

Church and Society (#2 Bright Lemon)

Second Partial Report
of the Church and Society Committee

Re: Rev. Dr. Charles Martin'sⁱ 1917 Eastern District Synod Resolution

WHEREAS, in 1917 the Rev. Dr. Charles Martin presented a memorial to the Eastern District Synod (appendum I) regarding the wrongs of slavery in our country and the indifference of the Moravian Church to the suffering of black persons, calling the Synod to:

- “express its indignation against the horror of Wacoⁱⁱ, the inhumanity and savagery of Memphisⁱⁱⁱ, the shameful, brutality, and fiendishness of the East St. Louis riots^{iv} and the race riots of Chester, PA^v;”
- “recommend to the Church in America the adoption of some constructive plans, educational, social and ecclesiastical efforts which may help to ward off those bloody racial conflicts that recurrently outrage the Christian conscience of the nation;” and
- “urge upon the Government legislation making lynching of every kind and form a Federal crime;” to assist the black person in his/her demand for social justice; to fight against segregation; to apply whole-hearted efforts to secure the rights granted by the Constitution of the United States; and

WHEREAS, the Martin memorial was approved by the 1917 Eastern District Synod, and noted in the minutes, with the resolves also noted in a later section under the heading, “Racial Conflicts,” but the church did not follow up with any statements, plans, or actions; and

WHEREAS, our Holy Scriptures claim that all persons are created in the image of God (Gen 1:27) and continue to call us to justice as a public expression of “love thy neighbor”, as seen among the prophets (Is 48:6, Amos 5:24, Micah 6:8) including Jesus’ own mission statement in Luke 4:18-19 that he was anointed “to bring good news to the poor, to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor,” referencing the year of Jubilee that allowed for an economic, cultural, and environmental leveling and reset within society; and

WHEREAS, the Northern and Southern Province Synods of 1998 affirmed an Interprovincial Faith and Order “Statement on Racism and the Church” (appendum II); and the 2018 Northern Province Synod reaffirmed this decision, as an official position of the two provinces of the Moravian Church in America, which aligned our provinces with the 1957 Ground of

the Unity Statement that “We oppose any discrimination in our midst because of ethnic origin, sex, or social standing, and we regard it as a commandment of the Lord to bear public witness to this and to demonstrate by word and deed that we are brothers and sisters in Christ”; and

WHEREAS, the Northern Province of the Moravian Church (MCNP) has approved legislation on multiple justice issues at our provincial synods, most recently at the 2018 MCNP Synod related to immigration, violence and responsible weapon ownership, elimination of racism, inclusion of persons of all gender identities, and awareness of violence against women and has particularly worked over the past inter-synod period to promote racial justice; and

WHEREAS, resolutions have been passed by the Synod of the Worldwide Unity regarding issues of global justice, most recently in 2016 affirming the equality of men and women in God’s eyes; and

WHEREAS, the 2018 Synod of the Moravian Church Northern Province affirmed the historic position of the Moravian Church as stated in the Letter to the Worldwide Unity from the Unity Board dated January 15, 2018, that: “In the very core of Moravian understanding of humanity, the God-given equality of all people is fundamental;” and condemned in the strongest terms racism and discrimination in all its forms; and

WHEREAS, there continues to exist great disparity in the opportunities available for persons of color and violence against them persists, as we have seen in the senseless murders of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, Ahmaud Arbery, Tyree Nichols and others; therefore, be it

RESOLVED: (3) the 2023 Northern Province Synod calls the church to honor the voice and legacy of the Rev. Dr. Charles Martin and reaffirms his 1917 resolution regarding racial injustice and violence in his time and expresses regret for the failure of the church to act on this resolution following its approval by the 1917 Eastern District Synod; and be further

RESOLVED: (4) the 2023 Northern Province Synod calls on our church to continue to express its indignation at the horrors of racial injustice and violence that persist in U.S. and Canada more than 100 years after Rev. Dr. Charles Martin called on the church to take action for change; and be it further

RESOLVED: (5) the 2023 Northern Province Synod commits to applying whole-hearted efforts to challenge and end the racial injustice and violence of our day, including asking the Racial Justice Team to continue to educate our churches about racial injustice in U.S. and Canada, and how to challenge political, social, economic, and ecclesiastical systems that perpetuate a culture of racism.

Respectfully submitted,
 Committee on Church and Society
 Chair, Marian Boyle Rohloff
 Secretary, Brenda Hoelman
 June 23, 2023

ⁱ Moravian Church in America, Eastern District. "Journal of the First Synod of the Eastern District of the American Province of the Moravian Church or Unitas Fratrum." 1917, pp. 59-60. Moravian Archives, Bethlehem, Pennsylvania. The three "Resolved" statements are also found under the heading "Racial Conflicts," p. 67. [Thanks to Tom McCullough of the Moravian Archives for calling attention to this resolution.]

ⁱⁱ In 1905 Sank Majors was arrested in Waco for raping a white woman; he had a white attorney who had sufficient evidence to prove his innocence, but a jury found him guilty and sentenced him to prison. An angry mob broke into the jail on August 8, 1905, hanged him from a bridge and then shot him. In 1916 Jesse Washington was accused of raping and killing a white woman. Someone had said they had seen him near where the murder occurred. After 4 minutes a jury called him guilty. An angry mob charged the courthouse, mutilated his body and nearly 15,000 people watched and cheered as he was burned alive and then dragged through the streets of Waco.

ⁱⁱⁱ On March 9, 1892 three black grocers in Memphis were seized from the jail and brutally lynched without trial. White grocers complained that their store was decreasing white profits and a white mob attacked the store of the black grocers. When 3 white men were wounded, the black grocers were arrested. In May 1917, Ell Persons, a black woodcutter in Memphis, accused of killing a white woman, was grabbed by a mob, chained, doused with gasoline, and set on fire, with a crowd of thousands cheering.

^{iv} From July 1 -3, 1917 a smoldering labor dispute in East St. Louis, IL, located across the river from its counterpart in Missouri, turned deadly as rampaging whites began brutally beating and killing African-Americans. The official death toll was 39 black individuals and 9 whites, but many believe that more than 100 African Americans were killed.

^v Also in July, 1917 racial tensions were increasing in Chester, PA and were ignited when a white man was killed by a black man. In revenge, gangs of white men roamed the city killing any black person. As blacks began defending themselves, the violence escalated over 6 days. In the end 7 people were dead and 28 injured. Police arrested both black and white and worked to prevent any lynchings.

ADDENDUM I

[This is a transcription of an introductory sentence followed by a resolution presented by Rev. Dr. Charles Martin to the Eastern District Synod in 1917. It was adopted by Synod.]
 Memorial.

The following memorial was presented by Bro. Martin, and adopted by Synod upon motion of Bro. M. W. Leibert:

WHEREAS: The Creator and Preserver of the world slumbers not nor sleeps, is not slack concerning His promises or rewards;

WHEREAS: He maintains a Paradise of Bliss for the Faithful who love and serve their fellowmen, even the most despised or degraded, and a Debtor's Prison where the last farthing is exacted from the man who ignores or forgets his huge indebtedness;

WHEREAS: He keeps a Record of Dereliction of Duty and Abuse of Privileges which the world becomes alarmingly conscious of at intervals like the following: