



MORAVIAN CHURCH IN AMERICA, SOUTHERN PROVINCE

Provincial Elders' Conference

459 South Church Street ▪ Winston-Salem, NC 27101-5314
(336) 725-5811 ▪ (888) 725-5811 ▪ fax: (336) 723-1029 ▪ pec@mcsp.org

August 13, 2021

Messages from the Provincial Elders' Conference

August 13 is the festival day in our Moravian Church when we remember the powerful, reconciling, and unifying experience of the Holy Spirit that brought our diverse church together in the summer of 1727. This is considered beginning of the renewed Moravian Church. From that empowering moment our forebears moved outward in a sustained mission effort to share the Good News of Jesus Christ in word and deed to the far corners of the world.

Today the Provincial Elders' Conference shares the following two statements: "When Moravians Disagree," and "Why Moravians are talking about Racism."

We invite pastors and church leaders to share these messages with the members of our congregations and fellowships, particularly as we look forward to the 2022 Provincial Synod.

When Moravians Disagree ...

We follow defined and agreed ways of working to resolve our differences.

This includes such things as: taking our concerns to the proper person or group to address them, speaking and working directly with the person or group with which we have a disagreement (not going behind their backs, or broadcasting to others), and following what is stated in our church rules and regulations, the Book of Order of the Province, and the Church Order of the Unitas Fratrum of our world-wide church (COUF).

If a group within our Province disagrees with a decision made by the Synod, the COUF (# 601) is quite clear about the steps to take:

In the case of the Provinces governed by a Synod, the individual members, congregations, institutions and boards shall have the right of appeal to their Provincial Board. The final court of appeal in these cases shall be their Provincial Synod.

This is the defined and agreed way. What is not appropriate is to ignore what the Church Order says and the role of our Provincial Synod in making decisions for our Province, and to campaign for the leadership of other Provinces to have them intervene in a disagreement.

We treat one another with respect and love as brothers and sisters in Christ.

Our Moravian Covenant for Christian Living defines expectations for how we behave with one another. [See the MCCL, paragraphs 13, 14, and 29.] Even in (or especially in) our disagreements we are called to "cherish love as of prime importance", to "be eager to maintain the unity of the Church," to not "despise, slander or otherwise injure anyone," to "strive to manifest love towards all people, to treat them in a kind and friendly manner."

More than 25 years ago, the Synod of 1995 recognized that we are not in agreement about matters related to homosexuality. The Synod of 2018 also recognized that we have differing viewpoints.

Both Synods called on us to live up to the Moravian Covenant in how we speak about and treat one another as we work with our differing understandings and interpretation of Scripture and are in conversation about human sexuality.

We believe it is possible to have strong disagreements without labeling, judging, engaging in personal attacks, or using hurtful and divisive words about brothers and sisters in Christ. We invite everyone to consider: Are we treating others as we would like to be treated ourselves? In our words, action, and attitudes, are we following the Moravian Covenant of Christian Living?

We work hard to maintain the unity we have in Christ, and avoid division and polarization.

Our Moravian Covenant for Christian Living says this:

We will be eager to maintain the unity of the Church, realizing that God has called us from many and varied backgrounds, we recognize the possibility of disagreements or differences. Often these differences enrich the Church, but sometimes they divide. We consider it to be our responsibility to demonstrate within the congregational life the unity and togetherness created by God who made us one. How well we accomplish this will be a witness to our community as to the validity of our faith. [*Paragraph 14*]

These words are a direct challenge to what is currently happening in our world, in our country, in our government, and in our civil society. Disagreements or differences quickly and sadly lead in the direction of division. People consider only their own interests and ignore the interests of others.

These words tell us: the Church is to be a sign of the “unity and togetherness created by God who made us one.” The Church is the community in which, as the Apostle Paul wrote, “Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others.” (Phil. 2:4)

As we prepare for the 2022 Synod, the following statement from COUF #403 is vitally important:

In representing the interests of their electors or their office, members of Synod must not lose sight of the interests of the Province and of the Unity as a whole. Members of Synod vote according to their own conviction and are not bound by instructions of their constituents given beforehand.

This is foundational to what a Synod is: a prayerful gathering of delegates who have not been instructed what to do, or selected or pressured to decide matters in a predetermined way. Rather they have been entrusted to be open to the leading of the Holy Spirit as Synod – together as a body -- deliberates, discerns and decides the priorities and direction for our Province.

We must not let this spiritually-grounded gathering of the church be or become what is on display in our current political environment: parties, factions, platforms, campaigning, lobbying, rallying, pressuring, creating litmus test issues, labeling, attacking, etc.

Why Moravians are talking about Racism

Since the 1740s, and until the 1860s, the Moravian Church in North America and its members participated in the shameful institution of chattel slavery. The founding and development of Salem, and our early “country” congregations included the enslaved labor of men, women and children, some of whom became church members. Church leaders and members saw no contradiction between meeting the needs of those who were brothers and sisters in Christ, and yet remained in servitude.

The Synod of 1998 adopted a “*Statement on Racism and the Church*,” which declared that “racism is a sin, because it contradicts the teaching of Jesus and violates the known will of God.”

The statement called the church to:

- set an example and show the way for a society which cries out for racial healing;
- to match our fine statements with worthy deeds;
- to confess the sinfulness of our failure to practice what we preach about discrimination;
- to examine our personal and corporate life and repent; and,
- under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, to turn from our racism and take a new direction in keeping with the teachings of God in Christ Jesus.

The 2018 Synod recognized that, “it is apparent that the work of naming and dismantling racism in our society continues to be an urgent need, and that further confession, repentance and reconciling work among ourselves and in our witness to our community is also needed.” Synod reaffirmed and renewed the work of the Moravian Team for Reconciliation “to develop resources, materials, experiences and programs to assist congregations and the Province in engaging the tasks to which the *Statement* calls the church.”

In our society dealing with racism is politicized. Words like “wokeness,” “Black Lives Matter,” or “cancel culture” become loaded and argued about. Even to the point where some are making the false claim that if you talk about racism that makes you a racist.

We Moravians are talking about racism not to be “political”. We are talking about racism because of the good news revealed in Jesus Christ, our failure to live up to the Gospel values we profess, and the call of our Synods to name racism as sin and to work to live up to who we say we are as a community of faith.