

step into an MCC and see things that remind you of your childhood upbringing, the way communion is celebrated, certain hymns or songs that may be sung. Some of the exterior trappings of MCC may be reminiscent.

SMB: As many churches become "open and affirming" to sexual minorities, what makes MCC still relevant?

NM: As much as we'd like to believe it's not the case, church is still one of the few places that gay and lesbian people are excluded. I think for many more years to come, MCC still has to be faithful to its calling to be a spiritual home for those who've been rejected based upon their gender and sexual identity. One of the things that MCC has been talking about the last couple of years is understanding ourselves as a movement with a church, not a church with a movement. An example would be what's happening in Eastern Europe with MCC. Queer people in Eastern Europe have contacted MCC primarily not to help them plant churches, but to actually help them in providing spiritual, visible leadership to queer mobilization in their contexts.

SMB: Are you concerned about the financial health of MCC Portland?

NM: Oh, yeah, yeah. I would say that's one of the biggest immediate concerns I have. And we talked about it during my candidacy. The search team and the board were very candid with me...so when it comes to acting quickly on something, that's something that has to be acted very quickly upon.

SMB: How much of your job here will be as chief fund-raiser?

NM: The pastor always has a central role in assuring financial health, as a pastor rightly should. The big picture is financial health, and that comprehensive piece is what we need to attend to.

SMB: The Rev. Troy Perry performed one of the first same-sex marriages in 1969, and it seems that MCC has been at the forefront of conversations and activism about same-sex unions. What is the church's role in pushing the movement forward?

NM: I think MCC is in a unique position because of its history to be one of the religious voices that says, "To deny anyone a right that is



The Rev. Nathan Meckley recalls his first MCC service as feeling "like I had gone to church for the first time in my life."

extended to other people is unjust." Injustice is a spiritual problem, and therefore we need to confront it wherever we see it.

SMB: How healthy is MCC?

NM: MCC was one of the fastest-growing churches in the '70s and '80s. I mean, really astronomically. And then also along the arc of [the] HIV/AIDS [pandemic], so much of the energy and focus in the '80s was addressing that—so I do think that the exponential growth slowed at that point. We also moved into a period of time that was kind of institutionalizing the church, and I think that through the '90s we began to feel the pinch of that. Now, while MCC continues in North America a steady but relatively slow growth profile, as a denomination we're growing most quickly outside of North America: We're growing very quickly in Latin America, in Africa, in Eastern Europe.

SMB: How will you define success during your tenure at MCC Portland?

NM: Faithfulness. I certainly personally understand success when I recognize that I'm being faithful, as opposed to popular or lucrative or whatever.

SMB: Do you see a need to grow the MCC congregation?

NM: It matters. Size does matter, to the degree that it enhances our ability to make a difference in people's lives. Small churches can do some things very well, even better than large churches. But I do think that, certainly in a setting like Portland, a larger MCC can have great value to the community. ☺

QT
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