

The Mission Society of the Southern Province Report to the 2022 Provincial Synod

Mission, Purpose and Values

On April 19, 1923, the Mission Society was organized as the Foreign Missionary Society of the Moravian Church, South. The preamble of the original charter stated that the first members were “desirous of forming a Society for the humane and charitable purpose of the general diffusion of Christianity, and aiding and furthering the mission work of the Moravian Church, or Unitas Fratrum.” The current by-laws of the Society further state, “We have no view or aim other than the communication of the knowledge of Jesus Christ, and esteem it a praiseworthy privilege to support that work to the best of our abilities, being compelled to it by the love of Christ.” The Mission Society therefore strives to be faithful to that vision as it seeks to support the mission of spreading the message of Jesus Christ throughout the world.

Responsibilities

Followers of Jesus Christ are called to fulfill the Great Commission to “Go to all peoples everywhere and make them my disciples.” (Mt. 28:19) The Mission Society recognizes that mission work on behalf Christ takes place both locally and throughout the world. The Society offers financial support to individuals who have answered the call to serve Christ as full-time missionaries, and also supports individuals and congregations which commit to short-term mission trips and mission camps. Additionally, the Mission Society provides financial support for the work of the Interprovincial Board of World Mission and responds to special requests from around the Unity. The Mission Society also endeavors to provide education and updates about Moravian mission work to the congregations and members of the Province and encourages and offers ways to participate in mission.

Summary of Activities

The past four years have provided many challenges for the Mission Society. Foremost among those challenges was, of course, the COVID-19 pandemic. During the past two years, several annual activities were either cancelled or altered. Meetings of the Board were held virtually through Zoom. In-person fundraising was impossible; however, the Society is pleased to report that it met in full the financial commitments made to all full-time missionaries.

The Mission Society supports eleven missionary couples working in the Middle East, Africa, Central America, Asia, Eastern Europe, and the United States. In the past four years the Mission Society has provided these missionaries \$184,500, plus an additional \$36,218 received as special offerings at Mission Lovefeasts.

Each year through the Partners in Mission program, several individuals are awarded grants to help defray short-term mission trip expenses or the cost of attending Laurel Ridge mission camps. In 2018 the Society granted \$12,750 to assist 116 individuals and in 2019 \$11,225 to assist 98 individuals. In 2020 \$2,400 was distributed to only eight people. In 2021 37 individuals received \$1,850 in support. In total, the Mission Society provided 259 individuals \$28,225 in grants from 2018 through 2021. The Society hopes that 2022 will see a return to pre-COVID levels of requests for grants to fund short-term mission trips and mission camps.

The Mission Society traditionally holds two major events each year: the Mission Awareness Dinner in June and the Mission Lovefeast in November.

The Mission Awareness Dinner celebrates the mission efforts of the Moravian Church. It usually includes a meal prepared by the host congregation, special music, and a program presented by an individual or group recently involved in mission work. At the dinner, the Society recognizes groups which have taken mission trips that year and commissions those who are planning to make mission trips in the ensuing months.

In 2018 a Mission Awareness Dinner was held at Fairview Moravian Church. The Rev. Chris Thore, Gary Locklear of the North Carolina Methodist Conference, and Kenneth Langford, chief mechanic with NASCAR, presented a program entitled “Ground Effect—A Collaborative Mission of Recovery in Lumberton, N.C.” In 2019 Hope Moravian Church hosted the Mission Awareness Dinner, which focused on Moravian mission work in Cuba. Following a meal of traditional Cuban food, Bishop Armando Rusindo shared an inspiring presentation about the Cuban Moravian Church and its work. Because of COVID, the Society was unable to hold Mission Awareness Dinners in 2020 and 2021. In July 2021, in lieu of the usual event, a Mission Awareness Festival was held outdoors at Olivet Moravian Church with the congregation providing a hotdog dinner. While observing necessary health precautions, various mission organizations and individuals shared displays highlighting their local and international work.

The annual Mission Lovefeast is the highlight of the Mission Society’s programming. In addition to a traditional lovefeast, the event includes wonderful music, an inspiring message, and an informative review of the year’s activities. The Mission Lovefeast coincides with the Society’s annual membership emphasis. Envelopes are distributed so that attendees may join, renew their membership, or become lifetime members of the Society. They may also contribute to a special love offering that is distributed to full-time missionaries. In 2018 Friedland Moravian Church hosted the Lovefeast, featuring a mission Singstunde compiled by the Rev. Nola Knouse and Bishop Sam Gray. The 2019 Lovefeast was held at Christ Moravian Church. Michael and Ceci Tesh shared an inspiring presentation about the Ray of Hope ministry in Kenya. The 2021 Lovefeast was postponed until January 2022. Friedberg Moravian Church hosted the event, attended by about 20 persons and also shared virtually. In addition to music, the online program featured video presentations from several full-time missionaries and the Board of World Mission. While this was a successful event, the Society hopes in-person Lovefeast attendance will soon return to pre-pandemic numbers.

The Mission Society sends out an informative newsletter, Onward, every other month. In years past it was mailed to nearly 400 recipients. In recent years the majority of subscriptions are fulfilled digitally.

As previously stated, the Mission Society financially supports various mission endeavors around the world. In the past four years the Society has sent \$100,000 to the Interprovincial Board of World Mission to help further their work with their partner provinces. The Society has given \$8,000 to ARMF (Armando Rusindo Mission Foundation) to support the Moravian work in Cuba, \$8,000 to the Sierra Leone Moravian mission work, \$8,000 to the Moravian mission in

Peru, and \$30,000 to the Ahuas Medical Clinic in Honduras. In addition the Mission Society has responded to several special requests totaling \$16,470.

Since the 2018 Provincial Synod, the Mission Society has given \$419,413 to assist the mission endeavors of committed servants. The Lord has truly blessed the efforts of the Society. The Board is grateful for the faithful support of the members and others who have generously given to the work of the Mission Society. The Mission Society is ready and willing to respond to situations of definite need, as far as our funds allow.

In 2020 the Mission Society Board reluctantly said farewell to Sheila Beaman, who faithfully served the Board as administrative assistant for over 30 years. The Board is grateful for Sheila's dedicated and enthusiastic service and genuine love for mission work. However, as the Lord closes one door, he opens another. The Board is pleased to welcome a new administrative assistant, Jennifer Boles, a member of Friedberg Moravian Church. Jennifer is ably supporting the Mission Society Board in its work.

Future Direction and Opportunities

As stated at the beginning of this report, The Mission Society has “no view or aim other than the communication of the knowledge of Jesus Christ, and esteem it a praiseworthy privilege to support that work to the best of our abilities, being compelled to it by the love of Christ.” As it seeks to spread the message of Jesus Christ across the globe, the Mission Society must be ready to respond to new mission challenges in a changing world. May Christ's love inspire every Christian to share His message everywhere, at all times!