

## **Report to the Synod of 2022**

### **From the Lutheran-Moravian Coordinating Committee**

ZOOM meeting held November 16, 2021

12 noon – 2PM Central Time

In attendance on November 16, 2021 were: Earl Goulbourne, Tammie Rinker, and Willie Israel (Moravian). Lutheran (ELCA) representatives were Guy Erwin, Kristen Opalinski, Kathryn Lohre, and Chris Thomforde, who served as moderator. The devotions and theme for our November 16 meeting centered around a reading from 1 Samuel 3:9 (“Speak, Lord, for your servant is listening”).

The mission of this committee is to enhance and strengthen the relationship between the Moravian and Lutheran denominations within the larger unity of followers of Christ in this country, intentionally seeking ways to glorify God through our lives and actions.

This meeting served as an opportunity to “restart” the work of the Lutheran-Moravian Coordinating Committee, after more than a year of inactivity due to the Covid 19 pandemic. Following a time of introduction, there was an opportunity to review the earlier work of the committee.

In the bulk of the discussion, we considered answers to questions such as: What has been the work of this committee in the recent past? What is the status of the work of this committee within the framework of our respective denominations? And where do we go from here?

The past work of the committee has been principally focused on dialog. Representatives from the ELCA and the Northern and Southern Provinces of the Moravian Church have met to discuss their respective histories, their theological statements of understanding, and their practices and ordinances. Our Bishop Wayne Burkett has attended these meetings, as well as Bishop Samuel Zeiser of the ELCA. The outcome of the discussions drew attention to the discovery that differences between the two traditions are more about “how” the Gospel is lived out in each community, rather than “what” each community of faith believes and confesses.

We learned that the Lutherans have been consistently involved with the work of the Episcopal church in the USA and Canada, as well as the United Church of Canada. There is need for discernment on such questions as: How do we live out the visible unity of the Church? What are the needs of the world we are called to serve? And How might the church respond for the sake of unity as well as justice and peace?

Of the many challenges/opportunities facing the Moravian Church, one that stood out at our meeting was the issue of racial reconciliation. Particularly in the Southern Province, we have intentionally focused on this issue for the past several years. There is ongoing work by the Moravian Team for Racial, Cultural, and Ethnic Reconciliation. In addition, attention was drawn

to historical research by Rev. Dr. Frank Crouch, as well as to presentations at clergy gatherings by the Rev. Dr. David Hooker of Notre Dame University, on inclusion and community-building, Lutheran and Moravian members of the committee have agreed that racial injustice is an ongoing issue that affects both of our faith communities. We agreed that we need to recognize and confess our past and present sins, and change our present behavior of omission and commission. The discussion went beyond simple recognition that inter-racial tensions still exist. We also need to recognize our own participation, as the church and as individuals, in past and present sins; and then work to bring about change.

When we considered “What happens next?”, there was an outpouring of possibilities. Guy Erwin has suggested that, in addition to continued work for reconciliation with descendants of former enslaved peoples and with those who are currently disenfranchised, we need to also look at current and historical interactions of Lutheran and Moravian Christians with the indigenous peoples of this country.

This work might go beyond the study and discussion phase, into working toward a time to meet with spiritual representatives of historically disenfranchised peoples. This time could offer an opportunity for story-telling, discussion, confession, worship, and a new start as we go forward in Christ, respecting each other’s cultures and histories.

**In John 17:11, Jesus prayed to his Father: “... Protect them by the power of your name, so that they may be one as we are one.”**

**Respectfully submitted by the Rev. Willie Israel**