

Opportunities and Challenges of Listening:

A report on stakeholder voices and the feasibility of a listening space for
Mennonite Central Committee

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ABSTRACT

This report explores the feasibility, opportunities and challenges of establishing a listening space for individuals who experienced harm while working with Mennonite Central Committee (MCC). Commissioned by MCC and conducted by an independent consultant with past affiliation to the organization, the report is grounded in a stakeholder-driven process involving interviews and thematic analysis. Stakeholders shared their insights on MCC harm, highlighting both a profound need for and significant risks in implementing a listening space. The findings underscore mistrust toward MCC, calls for transparency and empathy, and concerns about re-traumatization and institutional self-interest. Despite these challenges, there is cautious but compelling hope among many stakeholders that MCC can respond meaningfully if it demonstrates humility, transparency and a willingness to change. This report offers recommendations for MCC to shift its posture, commit to a comprehensive and well-facilitated process, and seize this moment as an opportunity for organizational healing and transformation.

A note from the author and consultant

My name is Jes Stoltzfus Buller, I was hired as an independent contractor with MCC to discern how the organization might listen to and learn from individuals who experienced workplace harm while working with MCC, by developing a comprehensive, trauma-informed and scalable process design. I am a White woman, born and raised in the Anabaptist church, originally from Goshen, Indiana. I work with a local peacebuilding organization in Sincelejo, Colombia, where I live, and also work as a facilitator, trainer and process consultant in areas of peacebuilding, conflict transformation, restorative justice and organizational leadership. In the past, I served in Colombia with MCC International Program for five years and also worked as domestic staff with MCC U.S. for eight years.

I introduce myself at the beginning of this report because my identity and experience is significant to the report, with implications to the process. While I no longer work for MCC, my past work experience with them establishes a level of proximity to the organization. In this sense, I have an insider-outsider role as a consultant, which provides both benefit and risk to the process at hand.

On one hand, my various years of work with MCC provide a deep understanding of organizational systems, structures and practices, which made the information gathering process efficient. Some stakeholders mentioned the value of an external consultant who already understands MCC as an organization. At the same time, my proximity to MCC presents a risk to the process, which demands the consultant maintain an honest arms-length from the organization to assure safety for stakeholders and integrity for the process. Some stakeholders, understandably, expressed concern for the ties I have to MCC.

As the Consultant, I acknowledge the precariousness of my role. Throughout the process, I have worked hard to maintain autonomy as a third-party Consultant, exercising full independence in the development of the process design, implementation of interviews, and gathering and reporting of information. The following report outlines, to the best of my ability, the process implemented to gather information, the perspectives of participating stakeholders, and my own recommendations for moving forward. I pray that I accurately and faithfully represent the voices and perspectives of stakeholders in this report.

INTRODUCTION

A worldwide organization of Anabaptist churches, MCC has a 100-year history of working at Relief, Development and Peace in the name of Christ, currently present in 45 countries with over 1,000 workers worldwide.¹ Amid the complexity of 100 years and 1,000 workers, in varying contexts around the world, the reality is that terrible situations, and mistakes, will exist.

There are many individuals who have experienced harm while working for MCC, ranging broadly in nature. In response to these experiences, MCC is interested in creating a listening space to hear these experiences, in hopes of learning from them and creating organizational changes to ensure harmful patterns do not repeat. To do this, they hired an external consultant (myself) tasked with the job of designing a listening process.

Process

Designing a potential listening space first required a process that centered the voices and perspectives of those harmed by MCC², as well as others connected to their experiences. This approach was essential to ensure the integrity and effectiveness of a listening space, grounding it in the lived realities of those most impacted.

The process included a strategy of stakeholder interviews aimed at gathering suggestions, concerns, reflections, and questions from a broad spectrum of voices. What do stakeholders see as essential for MCC's path forward? Is a listening space a meaningful next step? What conditions must be in place for such a space to be legitimate and effective? What structures, practices, and components would support its success?

I had full autonomy in designing and conducting the interview process. Grounded in research best practices, the approach prioritized confidentiality, clarity of roles, trauma sensitivity, and a whole-systems approach. The goal was to gather input from a representative cross-section of those affected by harm, victim advocates and content experts—ensuring their safety and continuing until a saturation point was reached.

A whole-systems approach required input from a diverse cross-section of MCC stakeholders, reflecting varied roles, placements, and demographics. To assess the breadth

¹MCC Annual Report, 2024

²Many terms were referenced by stakeholders in relation to their experience with MCC. Words such as abuse, harm, conflict, victim, pain and trauma were some of the words used to qualify the experience of individuals working or serving with MCC. This report most frequently uses the word “harm” because of its broad nature and ability to encompass other terms used.

of this representation, stakeholders were invited (but not required) to complete a brief survey identifying their relationship to the issue—such as harmed individual, victim’s advocate, or content expert—as well as their MCC assignment, leadership status, race, ethnicity, age, and gender. They were also asked to sign a consent form outlining the scope and terms of their participation and the consultant’s role.

Survey responses were anonymized, coded, and compiled into a single document. Interviews were recorded, transcribed, and analyzed to identify meaningful themes, which were synthesized with other responses to inform the findings in this report.

Limitations

There were inevitable limitations and errors to this process. The most significant limitation was lack of access to harmed individuals. The scope of MCC’s stakeholder population is large, making a whole-systems approach complex. Furthermore, virtually all harmed individuals are anonymous. Therefore, the process began by contacting a limited number of known individuals, related content experts and victim advocates. The Consultant also reached out to a handful of current and former MCC staff around the world who would have deeper knowledge of harmed individuals, to share about the initiative and invite connections for other potential interviews. Many interviews led to other interviews, as interviewees participated in the process and then shared with others. While this organic spread of information lengthened the overall time, it also strengthened the process by reaching a broader stakeholder population and building trust.

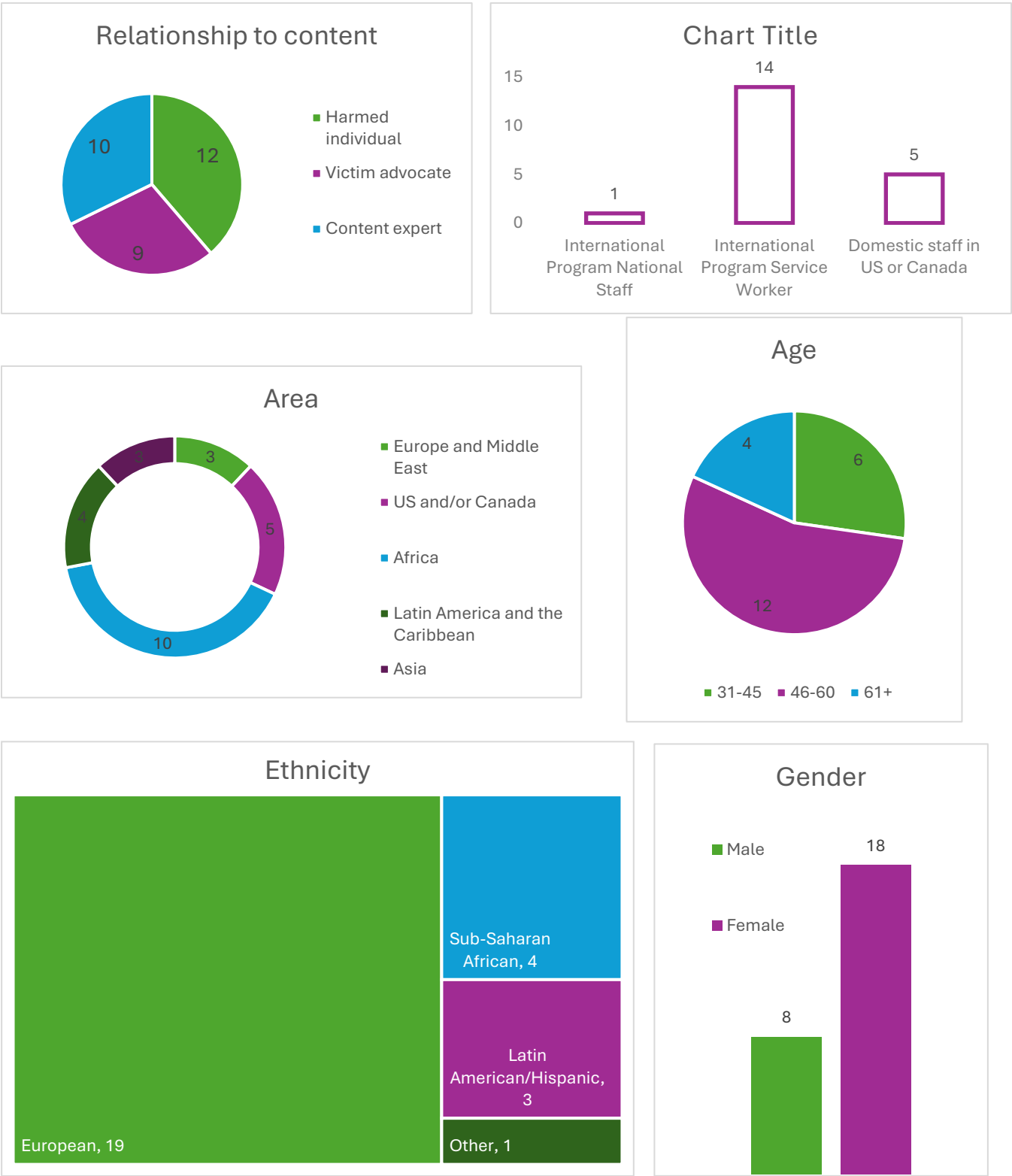
Even so, accomplishing a whole system approach proved challenging. Some groups of people are more represented than others in the group of interviewees, as outlined below. Most notably, lack of diversity in race, ethnicity and work assignment was recorded in the stakeholder population group, with the majority of stakeholders being White, European-descent individuals who worked outside their home country.

Significantly, nine stakeholders did not respond to invitations for conversation, of which eight were people from different racial and ethnic backgrounds, and five from countries outside the U.S. and Canada. While there is no evidence to specifically explain why this is the case, some reasons for the imbalance of participating stakeholders likely include distrust of the process due to past experiences, language limitations, and lack of sufficient time. Barriers that limit the participation of certain populations would need to be carefully remedied in the implementation of a listening space itself.

Stakeholders

The final process involved 18 individual or small-group interviews and five peripheral conversations, engaging a total of 28 stakeholders. Survey and interview data provided the

following breakdowns of stakeholder identities; however, some participants chose not to complete the survey, meaning full demographic and role-related data was not available for every individual.



OVERARCHING THEMES

When interviewed, stakeholders were invited to name their connection to the issue – why do they have a stake in a listening process? This was asked to develop a fuller understanding of the context surrounding the potential listening space. This initial question created a foundation. Four clear themes surfaced as important context for the proposal of a listening space, which highlight unique and specific aspects of MCC as an institution, implicating also how MCC might deal with harm to its (current or former) staff.

The all-encompassing dynamic of MCC

It was repeatedly mentioned that MCC is not just a job, it's a lifestyle. One person said, "MCC requires more than your time and your talents. They require your heart and soul." For individuals serving outside of their home country, MCC has significant power in people's lives, especially those serving as service workers and volunteers rather than staff. Even for individuals working in their home countries, the connected nature of Anabaptist communities, along with MCC's extensive constituency base, means that individuals' churches, friends and broader communities are often intertwined with their MCC work. The added layer of vocation and calling deepens even further the relationship with MCC. Therefore, when individuals experience harm from the institution while serving or working with MCC, that harm is uniquely compounded. There is a lack of autonomy for these individuals because, as one person said, "it's not just jobs they are losing, it's their entire lives." In some cases when endings happen unexpectedly or abruptly, people may not have a home to go back to, or they may feel rejected by a community who holds MCC in very high esteem, seen as "the bad MCCers." This experience of harm and betrayal for individuals is deeply disorienting, overwhelming and traumatizing; it consumes people's lives.

A call to values

Most stakeholders referred to the values MCC espouses, mentioning the use of "heavy duty Jesus language" and "God's love and compassion all over the place." They talked about the ways MCC was extremely formative in their own value system. Stakeholders asserted that MCC needs to be accountable not only to legal minimums as an NGO, but also to the values it promotes. Individuals talked about MCC needing moral courage to live up to its own value system and embody Restorative Justice (RJ) in practice, highlighting that MCC teaches RJ around the world and was foundational in the development of a modern-day understanding of RJ in North America in the 1970's. This call to live its values resurfaced over and over in interviews. One person said, "what's at stake is MCC's soul."

A deficit of trust

There is substantial pain, sadness and anger about the ways MCC has responded to reported cases of harm and abuse in the past and present, which significantly influences what people imagine and how they consider the idea of a listening space. Repeatedly, comments were made about the lack of empathy and transparency on the part of MCC, highlighting a posture of defensiveness that is not productive. Many stakeholders made comments regarding strategic and bureaucratic responses in public statements, rather than authentic and empathic responses. One person said, “it feels like a checked box” while another shared, “what we’re getting now is saving the brand and dismissing the stories.” These observations have contributed to a distrust in the organization’s capacity to respond well. As one person said, “the track record is not good.” Many stakeholders cited specific experiences, some highlighting current culture and practices inside MCC as a reason for distrust in the organization, with others made specific reference to distrust with current leadership. As one person said, “the bank account of trust in MCC is in a deficit right now.”

Poor processes

Over and over, culture, poor processes and implementation of policy were named as harmful, more than policies themselves. By and far, stakeholders shared an overarching opinion that problematic and harmful situations arose in their experiences because of poor processes, often despite good policies. One stakeholder suggested the need for more flexibility and care when applying policies, referencing the importance of consistency in care more than consistency in technicalities. Some individuals mentioned poor follow-up with staff after they return home, empty promises for closure meetings or reports to be shared, humiliating and insensitive processes for letting people go, and lack of good supervisory skills to hold staff accountable. These were understood to be part of the MCC culture, needing repair beyond policy change because they are things that go beyond the letter of the law. Furthermore, there were various individuals who asserted that the current policy changes are good, but that implementation is flawed.

AN INITIAL POLL

The concept of a listening space for MCC has been named in numerous ways, from different voices, in public and private settings, creating assumptions and opinions of what it might be or look like. During the interview process, stakeholders were asked what their initial impressions of a listening space were, which shed light on those assumptions and provided a very initial sense of the openness or interest of stakeholders in regards to a listening space.

Yes – No – Maybe

Twelve stakeholders offered initial affirmation towards a listening space. Importantly, along with that affirmation, all of the “yes” responses were followed up with ideas on how to best implement it. No stakeholder affirmed a listening space without specifying conditions of some kind. One individual summed it up well, saying, “Yes, it’s a good idea. It’s necessary. As an idea, it’s a very risky idea, and it really depends on how it’s done and on what happens after.” Some of the comments made from individuals who affirmed moving forward with a listening space are highlighted here:

- “The process will help MCC erase ignorance and raise awareness of the harm that they have been causing knowingly and not knowingly.”
- “It signals MCC is serious, it signals recognition that this is systemic and there is repair work to be done beyond one or two people.”
- “To have any integrity, if MCC wants a donor base in the next generation, they got to do this. But also, for those of us who have been hurt. There needs to be a safe space to share the stories and come to some sense that MCC hears and understands.”
- “It creates a platform for people who are sorry to actually verbalize it.”
- “It’s not going to be the best because it’s not going to be able to fully restore anything. But it’s a good step forward.”
- “Listening circles are always a good thing. They move people towards closure, maybe not restoration of relationship, but closure of experience, which then in and of itself allows for a new environment to begin potentially.”

Seven individuals responded negatively to the question of a listening space. Some of these were emphatic no’s, with a clear statement that they would not participate in a listening space. Other no’s were conditional to the ways they are observing the listening space to be unfolding. The following quotes were comments made in response to the idea of a listening space:

- “Listening has been harmful to us.”
- “Listening is not a neutral offer.”
- “Absolutely not before investigation.”
- “I think it’s going to be very hard for people to feel safe and bring things forward when they haven’t felt safe or been listened to before.”
- “We have huge doubts that this could be constructive, because MCC will not allow themselves to be publicly accountable.”

- “If a listening space is controlled by MCC, it’s a way to contain the problem so that there’s no public accountability. It does not prevent continuing abuse, and it can cause harm to people who come forward.”
- “I’m not seeing the respect and humility that I think is required in order to earn [harmed individuals’] participation.”

Five individuals did not affirm or reject a listening process, saying that their response would be entirely dependent on how it was developed. One person said, “It needs to be more than that, but at least we’re having a conversation to try and design something.”

Risks of a listening space

In their initial responses, many stakeholders outlined numerous risks that are involved in attempting a listening space. *Retaliation* was highlighted over and over as a legitimate fear of harmed individuals – there is risk to people’s professional lives, faith communities and more if they participate, and any kind of retaliation would be fatal. *Re-traumatization* was also named frequently as a potential, and even likely, harm of the process itself. Numerous stakeholders reflected that if harmed individuals were to share vulnerably and their stories were not taken seriously, a listening space would be extremely painful and traumatizing. *Poor follow-up* was another risk mentioned frequently, affirming that listening nicely, but doing nothing or responding defensively would, in fact, make things worse. Some individuals named *process fatigue* as a risk, recognizing the immense scope of a well-implemented listening space and what it would demand of those participating from MCC. Lastly, a few also mentioned that there is a risk simply in the fact that no process will meet everyone’s needs.

A picture of success

When asked what a successful listening space might yield, stakeholders expressed the following hopes for its outcomes:

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| - Significant investment (staff, money, consultation) in changes | - Past workers’ names cleared |
| - A re-signifying of what happened | - Interest in past workers returning to serve with MCC |
| - Increased numbers in reporting, due to increased trust | - Better handling of situations and better understanding in MCC |
| - A boost in morale internal to MCC | - Less of top-down practice and more emerging practice |
| - MCC becoming a learning organization | - Increased trust with donors |
| - New practices and systems in place | - A joint statement from all parties regarding accomplishments and commitments |
| - Actual data feeding into changes MCC is implementing | |
| - A sense of equity between staff | |

CREATING SAFETY AND ACCOUNTABILITY

To understand the needs and perspectives of stakeholders, various questions were asked to them regarding the kinds of conditions that would need to be in place if a listening space were to be implemented. Questions were framed around how a process could ensure safety and accountability. Stakeholders offered significant and insightful detail in response. In some cases, there was a broad consensus between individuals (albeit unknowingly) about conditions that would need to be in place. Other topics arose with a significant variety of opinion. The topics outlined here are human needs, expressed in different ways by stakeholders. Interestingly, these needs align well with the themes highlighted in the context section. In other words, the needs expressed by stakeholders relate directly to who they understand MCC to be and how they are experiencing MCC currently.

Acknowledgement

THEMES OF: A CALL TO VALUES & THE ALL-ENCOMPASSING DYNAMIC OF MCC

Acknowledgement was repeatedly highlighted as an essential first step toward accountability, where MCC would acknowledge harm that has happened. While there are varied understandings of what the details of acknowledgement would be, there was broad consensus that acknowledgement needs to happen. Most stakeholders affirmed the good work that MCC does, citing a need to acknowledge the good *and* the bad. One individual said, “we know MCC has done a lot of good work all over the world and impacted thousands of people’s lives. We’ve got no issue with that – but bad things have happened as well. Just acknowledge that.” For many, a significant piece of acknowledgement is a genuine apology that names specifically what has been harmful and admits wrongdoing. Individuals discussed the ways apology could open up space, recognizing the need for restoration and reconciliation. Numerous individuals highlighted an apology made by Anabaptist Mennonite Biblical Seminary in response to the abuse of John Howard Yoder as a good example of institutional apology. Many believe MCC has followed legal advice to not apologize, fearful of the ways an apology might open for litigation, and they hope for MCC to hold themselves to a standard of faithfulness rather than legality.

Safety

THEMES OF: POOR PROCESSES & THE ALL-ENCOMPASSING DYNAMIC OF MCC

Safety will look different for different people. One individual suggested the need for a listening space to be “safe enough”, recognizing that the process cannot guarantee total safety. Some of the components individuals named to help provide a safe space for listening included intercultural competence, the presence of support persons and services to

storytellers, surrogate victim participation, the requirement of anonymity for victims, the use of trauma-informed best practices, releasing individuals from Non-Disclosure Agreements, and accepting every story as is without fact-checking or doubting. There was also general consensus of the need for confidentiality as part of the safety of harmed individuals. Stakeholders discussed how confidentiality is currently a currency of power within MCC, that different cultures have different understandings of confidentiality, and that confidentiality requires significant care because it can be harmful.

Reparations

THEMES OF: THE ALL-ENCOMPASSING DYNAMIC OF MCC

A few individuals mentioned the possibility of reparative action as part of a listening space. While some suggested it might not be realistic, there was a desire to consider reparations, and others affirmed a definite need for reparations of some kind. One individual reflected, “maybe justice requires renumeration.”

Empathy

THEMES OF: POOR PROCESSES & A CALL TO VALUES

One of the major concerns put forward was the need for empathy and humility from MCC. Repeatedly, stakeholders highlighted the importance of compassion and deep listening that comes from a very genuine place. Stakeholders asserted that for a listening space to be successful, there must be openness by the part of MCC – if harmed individuals sense ingenuity, it will be a failure. One individual said, “there needs to be accountability, there needs to be transparency, but there needs to be empathy and compassion.” There was also recognition of the challenge of this kind of listening and posture for extended period of time over the course of many stories, and that would need to be considered in the design of the process. Stakeholders expressed pain from the experience of not being listened to in the past. The question lingered for many, can MCC be curious? Individuals named this in relationship to the necessary work of rebuilding trust. “You have to rebuild trust so that people are willing to tell you their story.” Some also mentioned the need for all parties to engage in this posture, including both the organization and the harmed individuals, affirming that, to be successful, everyone involved must believe the best of the other and work at choosing to not be enemies.

Transparency

THEMES OF: A DEFICIT OF TRUST & A CALL TO VALUES & POOR PROCESSES

Repeatedly, stakeholders reflected on the paradoxical need for transparency and confidentiality. Transparency is needed for individuals to trust the process – what the process would look like, what the commitments are that come of it, public reports after, etc.

One individual said, “Transparency needs to be really really really over the top...for people to feel they can trust MCC.” One individual suggested this would mean MCC commits to “sharing as much as possible, as opposed to as little as possible.” Stakeholders experienced harm in the past due to a lack of transparency and exclusion of individuals in processes, so the request is for MCC to be as transparent as possible in the implementation of a listening space. Reporting was also named as an aspect of transparency. Some very concrete suggestions were made, including a clear report at the end naming what was heard and committing to next steps publicly, an Ombudsman or some kind of outside evaluative process that could offer a third-party report of how they’re doing with the changes promised, and a report to show advances made, a year after the listening space has closed. It was also named numerous times that transparency would require that parties external to MCC, with autonomy and independence, be those reporting.

Clarity

THEMES OF: A DEFICIT OF TRUST & A CALL TO VALUES & POOR PROCESSES

Almost every single stakeholder somehow expressed the need for very clear expectations in a listening process. There was a general call for MCC to be extremely clear on what the listening space would be, and what it would not be. As one individual shared, MCC needs to name, “Who are you gonna invite? What is going to happen with my story if I tell you? What are the repercussions for me? How is this going to be used? Those questions need to be answered in a very, very careful and thoughtful way that rebuilds trust and encourages us to tell our stories.” Without clarity, it will do more harm than good. Part of this clarity, for some, is in defining terms – how will harm, conflict, abuse and harassment be understood in this process? Recognizing there is potential for harm in listening spaces, how will harm be held – both that of the perpetrator, as well as the victim? Furthermore, many requested MCC name the kinds of things is MCC open to doing, in response to the listening space, and what things are they not open to doing, at the beginning. Stating these things up front would provide a good launching pad for a listening space.

Investigation

THEMES OF: A DEFICIT OF TRUST & A CALL TO VALUES & POOR PROCESSES

The question was repeatedly asked by stakeholders, whether MCC would be open to investigations before, after, or alongside, the listening space. For some stakeholders, a third-party investigation is the only way forward – a necessary step towards truth-telling, with the selection of that third party being subject to victim’s approval. For others, investigations were named as important follow-up actions to experiences shared in a listening space. Some discussed the legal responsibility of investigation in cases of safeguarding, while others imagined some kind of established criteria for the process that could trigger further

investigation. Still other stakeholders reflected on the complication of investigations, expressing doubt that they lead to meaningful systemic change and highlighting the conflict of interest any third party contractor has, in being contracted by the institution. Amid these complications, most stakeholders expect at least openness to further investigation. Without that, there is significant concern about a listening space. Furthermore, stakeholders agreed that a key goal of any investigation should be to discover and expose the patterns that exist between different experiences of harm, as they relate to MCC, rather than separate investigations into each individual case. A few individuals suggested an audit could respond to these needs without individual investigations.

DESCRIBING THE DETAILS

As stakeholders shared reflections on a possible listening space, it was evident that each one had an image in their mind of what it would look like. This image undeniably influenced how they approached the interview, and the questions asked them. When asked to describe what they imagine a listening space to look like, various logistical considerations arose.

Preparation

To be done well, many named the need for good and thorough preparation, both for individuals who would share, and for individuals who would be listening, including training on power and safety for participants, shuttle diplomacy on the part of facilitators before an encounter would happen, definition of who would be in the room in each case, training for listeners to recognize if they are feeling defensive and tools for dealing with that. It was suggested that this preparation be required.

Time & Resources

Some stakeholders suggested the need for a clear timeframe for the implementation of a listening space, while the majority highlighted the importance of not rushing. Two individuals suggested a listening space be permanent, so that this kind of learning and accountability could be built into the very structures of how MCC works. Many named the importance of the organic spread of information, how people may not come forward initially, and then will see positive effects on others who have done so, and they will want to come forward later. These comments suggested that trust cannot be rushed, and that time will make the process stronger. Some mentioned the logistical implications of working with different time zones, accommodating for working people's schedules, and the potential size of a listening space. Several individuals reflected on their overwhelm at the vastness of the task. Financial considerations were also mentioned, with a consensus between stakeholders that a well-done listening space would be expensive. At the same time, it was stated by many that they

believe the short-term financial loss would translate into a long-term gain for MCC. One individual said, “it’s going to cost money. It’s going to cost time. And MCC could come out a lot stronger and with more integrity.”

Multicultural component

Given MCC’s worldwide nature, a listening space must adequately respond to the needs of different cultures. Numerous stakeholders specifically highlighted the need to assure accessibility for individuals who served as National Staff. Some shared insights on the ways power dynamics will affect the ability of people to come forward, and how cultural competence will be essential to a successful process. Various stakeholders affirmed that inequalities and power/privilege imbalances in the global context, or in MCC, are reason for more rigor in a process. Suggestions mentioned for how to improve the cultural competence of a listening process included the importance of having various language accessibilities, the use of current MCC Area structures to disseminate information, and the inclusion of individuals from various continents and cultures to be part of a consulting/facilitation team.

Method

Related to intercultural competence, numerous stakeholders referenced different methods for doing the listening itself. Most voices affirmed the need for a flexible design that allows for different modalities of storytelling. Some ideas mentioned include multiple ways that people can give feedback and participate, including surveys, a template for different options that people can choose from or blend together, a third-party website so that there’s an honest arm’s length from MCC, and options for both virtual and in-person, as well as individual and group spaces. There was general affirmation that there will not be a one-size-fits-all process and that any process will never meet everyone’s needs. Rather, an effective listening space will learn what people want and build different processes depending on their needs – it would be clear and flexible but not rigid or ambiguous.

PARTICIPATION

Facilitation

Good facilitation and organization of a listening space would be essential for its success. Almost all stakeholders discussed the importance of skilled, external facilitation who would be hired consultants, external to MCC asserting that a listening space must not be MCC-owned – if MCC controls a process, distrust will increase, and it will not be successful. Some suggested a global team of facilitators with focal points in each region. Others proposed that harmed individuals be able to participate in the choice of third party, affirming that it is hard to find the right consultant(s) without it being seen as MCC spearheading it, which is part of

the problem. Opinions varied on whether this person have knowledge of MCC, with some affirming the value of an external facilitator who knows MCC well, while others suggested that the facilitator(s) be individuals who have never worked with MCC and are completely outside the Anabaptist community.

Listeners

It was repeatedly named that who does the listening is critical. Most suggested various levels of MCC leadership be involved in listening, affirming that this would require a very well-written Terms of Reference document and staff with dedicated time and sufficient authority. There was discouragement to third party consultants being the only listeners, as reading a report would land different with MCC leadership than having sat in a space of empathy and heard the stories of individuals firsthand. Executive Directors and Board members were specifically named as important positions that would need to be part of a listening group. At the same time, it was affirmed that storytellers should have a say in who is present to listen – some may want high level leadership and others may not want it. Various comments suggested the importance of other “community members” being part of a listening space, such as long-time MCC partner staff and/or constituency churches.

Harmed individuals

Repeatedly, stakeholders made comments on the implications to harmed individuals in this process, including the emotional drain a listening space would place on them. For many harmed individuals, even talking about a listening space is triggering. Inevitably, some will choose not to, for legitimate reasons. One person reflected, “Maybe they’ve moved on, maybe they don’t want to open a wound. It triggers a lot of things. Maybe people have learned how to live with it or have put it away so that they can go on in life. And it takes so much energy.” Some stakeholders highlighted that a process would need to acknowledge those who opt out. At the same time, a few stakeholders affirmed that the goal would not be to get 100% of harmed individuals coming forward in a listening space because it would be neither realistic, nor necessary for success.

Furthermore, numerous stakeholders highlighted the very little gain harmed individuals would have in a listening space, without investigation or reparation. The question was stated over and over, how will this help harmed individuals?

Lastly, who would be included as a harmed individual was also frequently inquired about. Many stakeholders hoped that the process could be open to current and past staff. Most stakeholders agreed that there should not be a qualification for harm, but that the invitation be wide. A few stakeholders suggested that there be some sort of filter applied by external facilitators to participants to ensure a listening space be fruitful.

REFLECTIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

As I have reflected on the hours of conversations I had with these stakeholders, two things come to the forefront for me: deep gratitude, and cautious hope. I am immensely grateful for the wisdom of each stakeholder, and their willingness to share it with me. Every single conversation was enriching. I do not take for granted the honesty and vulnerability offered to me in these conversations. To each person I spoke with, thank you very much. I pray you feel your voice is represented in the report above.

I also hold cautious hope. I believe there is an opportunity in this moment. While some have been too deeply hurt to see a future for MCC, many of the stakeholders I met with care deeply for the organization and want it to do better, even want to help it do better. The calls from stakeholders for MCC to do something comes from a place of passion rather than disdain. Many are driven to see MCC grow and change. There is cautious hope.

A conundrum: Who is this for?

One of the central tensions in designing a listening space is the question: *Who is this really for?* On the one hand, such a space must serve individual people who have experienced harm. These individuals must be treated with dignity, respect, and care. A meaningful process must be flexible enough to meet their varied needs—needs that are diverse and deeply personal.

At the same time, there is often a larger institutional aim behind listening processes, namely, to help the organization learn, grow, or rebuild trust. That dual purpose creates a real conundrum. If the process is primarily oriented toward institutional benefit, how do we ensure that it does not unintentionally sideline or instrumentalize those who have already been harmed?

This is where the design process must tread carefully. The impulse to frame listening spaces as institutional learning tools is common, but to do so without prioritizing the needs of harmed individuals, risks reproducing the very harm the process is meant to address. A successful model must ask, *what's in it for those who participate*, and demonstrate how their voices are valued in and of themselves, not just as data points or public relations tools.

Even within the small sample size of this listening project, it was clear that many individuals want to share their stories with MCC, even without guarantees of investigation or reparations. That willingness speaks volumes. And yet, the goal cannot be to simply meet that minimum threshold of participation. Others do want investigations and reparations. If this process is to be just and restorative, it must be designed not only to gather stories, but to offer something meaningful in return.

Given this conundrum, the question exists for MCC: what to do? As one stakeholder said, “there is no good solution.” I agree that there is no process that will meet everyone’s needs. At the same time, I agree with various stakeholders who said that something is better than nothing. Given the responses from the stakeholder group in this process, I think a listening space can be an appropriate path forward for MCC, if implemented with rigor, balancing the needs of individuals and those of MCC. The following recommendations outline some of what would need to happen for it to be appropriate and beneficial:

Recommendation #1: Stop and Pivot

To create a meaningful and effective listening space, MCC must take a courageous and humble step: to pause, reflect, and reconsider its current posture. Across many conversations, stakeholders shared a longing for MCC to move away from patterns of defensiveness and guarded communication – postures that have left many feeling unseen, unheard, and unsafe. As it stands, these patterns are viewed as incompatible with a process intended to foster trust, healing, and authentic engagement.

Right now, a gentle but profound shift is needed, from protectiveness to curiosity, from managing outcomes to making space for what might emerge. This begins with a public posture of openness, acknowledging that harm has occurred, recognizing the pain that still lingers, and expressing a genuine willingness to listen without controlling the process or the narrative.

One stakeholder offered a simple but powerful reminder: “This is worthy of so much lamentation.” That lament is not something to fear, but to embrace. Acknowledging harm with honesty and humility creates the kind of sacred ground where trust can begin to grow. It invites those who have been hurt to step forward, not because they are required to, but because they sense that something different is possible.

This is not about perfection. It is about preparing the soil. A posture of lament, paired with openness and transparency, creates the necessary conditions for a listening space to feel safe, trusted, and truly transformative. MCC is not asked to have all the answers, but simply to begin – with courage, humility, and a deep desire to walk this journey faithfully.

Recommendation #2: Go All In

Designing a listening space that fosters healing and builds trust is an act of care, a commitment to relationship, and an opportunity to live out deeply held values. Stakeholders have made clear that such a process cannot be symbolic or surface-level. It must be thoughtfully and fully embraced, designed not only to listen, but to respond with humility, accountability, and tangible change. MCC should go all in and embrace a process that matches the complexity of the needs named above.

A listening space should be both trauma-informed and flexible, offering multiple, voluntary pathways for participation. In-person conversations, anonymous written submissions, virtual sharing, individual and group modalities are all formats to be explored, adapting to people's comfort and context. Safety must remain central. Anonymity and confidentiality should be thoughtfully safeguarded, especially for harmed individuals most vulnerable to re-traumatization or social consequences. Support structures such as access to mental health resources and trusted support persons should be available to ensure participants are not left carrying emotional burdens alone. Additionally, MCC should consider material or symbolic gestures of acknowledgment, including modest reparations, as an expression of respect, recognition for the harm experienced, and gratitude for the invested time of individuals participating.

Acknowledging from the start that the process will not be perfect, and being clear about what it can and cannot do, is essential. It builds trust through honesty – clarity itself is a form of care.

Very importantly, the listening space should be a vehicle for institutional reflection and change. MCC can build trust by being transparent about what outcomes are possible, including actions such as public apologies, staff training, new accountability mechanisms, and policy reform. A final report should clearly summarize what has been heard and name MCC's commitments moving forward, paired with a plan for follow-up and monitoring over time. An external audit should be explored as a parallel action step, to ensure that systemic issues are named and addressed.

The integrity of this process depends deeply on who leads it. A diverse, external facilitation team, representing multiple cultural, geographic, and professional perspectives, should be created to help ensure neutrality, credibility, and cultural relevance. While a few facilitators may bring past knowledge of MCC, most should not be formally tied to the organization. Harmed individuals should be invited to help shape or choose the facilitation team. Distinct roles for this team (e.g., facilitators, coordinators, analysts) are necessary to support the logistical, relational, and strategic needs of the process.

Finally, MCC leadership should demonstrate visible and sustained commitment. A rotating group of leadership staff, board members, and key program staff should participate as listeners – not just reading reports but sitting with stories. Their presence signals to all involved that MCC is not only willing to listen but is open to being changed by what it hears.

In short, to build a listening space that is truly transformative, MCC must go all in. It must approach this process with humility, courage, and a deep commitment to both care and change.

Recommendation #3: Move at the Speed of Trust³

A meaningful listening process cannot be rushed. Trust is not granted automatically – it is built slowly, often through quiet, organic means. Harmed individuals will need time not only to hear about the listening space but also to observe how it is handled before they feel safe enough to participate. The careful and deliberate spread of information, through word of mouth, informal networks, and trusted messengers, plays a critical role in building that trust. If MCC does the hard and necessary work of designing a thoughtful, trauma-informed, and trustworthy process, they must then resist the urge to close it quickly or move too swiftly toward conclusion.

A well-designed listening space will gain traction over time. As more individuals step forward and share, the process becomes richer, more robust, and more reflective of the complexity of experiences. This is not just about collecting enough stories to reach a saturation point for institutional learning; it is about offering sustained empathy, bearing witness to pain, and creating space for people to feel seen, heard, and honored. That kind of care and presence cannot be hurried.

Additionally, if MCC is committed to making this a truly global process, time is even more essential. Reaching international partners, former staff, and volunteers across diverse contexts requires deliberate outreach, careful planning, and culturally sensitive engagement. Creating safe and accessible spaces for global participants will take time and effort.

Ultimately, healing and transformation move at the speed of trust. Rushing the process risks undermining the very trust MCC seeks to rebuild. A slower, more patient timeline is not a delay, it is a commitment to doing this work with integrity, depth, and care.

Recommendation #4: Seize the Moment

Many stakeholders expressed a strong sense that MCC is at a pivotal juncture, one that holds both risk and opportunity. This moment represents a potential turning point in MCC's institutional story. There is growing awareness, especially among younger generations, of the need for transparency, accountability, and honest reckoning. These generations are less inclined toward blind loyalty and more likely to ask hard questions of the organizations they support. The public eye is on MCC, and how the organization responds in this moment will shape its credibility and trustworthiness for years to come.

Stakeholders also noted that MCC is currently undergoing a shift in leadership. This, they suggested, presents a significant opportunity. The new Executive Director of MCC Canada,

³Brown, A. (2017). *Emergent Strategy*. AK Press

the new Board Chair of MCC U.S., and the recently appointed Associate Director for MCC U.S. were all named as individuals who bring fresh perspective and are not entangled in the legacies of past decisions. Their relative newness offers an advantage. They can see the current landscape with clarity and openness, unburdened by defensiveness or long-standing institutional attachments.

Now is the time for courageous action. By seizing this moment, MCC has the chance to model integrity, humility, and faithful responsiveness. MCC can choose to respond with transparency and grace. This is a rare window for transformation. If MCC can meet this moment with authenticity and vision, it may not only repair broken trust but also deepen its relevance and witness for the future.

Recommendation #5: Increase Reach

To embody the spirit of a truly restorative listening space, MCC should make a concerted effort to broaden its reach and welcome a fuller diversity of voices. The initial process highlighted a significant gap in representation, particularly from racially, culturally, and geographically diverse communities. If MCC is to engage in a process that is global, just, and reflective of its communities and staff, this imbalance must be addressed.

This will require thoughtful outreach and investment: multiple language options, culturally appropriate communication, and the active inclusion of underrepresented groups. A diverse facilitation team spanning regions, languages, and lived experiences, can help build trust and remove barriers. Outreach should lean on regional networks and community-based channels to connect with those who may otherwise be missed. At the same time, communication should make clear that participants will engage with independent facilitators, not MCC leadership, reinforcing safety and neutrality.

Additionally, many stakeholders voiced a desire for current MCC staff to be included. If that is not feasible within the broader process, MCC should consider a parallel, staff-focused approach shaped by the same values of safety, reflection, and learning.

Ultimately, the success and impact of the listening process will depend in part on its breadth. A process that includes voices across continents, identities, and relationships to MCC will be not only more robust but also more faithful to MCC's global mission and diverse constituency. This work is not simply a logistical task, it is an act of hospitality. Inclusion must not be an afterthought, it must be an active, central commitment.

CONCLUSION

This report surfaces a complex but critical tension: Can MCC create a listening space that genuinely centers harmed individuals while also serving as a catalyst for institutional accountability and growth? The stakeholders engaged in this process bring deep care, insight, and, even in the face of pain, a hope for something better. They do not speak with one voice, but their collective wisdom paints a clear picture: MCC stands at a crossroads.

There is no perfect process, and the journey ahead will ask much of everyone involved. But the opportunity is real. With humility, transparency, and thoughtful design, a listening space can be a good step forward, rooted not in control or defensiveness, but in curiosity, lament, and the shared hope of something better.

MCC is not alone in this work. Across the organization and beyond, people are ready to support, to share, and to help shape what comes next. This is a chance to act with integrity – to show that healing, accountability, and change are not only possible, but deeply aligned with MCC's values.

The road ahead may be challenging, but it is also full of possibility. MCC has a meaningful opportunity to offer a witness of humility, courage, and care to its staff and constituency. The voices in this report do not demand perfection; they call for transformation rooted in compassion and integrity. The invitation is simple yet profound: to slow down, to truly listen, and to respond with care. This moment is not about having every answer; it's about taking the next faithful step together. The path forward begins with the willingness to listen well, and the courage to act.