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## northwest

# Pastor Debuts with Pride

Nathan Meckley starts as new MCC Portland pastor

by Stephen Marc Beaudoin

**H**e just didn't believe in encyclopedias. So instead of going door to door hawking \$400 Britannica sets, as he did in his early 20s, Nathan Meckley is now selling something he "believes in more strongly"—organized religion.

He'll have a lot of selling to do. The Pennsylvania-born Meckley just arrived in the Rose City as the newly appointed head pastor of Portland's Metropolitan Community Church, a tiny 150-member gay Christian congregation struggling to boost its membership and find its financial footing after several years of leadership turnover and operating in the red for three out of the past four years.

Meckley, who comes to Portland from recent pastoral posts in Florida and California, knows he has his work cut out for him. The congregation, which owns a 6,100-square-foot church and administration facility at 2400 N.E. Broadway, is paying off a second mortgage, and church bulletins

routinely remind members of their precipitous financial state: A recent newsletter's "Financial Report" announced, "This week we have \$26,447 in bills to be paid with \$1,104 cash in hand," and reminded members, twice, "We are a generous congregation."

"Everybody is thinking about that right now," says MCC Portland board member Hyla Richey about the congregation's financial health. "We would like our contributions to increase and our membership to increase. If we do our jobs well, then we will have all those things."

The church, founded in 1968 by gay activist and former Baptist preacher the Rev. Troy Perry, has struggled in recent years to stay relevant, especially as more Christian churches welcome sexual minorities through their doors. "That's a mold we need to break out of," Richey says. "We're not just a gay church."

Meckley says this expansion of mission, including a tighter lens on issues of social justice, will be part of his Herculean task of boosting MCC Portland: He points to examples like the church's "People's Pantry" mission, which last year donated 500 bags of groceries to poor families.

But right now Meckley is focused on Pride Weekend, which marks his MCC Portland debut at the 9 a.m. June 15 service. The topic of his sermon: pride, of course.

*Just Out* sat down with Meckley to talk about his vision for the church, its role in the greater Portland community and how MCC might be at the vanguard of the fight for marriage equality.

### Size Matters

Among other religions founded in the 20th century, Metropolitan Community Church ranks as one of the smallest denominations. Here are the number of worldwide church members for several recently founded religions, according to available figures:

- **Seventh Day Adventist:** Approximately 15 million (est. 1925)
- **Jehovah's Witnesses:** Approximately 7 million (est. 1931)
- **Church of Wicca:** 800,000 (est. 1954)
- **Church of Christ, Scientist:** 400,000 (est. 1879)
- **Metropolitan Community Church:** 43,000 (est. 1968)

**Stephen Marc Beaudoin:** When were you introduced to MCC?

**The Rev. Nathan Meckley:** I actually went there not to go to church, but as a class project. I had started coming out as a gay man, and I was taking a class on church and the contemporary world, and I decided I was going to do a paper on homosexuality and Christianity, and so I went. I had heard of MCC beforehand, and I thought, "Oh, that can't possibly be a real church." The only way to describe it is it felt like I had gone to church for the first time in my life.

**SMB:** How do you define MCC to those not in the church?

**NM:** MCC is not the church of your childhood. People still generally come to MCC from other traditions or no tradition at all. So you can

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