the ritual participants along the gay alliance and helps to blur the denomination boundaries. This "inclusive language" as it is called can be quite cumbersome. The change from "man" to "person," and "brothers" to "brothers and sisters" in hymns seems to be a way of saying, "We gays will go out of our way to correct for past linguistic injustice."<sup>17</sup>

The inclusive language used throughout the service serves this same purpose. The wording of the Lord's Prayer, Gloria and Doxology ("Father" or "Him" to "God," for instance) emphasizes the gay identity of the group at the

expense of the denomination boundaries. I say this here about various phases of a single ritual, but it is only an extension of what Turner says of entire rituals:

It may be said that any major ritual which stresses the importance of a single principle of social organisation only does so by blocking the expression of other important principles (1964:44).

The group retains its Christian form, however, by keeping the basic wording and service found in most churches.

Communion is another phase of the ritual of worship which has survived in form, changed in content. It has been made more personal and sensual. It is almost secular in comparison to most practices of Communion distribution, especially since the bread and wine are usually placed on the refreshment table after the service. Here again, both the gay norm of physical closeness and sensuality are kept within the Christian symbol that is Communion.

The definition of an MCC service as a Christian or gay Christian event (and not just as a "gay" event) is unstated but obvious when the interactions of gay men and lesbians in the service setting is compared with the non- interaction apparent in other gay settings, e.g. the bars.<sup>17</sup>

This resolution of the gay/lesbian conflict is undermined by the separation of the two caused by gay male speech idiom. In other words, gay men use their style of verbal intercourse to further define their unity at the expense of women. Part of this camp form of interaction involves

the use of name inversion ("Phillip" becomes "Phyllis" or "Felicia" for example) and belittling nicknames ("Honey," "sweetheart," "baby," "bitch") as well as references to women directly ("Stop that, girls" or "Act like ladies, you tramps"). This is seen less in the church setting than in others, but it is a suppressed form of communication, not an absent one. Christmas in July service which was Common identity of homosexual men and women as gays is a very weak cohesive force. Gays suffer from similar forms of oppression, but their differences still introduce strong cross currents within the subsociety. This can be seen in the conflict underlying the whole subculture; separation from the mainstream versus integration into it. At the symbolic level, one sees the MCC Pastor's suggested Baptism of members as gay men and women, a powerful subcultural rite of passage. The Holy Union ceremony as a symbol represents the other extreme, the mirroring of straight identity. Also apparent are the conflicting desires to both deal with gay issues and problems, and to push for involvement in the ecumenical community. At times, it seems, a double-entendre mixture of the two is used as a resolution. ("The Deacon's Closet is still receiving old clothes, foodstuffs, and toiletries for the distribution to [the city's] poor...") removed from the altar.

Turner asserts that the ritual is a powerhouse of validity (1968:2). But as I have hypothesized above,

has referred to several times since. The stations of

subcultural unification can be gained by questioning the authority of symbolic truths in some way: it amounts to what Goffman would call team collusion (1956:176): gays against straights. Several examples should help clarify my point. The Pastor rarely wore the Priest's collared shirt. In fact, only two instances come to mind; the one already described in the Christmas in July service which was bright red, and another time during the hot summer when he wore a traditional black one. On the latter occasion, several people commented afterward on how formal and conservative he looked, and he quickly removed his collar and shirt to reveal a black tank top emblazoned in silver glitter with "So Many Men, So Little Time." It is a fair assumption that this was a calculated play on the symbolic weight of the vestment. I can only recall seeing two other MCC Pastors wearing "the collar"; one was with a bright orange shirt and the other with a mint green one. The use of casual dress by most church-goers is another rejection of the Sunday-go-to-meetin' attire.

Several more instances of symbolic play occurred during the move to the MCC's new home. The Chapel it was moving to had last been used by an hispanic Catholic group, and transformation was performed by a team of volunteers. First, a plaster image of Christ was removed from the altar, danced around the chapel and put in a closet at the front of the building. The image of Christ in the closet has been referred to several times since. The stations of

the Cross were then removed to be replaced by a coat rack and a huge pink triangle (a recent symbol of gay pride although originally used to identify homosexuals during Hitler's purging, as Jews were identified with a yellow star of David. At Halloween, comic horror figures adorned the wall space as well). In discussing Catholicism, one member wanted to know about the Catholic view toward sexuality. Across the chapel he screamed, "Hey! Is it a cardinal sin to masturbate?" The same sort of secularization can be seen in the camping up of the Royal Wedding described earlier.

#### Goffman's Stigma Approach

The Dramaturgical approach that Goffman takes to social interaction is rich with possible explanations of activities within UFMCC. Much of what he says sheds light on the subculture in general, but I will concentrate on the Fellowship specifically.

For those individuals that maintain fairly disparate virtual and actual identities, the church serves both to define their subcultural identity and to threaten their passing identity. The church is the symbol of gay unity and identity to many gays; both those associated with UFMCC and its local church bodies, and those of the gay communities beyond it. MCC's offer a place to escape to for gay involvement, but also asks for a greater commitment of the individual to its activities. The local MCC is always

in need of resources of money, time, and materials. There are always parts of the service that members can participate in, and local resources are called for by the district and Fellowship levels. The person who tries to be intimately involved in the church's events but while passing as straight in other areas of his life is under great strain.

Also interfering with a total identification with the church is what Goffman calls stigma stratification. Each person places himself along his personal normal/stigmatized spectrum, identifying certain qualities of those around him with either the good (the normal) or the bad (the "gay"--using the general culture's meaning). MCC as a symbol of what is both gay and good must somehow bridge this disparity. For instance, there is a boat launching park into a river near the city's center. Dimly lit at night and nearby but not readily accessible, it is a common meeting place for gays.<sup>18</sup> The church (through the Pastor) begs members not to go there because the area is dangerous; several community members having been mugged or attacked there by area youths who correctly assume that few gays will report the incidents to the police. "Besides," the Pastor says, "we don't need areas like that. We have perfectly legitimate places to meet." The park is obviously thought to be a bad place, a "dirty" place in that activities occur there which straight society disapproves of--both because the acts are gay and because they are "public."

But in his role as gay community leader, the Pastor also must defend the actions of gays as gays, not as Christians. In a meeting with police, he asked, "Why isn't the force doing more important things than harrassing gays?"

To a great extent, interactions that take place within the church and bar settings contrast each other as the observations presented here would suggest, but there are also leakages from one type of setting to the other. As Read says, the style of interaction within a gay bar is sexual, whatever the intentions of the participants (1980: 93-94). Some frequent bars only to pair up (or triple up), but many only go to talk to friends in a "relaxed" setting--"relaxed" in the sense that a straight mask need not be work; in most senses, the gay bar setting is more constraining, formalized and posed than most any other gay setting. Gay institutions like MCC's serve a social not sexual function, just as many straight organizations do (Read 1980:146). Campy exchanges and pantomimes of sexual acts which characterize gay bars are found within church-sponsored gatherings but never within the worship service itself. It can be said that the gay style of interaction "leaks into" the outer regions of the Christian setting but doesn't make it all the way into the ritual itself. On the other hand, it may be as useful to characterize the sensuousness of the worship service itself as a sublimated form of gay interaction.

Direct leakage of the Christian idiom into the bar/cruising domain is also apparent and to a limited extent, but to a greater degree than expected, considering the usual American taboo against bringing the religious idiom into a social setting. Several members often discussed both practical and strategic church matters as well as religious matters. Church members often moved from the service to a gay-identified restaurant or bar. The coffee-house form (talking casually and loudly in a group around a table, largely ignoring other bar patrons) was often maintained, frequently to the discomfort of those seeking a "pure cruising" atmosphere. As an example, playing pin-ball is often a way to be observed by other patrons without interrupting the pursuer's appraisal of the pursued. The opportunity is lost if groups of people stand around and watch each other play the games, creating a more fraternal and less sexual atmosphere. I have observed church members discussing their religious backgrounds, belief or lack of belief in God, and so on in the bar setting; a quite unusual occurrence for the straight bar, as I have already noted. I believe this is due to both the limited number of subcultural settings in which to interact (especially in a small or "closeted" city) and the conscious attempt to integrate church activity into gay life: to Protestantize the church, or to extend its influence as far as possible into the lives of its members.

### In Conclusion

I have made an unstated assumption which has been used throughout this analysis which should be made explicit: comparisons between the MCC worship ritual and the main-stream Protestant forms are made continuously by MCC members, and the contrasts which exist are deliberately created and are important ones. Although the phases of the gay church ritual have been presented for comparison with non-gay Christian worship, direct and word-for-word examination has been left to the reader as inclusion of both would have significantly lengthened this paper. Changes made to the Lord's Prayer, Gloria and Doxology are fairly obvious, but one also should consider variations of a more subtle nature; the use of "Good will among all people" instead of the traditional "among men" which appears in the Call to Worship of the Christmas in July service, or the use of "family of faith" instead of the kin group in the service's Prayer of Confession. Alterations that seem to have been made to hymns are sometimes evident and sometimes questionable without knowing the original sources, but the intent can be inferred from the obvious examples, including, for instance, the use of "person-hood" in "The Universal Fellowship" created specifically for this MCC. It may be inappropriate to refer to an original work as an alteration, but I assert that a choice has been made over the more common "manhood."

But can it be said that all the variations in terminology are conscious refractions of the worship rituals which are found in the overarching society? Or if not conscious, unconscious but still deliberate? The valid use of Turnerian theory of conflict resolution depends on this question, because the subcultural ritual can only perform its function (separation from the main culture, unification of subculture, and definition of remaining relationships between the two) if the ritual participants are using the ritual elements for these purposes. This comparison does not have to be made on the conscious level--but it must be made at some level.

Indeed, there are several ways in which this comparison is made, and so our Turnerian model will hold. First, MCC participants bring with them the particularities of the congregation and denomination where they received their adolescent religious training. This is manifest in the Catholics' kneeling and crossing themselves at the aisle when entering their seat, the various wordings of the Lord's Prayer that are heard, the Lutheran's insistence on pouring the Communion wine into the earth and on washing the altar cloth himself to be sure it was rolled and not folded, and so on. They cannot help but make comparisons between MCC ritual and their "church of indoctrination" (Willenbecher 1980). These are examples of manifestations of the way in which the gay subsociety differs from others; namely that entrance into it is late in a person's development

and is distinctively personal. People who will become members of a stigmatized or oppressed subsociety and who will internalize its subculture usually do so throughout their lives, no matter how weak or strong the subgroup identification. Women are socialized as women and blacks as blacks during their entire lives. Gays are socialized as straights and learn later that a whole community of people with similar interests exists (Dank 1979; Goffman 1963; Yearwood and Weinberg 1979). Second, the straight and gay congregations interact by sharing the same social space. The concerns that the groups have in common as Christian entities such as the elderly, the poor, the city's street people, and troubled youths bring them together frequently enough to allow comparisons of ritual. Added to whatever chance overlap of concerns the social and sub-social institutions may have are the deliberate interactions the gay-identified congregation initiates to further legitimize itself in the ecumenical community. This can be seen both at the local and Fellowship level, and it leads to exchanges of sermons and prayer speaking engagements which further expose the MCC ritual participants to the "straight" ritual style.

Comparisons are also made consciously and frequently. Local folk history is full of anecdotes where the MCC ideology comes into conflict with that of a mainstream congregation, as in the following example. A gay minister who belongs

to the Fellowship but is a Pastor of a mainstream congregation retells of when this MCC was looking for a church in which to hold its services. One of the more liberal Protestant denominations turned the group down, saying that it agreed in principle with MCC but felt the use of the chapel by the largely gay organization would "disrupt the ecumenical calm" of the building. Such an idiom of ritual pollution, similar to that associated with racial prejudice, serves to emphasize the differences between MCC and other congregations. The comments of the UCC minister which I have included earlier in this paper, characterizing the Fellowship as an overly specific, one-issue organization also typify the sort of information which becomes part of this folk history.

The particular worship service described in this paper can be considered a ritual reversal of a typical, straight, Christian Christmas service. Its elements are familiar to anyone raised within our generally Christian culture but have been altered enough to label them "gay." "Christmas in July" was not a complete and total inversion of the Christian holiday, or would this be expected. Christ's birth is celebrated, gifts are given, and the participant is generally reminded of an average Christmas. The service is useful as a subcultural ritual in that it points out the arbitrariness of the overarching culture's holiday, unifies the gay community both with this special occasion

and by pointing out that the dissolves during the "real" Christmas season, but by using elements of the parent culture in the process. The three goals of a subcultural ritual mentioned earlier have been achieved.

The service is not part of the MCC structure but is rather an idea a particular Pastor brought to the church from his own experience. This is exemplary of typical MCC activity, however, because 1) it shows the interesting combination of Christian and gay forces in a ritual setting and because 2) the form of the service was introduced by a single member. The Fellowship is very much a loose federation of local gay awareness groups, each interpreting the Christian worship service according to the wishes of its local members.

We have seen how various conflicting ideals within gay subculture are clarified and reintegrated in a Turnerian sense in the Metropolitan Community Church ritual. This definition/separation/reintegration of contrary norms also takes place at the district and Fellowship levels, but analysis here has been restricted chiefly to one local MCC. Emphases in congregations across the Fellowship are likely to differ, and a more extensive investigation than the one I have undertaken here would be required to reveal the similarities and differences between them, but I propose--perhaps as a working hypothesis for such a study--that the MCC provides a ritual setting for the temporary resolution or

recurrent redefinition of the cultural and subcultural norms in a way common to all religious ritual.

An anthropological approach has been used for this investigation because the discipline forces one to look for coherency and stability in situations which seem completely chaotic. A different perspective of gay subculture is gained by viewing it from the side, as it were; probing the stigma itself rather than attempting to interpret the natives' actions as mere deviance. The ethnographic approach (with its emphasis on native point of view gained by participant observation) is particularly suited for investigation of the stigmatized subsociety.

Turner's thesis of rituals as re-creators of reality and stability and reconcilers of conflicting norms have been essential to understanding the subtle and obvious ways that MCC worship differs from mainstream worship. His analysis of symbols as powerhouses helps explain why cultural elements find their way into the subcultural situation, although often changed to express a new viewpoint. Goffman's stage metaphor and stigma theory reveal the reason why gays feel a need to associate with one another for other-than-sexual purposes. His thoughts on stigma stratification and the legitimation/definition conflict add to the list of ideals involved in Turnerian ritual resolution.

We have seen how the church at its various levels is symbolic to the various communities in which it acts.

Both the local gay church and the Fellowship represent gay unity to members of MCC's, members of the larger gay communities and still larger local straight communities, and other churches--both individual congregations and the entire denominations. Briefly, the Pastor has been shown to be the focus of many of the conflicting norms. Certainly, there is still much to explore within the Fellowship.

The interdenominational, sexual, and separation battles are only a few of the ongoing and complex concerns of this very young church.

Until more research is available, however, we can look to the present study and ones like it to shed light on: 1) gay institutions; 2) on other stigmatized subcultures, since the institutions are likely to be similar; 3) on "human interaction" to the extent that ritual is used to reconcile conflicting norms ("Ritual is a periodic restatement of the terms in which men of a particular culture must interact if there is to be any kind of a coherent social life" (Turner 1968:6).); and 4) on "human interaction" since, as Goffman asserts, everyone has a hidden failing causing disparity between virtual and actual identities.

# NOTES

1) I would like to give special thanks to Dr. Larry Taylor for his invaluable advice and assistance on this project.

Thanks also go to the other members of my Thesis Committee, Dr. Bauer and Dr. McIntosh for their ideas, questions and guidance, and to Dr. Susan Niles of Lafayette College for her support and humor.

And thanks also to the members of the Fellowship, a People with a Dream.

2) The reader's folk definition of the term "gay" is probably close enough to its meaning here to delay its exploration until a later section.

3) Dr. Richard Follett, Executive Director of UFMCC's Samaritan Theological Institute, pointed out that UFMCC is "a Christian Church with a primary outreach to the gay and lesbian community" (personal correspondence October 19, 1981). I have used the term "gay church" here because virtually all references to such organizations use the term. It is appropriate from an anthropological point of view and need only be offensive if not accompanied by a full explanation of what the organization does. UFMCC has many straight members and deals with problems outside the gay community as well as inside it. It is in this sense that it is a Christian church (helping people solve problems within and beyond the denomination) and is gay (since most members are gay and primary concern is with the gay community). Dr. Follett is correct that the shorthand term used here conflicts with the goals of UFMCC, but not to any greater extent than the term "Lutheran" is a misrepresentation of that denomination.

4) This is a variation of Galatians 3:27-28.

5) As I have said elsewhere in this paper, the church is comprised primarily but not exclusively of gays and deals with issues other than those of unique interest to the gay subsociety. There are many nongays in the subsociety and nongay concerns in the gay subculture, and so it is not surprising to find straights at the inception of the gay church. Also, for pragmatic reasons, the inclusion of straights in the church helps legitimize the organization.

6) These characterizations of gays or gay Christians as God's chosen people who suffer in an inhospitable world point to the parallels with the Cults of Affliction found by Turner.

7) It seems that many local MCC bodies are faltering both in attendance and in finances at present, at least in the Northeast where my investigation was concentrated and where a large portion of the gay population is publicly closeted. A more thorough study of the Fellowship as a whole would be needed to prove or disprove this assertion.

8) Again, the "beacon" analogy is fitting.

9) A burnout is an overidentification of the Pastor with the gay community. The role of sole representative of the local church (and so of the respectable gay community) involves juggling of the most conflicting ideals found in the subculture. The Pastor must represent the legitimacy of the congregation and the Fellowship and must exemplify the gay lifestyle to both the local straight community and the local gay community. Goffman points out that the professional representative of any stigmatized group walks a thin line of nonexcessive normalcy, nonexcessive deviance. The more he can pass, the more he is acceptable to the normal community, but the less representative of the subgroup (1963:26-28). He must be everything good about gayness to the straight world, everything Christian to the gay world, and must somehow maintain these images simultaneously. It is no wonder that "burnouts" occasionally occur.

10) Here we see the extension of the church into all areas of the gay's life; much more than a style of worship is being developed by the gay church. Entire social forms are being created; ones which parallel and replace straight forms. There is now a style of gay marriage, gay funeral, gay will, etc. The church is advocating replication of straight institutions, but total segregation from them.

11) Note how closely the Reception mimics elements of typical, Protestant Baptism and Confirmation rituals. As expected, the membership process is less structured than in mainstream Protestant churches. For instance, a person can become a "Friend of MCC," participating fully in most activities but not making a doctrinal commitment to the Church Covenant (see Appendix G). Jews are often affiliated with the church in this way. The Protestant form of membership has been preserved but in an altered style which fits the latitude found in the other church elements.

12) The masculine/dominant term "Lord" can be found in several phases of the MCC ritual. My two theories for explaining its sporadic presence are 1) that its inclusion is an oversight and would be removed if pointed out--a fairly weak argument, given the great attention paid to the rest of the service--or 2) that the term has been replaced with "God," "Yahweh," "Mother Hen," etc. when its

meaning is seen as important. Scripture readings have clearly been used against gays in the past; so phrasing used in MCC ritual is important, the simple response "Lord, hear our prayers" in the Prayers of the People may not seem important.

13) This is representative of the conception of this local MCC by its members, a "church without walls" as the idiom goes. Many MCC's are forced to move from one facility to another as rent forces them out or when the group is renting space from a mainstream church which elects a less liberal board of directors. This particular MCC has been in almost a half dozen locations in as many years, and all church activities have never taken place in a single place. This fact has become part of the oppressed-chosen-wandering metaphor that I have noted elsewhere. (See, in particular, the hymns "The Universal Fellowship" at the opening of this paper and "Lead On, O Cloud of Yahweh" in Appendix C.)

14) The coffee hour setting, a sort of compromise between the Christian ritual stage and the gay social stage, will be discussed later.

15) Certainly many groups have this set of conflicts, and stigmatized groups will see them more obviously than other groups in proportion to the power the stigma has in creating a community of like-stigmatized. In other words, a shared stigma will bring people together who would not normally be associated with one another and so would not have as many differences to overcome in the group setting. Homosexuality (the stigma) is quite an extreme case of this, for although it is true that the category "homosexual" is an extremely broad one including people from all parts of the parent society (Tripp 1975:119), the individuals as members of the subsociety must deal with their differences in the social world. Here is Turner's idea of social life imitating but never quite living up to ideals (1968:7) quoted above.

16) A good example of this conflict occurred during the Winter Northeast District Conference, description of which introduced this paper. A Resolution was presented (see Appendix F) suggesting worship services be held more frequently during the conference. A member of another congregation pointed out that it is against his religious beliefs to have more than one Communion service per day and that the advocates of the Resolution were trying to impose their religious beliefs on others. The Resolution was unanimously defeated.

17) The gay bar setting, like most gay settings, is clearly a male domain. Warren asserts that the women who frequent it fill these roles: the decorative, the surrogate and the functional (1979:227). That is, women add either decoration (as a sort of walking jewelry tree or living mannequin of feminine clothing), opportunity for gay men to express their feminine side (by commenting on the women's dress or borrowing their jewelry), or legitimacy (as when a gay needs to appear as part of a straight couple for family functions, business dinners, etc.). The point is, women are functioning (no matter how successfully) within a male gay realm (236-237) and are treated as "women" and not "people." Contrast this to the nearly equal footing gay men and women have in the church environment. They are "brothers and sisters in Christ" as the idiom goes.

18) An attempted analysis of why gays seek anonymous sexual encounters would be both extensive and irrelevant here. It is sufficient to note that such meetings do take place, and are generally acknowledged as occurring.

2) attending the MCC sponsored Rap Group during the summer of 1980

3) attending full membership status in an MCC in the summer of 1981

4) attending approximately two dozen weekly services and a number of school

5) attending a monthly business meeting of the MCC

6) attending the weekend Long Northeast District Conference

7) hearing delegates' report of the Fellowship-wide General Conference

8) informal questioning of members

9) formal interview of this MCC's Pastor

10) analyzing several issues of the Fellowship's publications: The Gay Christian and In Unity as well as several of the Gay Newsletter

## RESEARCH METHODS

Originally, over four dozen organizations were contacted by letter; the names either coming from the national publication Gayellow Pages or from organizations contacted from that publication. I talked with several researchers of homosexuality including members of the Anthropological Research Group on Homosexuality (ARGOH) of the AAA.

Concentrating further research on the Fellowship, the Northeast District and the local MCC consisted of:

- 1) corresponding to Fellowship Elders and officers
- 2) attending the MCC sponsored Rap Group during the summer of 1980
- 3) attaining full membership status in an MCC in the summer of 1981
- 4) attending approximately two dozen weekly services and as many Coffeehouses
- 5) attending a monthly business meeting of the MCC
- 6) attending the weekend long Northeast District Conference
- 7) hearing a delegates' report of the Fellowship-wide General Conference X
- 8) informal questioning of members
- 9) a more structured interview of this MCC's Pastor
- 10) studying several issues of the Fellowship's publications: The Gay Christian and In Unity as well as several of the local MCC's newsletters

11) participation in potluck dinners, parties and other church-sponsored activities

12) informal observation in the area's several bars and gay hangouts.

You are invited to share with us coffee, conversation, and fellowship after the service at our social hour!

THE SOMEWHERE COFFEEHOUSE continues to meet this Friday evening at 8 pm, at the [community center name and address]. The coffeehouse is in the basement, through the Cellar Door.

Tonight, we are receiving new members into our church, following a series of New Membership Classes. Please help welcome them, both during the service, and afterwards at the Social Hour. This Wednesday, there will be a New Members Party at the home of two of the new members, [their names]. Board members, staff, and the new members are invited to get directions from either of our hosts following the service.

Tonight we are also taking a special offering for World Church Relations. This is a UFMCC project to see that ministry to the Lesbian and [Gay] community happens all over the world. We currently have churches in such places as Australia, New Zealand, Canada, the U.K., and Nigeria. MCCs are beginning to appear in most of Western Europe as well as Poland. This is the one time of the year when we are asked to give to this branch of MCC's ministry, and the offering will be presented at the Thursday evening worship service at General Conference in Houston.

YOUR [youth] group, continues this Friday evening at 7 pm at the [community center].

Next week, [name] will be on his way to Houston for the UFMCC General Conference, as will our regular pianist, [name], who is MCC's delegate to the Conference. There will be a special Lay Service, organized by Deacon [name] the following week, and [name] will be [name] lay clerk from Houston, and Rev. [name] will preach, with Deacon [name] leading the liturgy.

We are still trying to pay off our debts to the Unitarian Ministry before we move into [the new chapel]. We're not really in fear there, but we still have a way to go. If you are interested in giving to this designated fund, see [name] after the service.

[descriptions of officers and the MCC's local ecumenical affiliations, not read at the service.]

## TYPICAL BULLETIN ANNOUNCEMENTS

[from July 26, 1981]

+ + + + + ANNOUNCEMENTS + + + + +

You are invited to share with us coffee, conversation, and fellowship after the service at our social hour!

The SOMEWHERE COFFEEHOUSE continues to meet this Friday evening at 8 pm, at the [community center name and address]. The coffeehouse is in the basement, through the Cellar Door.

Tonight, we are receiving new members into our church, following a series of New Membership Classes. Please help welcome them, both during the service, and afterwards at the Social Hour. This Wednesday, there will be a New Members party at the home of two of the new members, [their names]. Board members, staff, and the new members are invited to get directions from either of our hosts following the service.

Tonight we are also taking a special offering for World Church Extension. This is a UFMCC project to see that ministry to the Lesbian and [G]ay community happens all over the world. We currently have churches in such places as Australia, New Zealand, Canada, the U.K., and Nigeria. MCCs are beginning to appear in most of Western Europe as well as in Poland. This is the one time of the year when we are asked to give to this branch of MCC's ministry, and the offering will be presented at the Thursday evening worship service at General Conference in Houston.

YOUR TURF, the gay youth group, continues this Friday evening at 7 pm at the [community center].

Next week, Rev. \_\_\_\_\_ will be on his way to Houston for the UFMCC General Conference, as will our regular pianist, \_\_\_\_\_, who is MCC +++++'s delegate to the Conference. There will be a special Lay Service, organized by Deacon \_\_\_\_\_. The following week, \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ will be on their way back from Houston, and Rev. \_\_\_\_\_ will preach, with Deacon \_\_\_\_\_ leading the liturgy.

We are still trying to pay off our debts to the Unitarian Meeting House before we move into [the new chapel]. We're more than halfway there, but we still have a way to go. If you are interested in giving to this designated fund, see \_\_\_\_\_ after the service.

[description of officers and the MCC's local ecumenical affiliations, not read at the service.]

SELECTED HYMNS  
from the local MCC's  
Alternative Hymnal

[underlined words are those that obviously have been changed from the original]

God of Grace and God of Glory

God of grace and God of glory, On they people pour thy power;  
Crown this ancient church's story; Bring bud to glorious flower.  
Grant us wisdom, Grant us courage, For the facing of this hour,  
For the facing...

Lo! the hosts of evil round us, Scorn thy Christ, assail thy ways!  
From the fears that long have bound us, Free our hearts to faith  
and praise.

Grant us wisdom,... For the living of these days,...

Cure thy children's warring madness; Bend our pride to thy control;  
Shame our wanton, selfish gladness, Rich in things and poor in soul.  
Grant us wisdom,... Lest we miss they vision's goal,...

Set our feet on lofty places; Gird our lives that may be  
Armored with all loving graces, In the fight to set us free.  
Grant us wisdom,... That we fail not us nor thee,...

Save us from weak resignation To the evils we deplore;  
Let the search for thy salvation Be our glory evermore.  
Grant us wisdom,... Serving thee whom we adore,...

I Danced in the Morning

I danced in the morning when the world was begun,  
And I danced in the moon and the stars and the sun  
And I came down from heaven and I danced on the earth--  
At Bethlehem I had my birth.

(refrain)

Dance, then, wherever you may be, I am the Lord of the Dance said he  
And I'll lead you all, wherever you may be,  
And I'll lead you all in the dance said he.

I danced for the scribe and the Pharisee,  
But they would not dance and they wouldn't follow me;  
I danced for the fishermen, for James and John--  
They came with me and the dance went on.

(refrain)

I danced on the Sabbath and I cured the lame;  
The holy people said it was a shame;  
They whipped and they stripped and they hung me high,  
And they left me there on a cross to die.

(refrain)

I danced on a Friday and the sky turned black,  
 It's hard to dance with the devil on your back;  
 They buried my body and they thought I'd gone.  
 But I am the dance and I still go on.

(refrain)

They cut me down and I leap up high--  
 I am the life that'll never, never die;  
 I'll live in you if you'll live in me--  
 I am the Lord of the Dance, said he.

(refrain)

Lead On, O Cloud of Yahweh

Lead on, o cloud of Yahweh / The exodus is come;  
 In wilderness and desert / our tribe shall make its home.  
 Our slav'ry left behind us / a vision in us grows  
 We seek the land of promise / where milk and honey flows.

Lead on, o fiery pillar / we follow yet with fears  
 But we shall come rejoicing / though joy be born with tears;  
 We are not lost, though wandering / for by your light we come  
 And we are still God's people / the journey is our home.

Lead on, O God of freedom / our guiding Spirit be;  
 Though those who start the journey / the promise may not see  
 We pray that those who follow / may live to see that land  
 Where justice rules with mercy / and love is law's demand.

(refrain)

Let There Be Peace on Earth

Let there be peace on earth, And let it begin with me;  
 Let there be peace on earth, The peace that was meant to be.  
 With God as our Parent, Brothers and sisters are we.  
 Let us walk with each other In perfect harmony.  
 Let peace begin with me, Let this be the moment now.  
 With every step I take, Let this be my solemn vow:  
 To take each moment and live each moment In peace eternally.  
 Let there be peace on earth And let it begin with me.

Living In Us Now (to "Blowin' in the Wind")

How many years must my people exist before they know they are one?  
 How many times must there blood be shed before they know that  
 it's mine?  
 How many times will you break my bread before you give me to eat?  
 The answer my friend is living in us now.  
 The answer is living in us now.

And we are one in the Lord, We are one...

And we are Christians by our love, by our love,  
 Yes, we are Christians by our love.

How many times must the sick look up and find there's no one to care?

How many times must I stumble and fall before you offer your hand?  
How many times must I reach through these bars before you hand me the keys?

The answer my friend is living in us now.  
The answer is living in us now.

How many branches still cling to the vine without their share of its life?

How many people still pray to their God with hate in their hearts like a knife?

How many years will it take till we know the hurt we cause by our pride?

The answer my friend is living in us know.  
The answer is living in us now.

Why can't we sing a song full of love in a spirit open to all?  
Why can't we have a world without hate so no one else has to die?  
Why can't we find somewhere in our lives the courage we need just to try?

The answer my friend is living in us now.  
The answer is living in us now.

Are we not free slaves indeed? Slaves unworthy to be freed?

### Many Gifts, One Spirit

God of change and glory, God of time and space,  
When we fear the future Give to us your grace.  
In the midst of changing ways Give us still the grace to praise.

(refrain)

Many gifts, one spirit, One love known many ways.  
In our difference is blessing From diversity we praise  
One Giver--One Lord--One Spirit--One word; Known in many ways,  
Hallowing our days.

For the giver, for the gifts: Praise, praise, praise!

God of many colors, God of many signs,  
You have made us diff'rent, Blessing many kinds.  
As the old ways disappear Let your love cast out our fear.

(refrain)

Freshness of the morning, Newness of each night,  
You are still creating Endless love and light.  
This we see as shadows part, Many gifts from one great heart.

(refrain)

### They'll Know We Are Christians by Our Love

We are one in the Spirit, We are one in the Lord, We are one...  
And we pray that all unity will one day be restored.

(refrain)

And they'll know we are Christians by our love, by our love,  
Yes they'll know we are Christians by our love.

We will walk with each other, We will walk hand in hand,  
 We will walk...  
 And together we'll spread the news that God is in our land.  
 (refrain)

We will work with each other, We will work side by side,  
 We will work...  
 And we'll guard each person's dignity and save each person's pride.

(refrain)

All praise to the Lord God, From whom all things come, And  
 all praise to Christ Jesus, God's only Son, And all praise  
 to the Spirit, who makes us one.

(refrain)

True Freedom

All whose boast it is that we are a people brave and free,  
 If there breathe on earth a slave, Are we truly free and brave?  
 If we do not feel the chain When it works another's pain,  
 Are we not base slaves indeed? Slaves unworthy to be freed?

Is true freedom but to break Fetters for our own dear sake,  
 And with leathern hearts forget That we owe our world a debt?  
 No! True freedom is to share All the chains that others wear,  
 And with heart and hand to be Earnest to make others free.

They are slaves who fear to speak For the fallen and the weak;  
 They are slaves who won't oppose Hatred, scoffing and abuse,  
 Or who would in silence shrink From the truth they needs  
must think;

They are slaves who dare not be In the right with two or three.

Our God is like an Eagle

When Israel camped in Sinai, Then Moses heard the Lord.  
 This message tell the people, And give them this My word.  
 From Egypt I was with you, and carried on my wing  
 The whole of your great nation, from slav'rey I did bring.

Just as a mother eagle, who helps her young to fly,  
 I am a mother to you, your needs I will supply.  
 And you are as my children, my own who hear my voice  
 I am a mother to you, the people of my choice.

If God is like an eagle who helps her young to fly,  
 And God is also Father, then what of you and I?  
 We have no fear of labels, we have no fear of roles,  
 If God's own being blends them, we seek the self-same goal.

Our God is not a woman, our God is not a man.  
 Our God is both and neither, our God is I who Am.  
 From all the roles that bind us, our God has set us free,  
 What freedom does God give us? The freedom just to be.

## SELECTED SCRIPTURE READINGS

Note: I have no written record of changes made to the Revised Standard Version text used in the MCC service. There was no unobtrusive way to record such data in the ritual setting.

Service Date	Readings
6/21/81	Ruth 1:1-18 John 8:31-33
6/28	I Samuel 17:55-18:5 John 15:12-21
7/5	Jeremiah 15:15-18 I Corinthians 12:14-26
7/12	Jeremiah 20:14-18 Matthew 6:25-34
7/26	Isaiah 11:1-6 Luke 2:15-20
8/2	Acts 2:37-47 Romans 12:3-21
8/9	? ?
8/16	Ezra 3:10-13 Matthew 13:44-52
8/23	Isaiah 55:1-3 Matthew 14:13-21
10/25	? ?
12/27	I Kings 19:9-13 Matthew 1:18-25
1/3/82	Ecclesiastes 1:1-11 Luke 2:25-35
1/10	Acts 11:4-18 Mark 1:4-11
1/17	I Samuel 3:1-10 John 1:35-42

2/21 I Kings 19:9-13a WORSHIPS  
Luke 8:1-3

3/14 Psalm 147:1-11  
Matthew 18:1-4

3/19 Galatians 3:23-29  
John 1:1-18

3/20 Isaiah 43:18-25  
Mark 2:1-12

6/28/21

In the loneliest times, hear the call to join the family of God.

AND IN TIMES OF CELEBRATION, GOD HAS GIVEN US A NEW GROUP OF SISTERS AND BROTHERS WITH WHOM WE CAN SHARE.

Jesus Christ has established a family where we are all welcome.

THE HOLY SPIRIT HAS BOUND US TOGETHER IN LOVE.

Practicing God's love in song, celebrating all God has given us!

7/2/21

In times of doubt and confusion, hear the saving call of God.

IT IS TIME TO STEP INTO A COMMUNITY OF FAITH.

TO LOVE GOD WITH ALL, and to love our neighbors as ourselves.

IT IS TIME TO NEW BEGINNINGS, AND TO NEW LIFE IN CHRIST.

With God's grace, whose grace has set us free to live with hope, with wisdom, and with courage!

1.3/22 Psalm 115

We will praise thee, O God and Sovereign, and bless thy

name for ever and ever.

PRAY FOR US, O GOD, AND PRAISE THY NAME FOR EVER

AND AVE

Great and glorious and worthy to be praised; God's greatness

is incomparable.

OF THE GLORIOUS SPLENDOR OF THY MAJESTY, AND OF THEY WONDROUS

POWER, O GOD, WE PRAY!

We shall praise thee with the songs of thy abundant goodness

AND SOULS OF THY RIGHTEOUSNESS.

The standard Version follows on p. B2.

SELECTED CALL TO WORSHIPS

6/21/81

In the rubble of oppressiveness, hear the voice of prophets:  
THEY SPEAK OF LIFE IN THE MIDST OF DEATH, OF TRIUMPH WHERE  
THERE IS DESPAIR, AND OF BEAUTY IN OUR BROKENNESS.  
Look and begin to see the possibilities undreamed of:  
SOME WILL SEE VISIONS, AND SOME WILL DREAM DREAMS, AND  
OUR BLINDNESS WILL BE TAKEN AWAY.

We have a vision of the Common/wealth of God:  
WHERE TEARS ARE WIPED FROM EYES, WHERE PAIN IS HEALED,  
WHERE LIFE IS SACRED, WHERE NO ONE DIES OR LIVES IN VAIN.  
Build what you dream, and come to know:  
GOD BUILDS A GREAT CITY AMONG US. GOD CREATES A NEW COM-  
MUNITY FOR US. GOD WILL BUILD A NEW WORLD.

6/28/81

In the loneliest times, hear the call to join the family  
of God.  
AND IN TIMES OF CELEBRATION, GOD HAS GIVEN US A NEW GROUP  
OF SISTERS AND BROTHERS WITH WHOM WE CAN SHARE.  
Jesus Christ has established a family where we are all  
welcome.  
THE HOLY SPIRIT HAS BOUND US TOGETHER IN LOVE.  
Proclaim God's love in song, celebrating all God has given us!

7/5/81

In these days of strife and confusion, hear the saving  
call of God!  
IT IS A CALL TO ENTER INTO A COMMUNITY OF FAITH.  
It is a call to share, and to love our neighbors as ourselves.  
IT IS A CALL TO NEW BEGINNINGS, AND TO NEW LIFE IN CHRIST.  
Sing out with joy to God, Whose grace has set us free to  
live with hope, with wisdom, and with courage!

1/3/82 Psalm 145

We will extol thee, our God and Sovereign, and bless thy  
name for ever and ever.  
EVERY DAY WE WILL BLESS THEE, AND PRAISE THY NAME FOR EVER  
AND EVER.  
Great is Yahweh, and greatly to be praised; God's greatness  
is unsearchable.  
OF THE GLORIOUS SPLENDOR OF THY MAJESTY, AND OF THY WONDROUS  
WORKS, WE WILL MEDITATE.  
We shall pour forth the fame of thy abundant goodness  
AND SHALL SING ALOUD OF THY RIGHTEOUSNESS.

The Revised Standard Version follows on p. E2.

Psalm 145:1-7 RESOLUTION CONCERNING WORSHIP

I will extol thee, my God and King, and bless thy name for ever and ever. Every day I will bless thee, and praise thy name for ever and ever. Great is the Lord, and greatly to be praised, and his greatness is unsearchable.

One generation shall laud thy works to another, and shall declare thy mighty acts. On the glorious splendor of thy majesty, and on thy wondrous works, I will meditate. Men shall proclaim the might of thy terrible acts, and I will declare thy greatness. They shall pour forth the fame of thy abundant goodness, and shall sing aloud of thy righteousness.

WHEREAS, as presently scheduled, we feel district conferences fail to meet this spiritual goal adequately,

BE IT RESOLVED that the Northeast District will schedule a worship service on Friday evening, Saturday morning and Saturday evening at all future district conferences and that Communion be available on Sunday morning at all future district conferences.

## RESOLUTION CONCERNING WORSHIP

R E S O L U T I O N

WHEREAS we, the members of Metropolitan Community Church of \_\_\_\_\_, Feel the need for the Northeast District to pray together and to worship together so as to experience the diversity of our worship experiences and share in the joy of worshipping together:

WHEREAS one of the aims of district conferences is to bring members together to renew their spiritual life: and

WHEREAS, as presently scheduled, we feel district conferences fail to meet this spiritual goal adequately,

BE IT RESOLVED that the Northeast District will schedule a worship service on Friday evening, Saturday morning and Saturday evening at all future district conferences and that Communion be available on Sunday morning at all future district conferences.

Gratefully accepting the free and saving grace of God, which is the source of the events and relationships of our lives, in the depths of ourselves, in the lives of others both near and distant from us, and in the testimony of Scripture, but especially in the story and proclamation of Jesus of Nazareth.

We consent together to throw open our lives to the love which dwells within us and around us, and to share in the fullness of the One we confess we cannot fully know.

We consent together to seek to fulfill the demands of God's love and love in our lives and in our world.

We consent together to seek to discover the Christ in each other, to discover and share Christ's gifts in each other, and to share with others, and for the world, for which Christ died.

We consent together to seek to understand the meaning of our lives, the significance of our task in human history, in the events and relationships in which God is at work.

We consent together to commit a reasonable measure of our time, talents and gifts to the life and work of this church, as an expression of the great and inclusive love of God.

We consent together to share our faith wherein God's presence is known and realized.

## SELECTIONS FROM LOCAL CHURCH BY-LAWS

Article VI (Membership):  
Part 2 (Members:) b)

FRIENDS Persons wishing to affiliate with the church without making the commitment necessary to be Members, or who otherwise choose not to become Members, may choose to affiliate as Friends of the Church. Friends may speak at congregational meetings or open board meetings, but may not vote. They may serve on committees, commissions, and task groups, but may not serve as chairperson of commissions or as members of the Administrative Board. Prospective Friends shall attend one class of orientation into the history, purpose, and organization of the church and its ministries, and may be publically accepted as Friends of the Church during a worship service upon attendance at such a class.

THE CHURCH COVENANT

Gratefully accepting the free and saving grace of God, which we discover in the events and relationships of our lives, in the unseen depths of ourselves, in the lives of others both near us and distant from us, and in the testimony of Scripture, but especially in the story and proclamation of Jesus of Nazareth:

We covenant together to throw open our lives to the Presence within us and around us, and to seek to know the fulness of the One we confess we cannot ever fully know, so great is God's fulness.

We covenant together to seek to fulfill the demands of God's peace, justice and love in our lives and in our world.

We covenant together to seek to discover the Christ in each other, to discover and nurture Christ's gifts in each other, and to care for each other, and for the world, for which Christ died.

We covenant together to seek to understand the meaning of God's call in our lives, and to understand the significance of our task in the present moment of human history, in the places and times and relationships in which God has placed us.

We covenant together to commit a reasonable measure of our time, resources and gifts to the life and work of this congregation, which is the specific expression of the great and inclusive Body of Christ, that great family of faith wherein God's presence is known and celebrated.

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