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# local news

## A strong voice

The new pastor at MCC Portland has plans to revitalize  
the organization's role in the community

by Inga Sorensen

**R**oy A. Cole is a man with big plans and grand visions. As the new pastor of the Metropolitan Community Church of Portland, a denomination catering to gay and lesbian worshippers, Cole says he's looking to give MCC a facelift.

"My goals include transforming MCC's predominantly male membership into one which is more reflective of society, a place where women feel welcome," says Cole, adding 90 percent of MCC's 65 members are men. "It seems as though when a woman is pastor, then most of her membership is female; when a man is pastor, his membership is mostly male. I really want to see that change, because I think lesbians can offer so much to gay men and gay men can offer so much to lesbians."

Cole, an amiable 38-year-old, was recently installed as MCC Portland's senior pastor. A 1984 graduate of Warner Pacific University in Portland, he spent the last five years with MCC in Reno, Nev., before wending his way back to the Rose City.

"I am delighted to be back here. There are a lot of challenges I am eager to take on," he says. In addition to attracting more women to MCC, Cole is leading the charge to renovate the church. The structure, which is located in the Irvington neighborhood in Northeast Portland, was built in 1906 and, says Cole, is in need of serious repair.

"We want to make MCC an asset to the entire Irvington neighborhood as well as the lesbian and gay community. The church needs major renovation if we are to do that. We are currently looking to have the exterior repainted," Cole says, adding he hopes MCC will eventually become an important resource and comfortable meeting place for a diversity of community groups.

"MCC has a long history here in Portland [25 years], but I think the voice of MCC has been muted over the years. It's my hope that, under my pastoral leadership, I can help make our voice a strong voice for the rights of gay and lesbian people."

Cole says he believes MCC's voice has long been "muted" because many gay men and lesbians have simply stayed away from the church: "Many gays and lesbians, in their journey to accept them-

selves, have been rejected along the way by the Christian church. Many believe that God no longer loves them because of their sexual orientation. That's what they're told by their religious leaders," he says. "It takes time to get over that hurt and to realize that's not true. One of MCC's roles is to reach out to lesbians and gay men and help them reclaim their spiritual heritage."

In order to reach out to others, Cole says MCC Portland plans to hold a service honoring women, and is sponsoring a Christmas celebration Dec. 18 to which gay and non-gay followers of many faiths are invited to attend. He also would like MCC to become a member of Ecumenical Ministries of Oregon, a group which represents 2,000 congregations and 17 denominations statewide. Over the years, rumors have circulated that MCC was not welcome in EMO due to opposition from certain EMO members. Other rumors maintained MCC did not want to become a member of EMO.

"I've heard the stories, and I don't know what's what," says Cole. "What I do know is that I'd like to sit down and talk with [EMO executive director] Rodney Page [and] it is my hope that we can become a part of Ecumenical Ministries of Oregon."

In the meantime, Cole says he will work on nurturing his relationship with his new community. The day after the Nov. 8 election and the defeat of Ballot Measure 13, he joined representatives from two dozen human rights organizations who held a press conference to call for continued unity in the struggle for civil rights.

"I am very proud that MCC will be among the many groups across our state that are working to educate people about gays and lesbians," says Cole, adding he'd like to see MCC churches spring up across Oregon. Currently, MCC establishments exist in Portland, Eugene and Salem.

For more information about MCC Portland, call 281-8868. The Christmas service will be held at 10 am Dec. 18 at MCC, Northeast 24th Avenue and Broadway, in Portland.



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—Roy A. Cole