

## MCC Toronto – a personal perspective by Annis Karpenko

Welcome to the first "Bridges to Hope and Freedom" event. First off, I want you to know I am straight; not that it should matter, but sometimes it does. Human nature makes it so we like to know what we're dealing with. So for the record, I am a 51-year-old, straight, married-for-25-years, mother of two. And I am not a churchgoer. But I love MCC Toronto.

Although Metropolitan Community Church is known as the Gay church, it really should, **must**, be known as the HUMAN church. What is that old saying? You can choose your friends, but you can't choose your family. Well, at MCC Toronto you can choose your family and day after day, people have been wandering in to Metropolitan Community Church to see what all the hoopla is about. And what they find, quite unexpectedly, is family in the truest sense of the word. They find unconditional love, compassion, humour, caring, joy, sadness and a continued validation of their humanness. You might not even know you are looking for it. Like me, you just drop by one Sunday at the request of a friend. You wander in expecting another run-of-the-mill, now we pray, now we sing, now we pray Sunday service and before you know it you are dumbstruck at discovering some missing part of your soul – like a shiny penny laying on the sidewalk there for you to pick up - and you didn't even know it was lost.

Buddhist monk, Thich Nhat Hanh writes: "When we see the nature of interbeing, barriers between ourselves and others are dissolved, and peace, love and understanding are possible." You will experience *Interbeing* when you visit MCC Toronto. This is why they keep boxes of Kleenex in the pews. You can not help but be moved by the experience of coming into a place with hundreds of perfect strangers and feeling immediately at home; recognizing familiarity in a place you have never been before; hearing words you always wanted to hear, feeling emotion from deep inside you. MCC Toronto is a place of hope and pride and spirituality – the deep, mind-boggling, uplifting spirituality we all dream of experiencing. And because of this I nominate attending a Sunday service at MCC Toronto for one of those Top 10 Things You Do Before You Die lists.

For 34 years, MCC Toronto has brought solace and comfort and respect to human beings when perhaps, no one else would. It didn't matter which label you arrived with, MCC Toronto had a place for you. Most churches in this city have seen a drastic drop in young and middle-aged parishioners, but the fastest growing group at MCC Toronto is young families who want their children to experience inclusive spirituality. While the Anglican Church is fragmenting itself over same-sex relationships, MCC Toronto has it all figured out. Each Sunday, they remind us that we are all made in the image of God. I need to repeat that; we are **ALL** made in the image of God.

For those of you who do not go to church, or who attend regular services in a more traditional denomination, I warn you, a service at MCC Toronto is kind of like Dorothy arriving in the Land of Oz. You walk in off the grey city street and suddenly there is colour and laughter, and PowerPoint and singing and joy and deep prayer, deep caring, and deep commitment to pure spirituality. So if you like a challenge, I hope you will take me up on this one. Promise yourself that once in the next 6 months, you will spend a Sunday morning at an MCC Toronto service.