

# Resolution

Subject: Continuing the Journey of Reconciliation  
From: Advocacy & Justice Committee

**WHEREAS**, in 1738 the Moravian Church began the practice of “owning” enslaved people at the mission on St. Thomas, continued the practice on other Caribbean islands and in America—both North and South, defended the practice theologically as part of God’s created order, and did not stop the practice of enslavement in the United States until 1865; and

**WHEREAS**, after the abolition of slavery, until 1956 and 1968, the Synods of the Southern Province of the Moravian Church in America did not officially oppose slavery’s legacies of racial segregation and discrimination among our congregations and within society; and

**WHEREAS**, the Northern and Southern Province Synods of 1998 affirmed an Interprovincial Faith and Order “Statement on Racism and the Church” (*appended below*) 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 Synod of 2006 resolved “the Southern Province expresses its regret and apologizes to the African American community for the past participation of the Moravian Church in the institution of slavery,” and endorsed “a mandate to the Provincial Elders’ Conference to expand their efforts in respect to racial reconciliation, the elimination of institutional racism, and the fostering of diversity in churches of the Southern Province; and

**WHEREAS**, a Moravian Team for Racial Reconciliation was formed, worked between 2006 and 2012 to further these goals, and was reconvened in 2018 by the Provincial Elders’ Conference (PEC); and

**WHEREAS**, since the adoption of the “Statement” in 1998, 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; and

**WHEREAS**, the sin of racism is not limited to one “race, kindred, or tongue,” the sin of slavery and its legacies continue in many forms, and our need for reconciliation extends across all cultures and ethnicities; and

**WHEREAS**, both the Northern and Southern PECs have appointed working groups to lead the Church’s work toward reconciliation and justice—the Racial Justice Team (RJT) in the North and the Moravian Team for Racial, Cultural, and Ethnic Reconciliation in the South (MTR)—and in the last four years, the RJT and MTR have (independently and together) developed and offered publications, programs, worship opportunities, and other events within and between the Provinces; and

**WHEREAS**, the MTR specifically developed the “Continuing the Journey of Racial Reconciliation” booklet, offered “Salem Walks” for experiences of historical understanding and spiritual growth; and updated resources on the Southern Province website for public witness and education; and

**WHEREAS**, on August 13, 2021, the Southern Province PEC issued two statements addressing racism and other matters of controversy—“When Moravians Disagree,” and “Why Moravians are talking about Racism”—which concluded: “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”; therefore be it

**RESOLVED, that** the Synod of 2022 reaffirms the 1998 “Statement on Racism and the Church” as the official position of the Moravian Church, Southern Province, and directs the Provincial Elders’ Conference to publish and commend it to our congregations, fellowships, boards and agencies for study, discussion and implementation in the life and ministry of the church; and be it

**RESOLVED, that** this Synod supports the renewed work of the Moravian Team for Racial, Cultural and Ethnic Reconciliation (MTR) to develop resources, materials, experiences and programs

1. to assist individuals, congregations, and the Province in engaging the tasks of examination, dialogue, confession, repentance, and action with respect to racial justice; and
2. to encourage faithful responses to God’s call for justice and fulfillment of the Southern Province’s commitments outlined in the 1998 “Statement on Racism and the Church;” and be it

**RESOLVED, that** at least one member of the PEC will serve as a member of the MTR; and

**RESOLVED, that** congregations, through their church board(s), will report to the Provincial Elders’ Conference on an annual basis until the next Synod how they are using and implementing

the “Statement on Racism and the Church” and are utilizing the resources developed by the MTR; and be it

**RESOLVED, that** in the next inter-synodal period, the PEC will initiate intentional conversation among the diverse congregations and populations of the Southern Province, as well as intentional conversation with one or more churches or denominations of diverse racial, cultural and ethnic membership to explore cooperation in mission and service and to “bear public witness and to demonstrate by word and deed that we are brothers and sisters in Christ”; and be it

**RESOLVED, that** during the inter-synodal period 2022-2026, up to \$2,000 per year (a total of \$8,000) be available through the Provincial budgeting process to support the work of the Moravian Team for Racial, Cultural and Ethnic Reconciliation, under the oversight of the Provincial Elders’ Conference, which shall bring a report of activities to the Synod of 2026.

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### **A Statement on Racism and the Church<sup>1</sup>**

Racism has been defined as an institutionalized socioeconomic system or a pattern of behavior “which divides people into groups identified by characteristics of origin or color for the purpose of establishing and perpetuating, on the basis of those characteristics, the subordinate status and the denigration and exploitation of one group to the benefit of the other.”<sup>2</sup>

The church must declare that racism is sin. The Moravian Catechism describes sin as disobedience to the known will of God.<sup>3</sup> God’s will is made known to us in Jesus’ teaching that we are to love God and love our neighbor as we love ourselves (Mark 12:29-31). Racism then is sin, because it contradicts the teaching of Jesus and violates the known will of God.

The sin of racism is also evidenced in its violation of God’s call for the members of Christ’s church to be reconciled to God and one another and to be engaged in a ministry of reconciliation in the world (2 Corinthians 5:16-21). Contrarily, racism separates and perpetuates divisions, thus denying the unity of the church proclaimed in Holy Scripture: “As many of you as were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus. And if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham’s offspring, heirs according to the promise” (Galatians 3:27-30). Through its struggle with the issue of including outsiders, the early Christian church discovered that God shows no partiality (Acts 10:34) and that Christians are called upon to do likewise (James 2:1).

The Ground of the Unity states, “The Unitas Fratrum recognizes no distinction between those who are one in the Lord Jesus Christ. We are called to testify that God in Jesus Christ brings His people out of ‘every race, kindred and tongue’ into one body, pardons sinners beneath the cross and brings them together. We oppose any discrimination in our midst because of race or 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.”<sup>4</sup> Further, the Moravian Covenant

for Christian Living teaches that Moravians oppose any discrimination based on color, gender, race, creed, or land of origin.<sup>5</sup> The Moravian Church, despite sound biblical teaching and clear statements of belief, has, from time to time, demonstrated the values of the surrounding world and thus has denied the very affirmation it professes. It has been affected by the very racism that is contrary to our beliefs.

As evidence, we identify:

- An absence of racial diversity in some areas of the workplace and the classroom;
- The disproportionate number of black and biracial churches that have been arson victims;
- The segregation apparent in our church's worship life and congregational life in general, and the tendency of congregations and Provincial Elders' Conferences to extend calls only to pastors of the same race as the congregation;
- The absence of widespread dialogue on the issue and the resulting congregational inaction to overcome the effects of racism in our society in housing, health care, and equitable salaries; and
- The inability of the majority to hear the expression of frustration, pain, and anger on the part of minority peoples or even to recognize the hostility growing out of their experiences in our society.

The church of Jesus is called to be salt and light:

- 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.

Thus the church shall practice racial inclusion in every area of its congregational and denominational life; and individual Christians and congregations shall work actively to identify and eliminate the patterns of discrimination both within the church and within society at large.

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