

## Stop MCC Abuse – Press release, September 10, 2024

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### Broad public support for open letter and petition

The June 11, 2024 [open letter](#) to MCC's global constituency detailing serious concerns about workplace abuse within MCC has been broadly supported by over 1400 petitioners. The close relationship between MCC and Mennonite identity makes the revelations in the open letter particularly painful, while also making change particularly complex. As signatory and former MCC worker Mary Lou Klassen stated in a social media post, the petition is "a collective deep throated moaning for justice that begs MCC (us!) to take this opportunity to humble ourselves, seek God's face, turn from our evil (harmful) ways and make concrete steps towards justice and peace."<sup>1</sup>

### Inadequate and hypocritical response from MCC leaders

Despite support by [petition](#) signatories and others, MCC leaders' responses give no indication of choosing a different path. MCC communications are full of deflection, pacifying language, denial, and outright untruth. They emphasize ways in which MCC staff are supported, while implying that outside observers will unfairly take sides because they don't know "all the facts" – "facts" that remain conveniently "confidential."<sup>2</sup> In this way, they continue to avoid responding to urgent questions about workplace abuse such as those asked in the petition, which do not require them to comment on specific cases.

The MCC boards have not taken substantial action, nor contacted the open letter signatories, even though MCC Executive Directors claimed in an August 29, 2024 memo to staff that they have been spending "multiple hours communicating with people who have reached out to share their critiques, questions and words of support." MCC leaders consistently seem more concerned about their image than about truth, justice, or accountability.

### Launch of MAST

Therefore, to coordinate ongoing efforts to hold MCC to account for its abusive behaviour, the group MCC Abuse Survivors Together (MAST) launched on September 5, 2024. The MAST steering committee includes open letter signatories as well as other MCC survivors and allies.

*MAST seeks justice for survivors of MCC abuse, accountability for MCC, and transparency for the MCC constituency.*

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<sup>1</sup> Mary Lou's Facebook post was later removed due to a technical glitch, but she has given permission for this quotation.

<sup>2</sup> <https://mcc.org/our-stories/journey-service-mennonite-central-committee>

In addition to our efforts to hold MCC accountable, we seek to offer a space to support survivors. We continue to invite survivors to report their stories confidentially, track and report cases of abuse, and offer platforms for survivors to publicly share their stories. We will engage in advocacy in pursuit of these goals.

We seek to expose the truth about abusive behaviour so that harm against MCC staff and partners can end. Our ultimate goal is not to destroy MCC as an organization, but to pursue justice, truth, and healing within the broader community of Mennonites who support MCC. We long to see our communities become places where survivors' stories are believed, harm is repaired, and offenders are held accountable.<sup>3</sup>

### **New information about the extent of the abuse**

Since going public, some 22 additional former MCC workers (individuals or couples) have shared their own stories of abuse experienced with MCC. To be clear, these are in addition to the 21 cases referenced in the open letter, 43 cases in all. This does not include the many who have referred to their own or others' painful experiences in petition comments/social media but have not (yet) come forward to share details with us.

We hear stories of people being fired after reporting concerns of corruption or financial misconduct, people being inexplicably fired without cause or warning, and people experiencing gaslighting or bullying from senior HR or senior MCC leaders for years, leading them to resign. Others share stories of sexual assault by MCC staff (with attackers allowed to continue serving with MCC even after being reported). Others share the physical danger they were exposed to because supervisors failed to care for their health needs or their families' safety. We have heard from salaried staff in Canada and the US as well as staff in international locations. Some of these cases involve events currently unfolding. We seek to support those who share their painful stories, often after years of thinking they were the only ones to experience something like this.

In a recent public statement, Executive Directors Rick Cober Bauman and Ann Graber Hershberger imply we might not know the "difference between workplace abuse and organizational conflict."<sup>4</sup> However, while "abuse" is a strong word, it is the appropriate term for what has been experienced. Bullying, humiliating, and psychologically harassing staff, firing staff while sick or in the midst of a mental health crisis, sexually assaulting staff, mishandling reports of sexual assault, offering money in exchange for silence, summarily firing staff for reporting concerns or refusing to collaborate with corrupt practice – these are serious actions that go far beyond simple workplace conflict. In the

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<sup>3</sup> Judith Herman, *Truth and Repair: How Trauma Survivors Envision Justice* (Basic Books, 2023), 3–4; Kathryn Post, "New Catholic Clergy Sexual Abuse Report from Fordham Charts a Path Forward," *Religion News Service*, February 9, 2023, <https://religionnews.com/2023/02/09/new-catholic-clergy-sexual-abuse-report-from-fordham-charts-a-path-forward/>.

<sup>4</sup> <https://canadianmennonite.org/stories/mcc-executive-directors-respond-concerns-former-workers>

shared stories, we see the involvement of MCC leaders in executive leadership, Human Resources, Communications and Donor Relations, Financial Services, International Program, and regional MCCs. No sector of MCC is exempt.

Contrary to a recent memo to all MCC staff, in which Executive Directors claim that NDAs have been used “less than half a dozen times in the past 12 years,” we are aware of 13 cases of NDAs being offered to individuals or couples, of which 10 were signed. We know the number is more than MCC leaders are admitting, and we strongly suspect it is much higher.

### **How you can help**

Please stop supporting a culture of silence about abuse. Instead, support healing by honouring survivors’ stories and requiring accountability from MCC.

- Sign our [petition](#) that insists on answers from MCC and asks for a transparent, external, independent third-party investigation with full public report into the complaints detailed in the open letter as well as the complaints of others who have or will come forward.
- Report your experiences confidentially to [stopmccabuse@proton.me](mailto:stopmccabuse@proton.me).
- Write directly to MCC registering your concern and copy us in your correspondence.
- Register your concern as congregations, church conferences, and service/mission agencies.
- Reach out to survivors and support them, believe them, and advocate for them.

In coming weeks, MAST will have a website with survivor stories, letters of support, and pastoral resources. Meanwhile, you can follow updates on the Stop MCC Abuse Facebook page.

Dozens of MCC staff have been deeply harmed by MCC’s abusive practices. MCC has abused its donors’ trust. MCC’s partners and project beneficiaries have also been harmed.

We think justice requires the Mennonite constituency to change – from a culture where authority cannot be questioned and the MCC image remains sacred, to one where those who suffer abuse are believed and cared for, and those who harm others are held accountable. We invite you to join us on this journey of transformation to being an Anabaptist community that engages in genuine peacebuilding through truth-telling and reparation of harm.

Sincerely,

The members of the MAST steering committee