



# PROVINCIAL TIES

July 2023



— LATEST NEWS & EVENTS —

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## What Is Essential? (Part 2)

Our spiritual ancestors (the Ancient Unitas Fratrum) organized a way of describing their core spiritual beliefs as the “essentials, ministerials, and incidentals.” I invite you to ponder why our tradition chose this mode of expression and its relevance for Moravian faith and practice today.

In part one, I noted that our spiritual ancestors organized this expression in three concentric circles. At the core are the essentials. Next are the critical resources that lead to experiencing and understanding the essentials (“the ministerials”). And finally, the features of church community life which form the outer circle (“the incidentals”). These three elements are not separate circles. They remain connected. Everything about the ministerials and incidentals are nested in the essentials. But what makes up the ministerials

and incidentals are not essentials in themselves. It is the relationship with God in Jesus Christ that stands alone at the center as the essential.

Why choose this mode of expression? As stated in the Moravian Catechism: “The founders of the Ancient Unity had to explain why they rejected some teachings and practices of the Roman Catholic Church and did not reject others.” (“The Moravian Catechism” - IBOC: 2020, p. 6). By stating the “essentials” it also helped them explain why they could cooperate and collaborate with other Protestant communities while retaining their identity. “They believed that without the ‘essential’ things, a church cannot be a church, and if a church has these ‘essential’ beliefs, it is a church even if it has practices and principles that are different from other churches.” (p. 6) Believing and living out these “essentials” gives witness that we are followers of Jesus.

There are lots of directions one can go at this point to explore the “why” behind the way the “essentials” were organized. Just remember what remains at the center - a relationship with God through Jesus Christ (personally and corporately). See: The Theology of the Czech Brethren by Craig Atwood and Faith, Hope, Love, by Daniel Crews.

What stands out for me in the present moment is that this is all about relationship with God. Our ancestors did not attempt to quantify or qualify this with doctrinal statements, but with a road map for living into relationship with God and with fellow believers. God provides redeeming quality through God’s actions of creating, redeeming, and sustaining. On our part, we are called to respond with actions of faith, love, and hope in every decision we make (personally and collectively).

This map also gives us a clear guide for responding to God, life situations, and partnering with fellow followers of Christ in the work of reconciling the world to God (2 Corinthians 5:16-21). Our spiritual ancestors made a conscious choice not to build this around a system of doctrine or dogma, but around a faith expression that comes to life as we do it. There is also a built-in self-check: do my choices reflect agape-love, faith, and hope? If not, I have more work to do. And if my actions cause others to suffer, I must stop and choose a different way to act.

There is a context behind the uniqueness of this focus. It is more complex than I can describe here, but an important reference point for how our faith tradition began. It emerged out of a prolonged period of suffering caused by spiritual division, violence, and war. Following the execution of Jan Hus (1415) in the homelands of our ancestors, Moravia, Silesia, and Slovakia, there were 50 years of war and violence between Christians. Certain doctrines and dogma, as well as certain interpretations of scripture, were a source of bloodshed and division. As the Ancient Unitas Fratrum emerged in 1450s, this was a key reason the Bible and scriptural interpretation were not at the center among the “essentials” but was the first among the very necessary “miniserials.” It was also why our ancestors stipulated that one’s view of theology or interpretation of scripture becomes “ineffective” at the point it causes others to suffer.

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By 1618, the Ancient Unity was a significant Christian expression in Central Europe and Jan Amos Comenius had emerged as a key leader and Bishop. War broke out again, this time lasting 30 years and extending across mainland Europe. Once again war was waged between various expressions of the Christian faith. Our ancestors continued to focus the “essentials” on a relationship with God while avoiding the division and violence connected to systematic theologies and the debates they often inspired.

Another reason our ancestors held on to this simple road map for faith is that it was the centerpiece for how they organized congregations beginning in the 1400s. Their expression of the “essentials” was a literal focus point for daily prayer, study of scripture in small groups, and collective action. In the beginning, our ancestors lived in closed communities much like the Amish and Mennonites who came later. By the 1500s when they adapted to be open communities, they retained the emphasis on small groups. (More to come on this in the next issue).

They took to heart and mind the admonition to respond to all life situations with faith, love, and hope, and had a way to process it daily through small groups. As they did this, certain portions of scripture were elevated to the status of “the Gospel within the Gospel.” Whatever interpretation of scripture or discernment a small group or individual determined, it had to pass the test of the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5-7). If it was in-line with the statements of Christian faith and practice found in Matthew 5-7, it was a proper pathway; if it contradicted them, it was not a faithful path.

They gathered by small groups to do faith together, to experience God’s ongoing response and to seek ways to listen to God’s voice through the study of scripture, discerning together practical ways to give Christian witness, and to hold one another accountable. These actions pointed to love, faith, and hope without stirring up anger and hurt. The “essentials” served as the map for doing Christian life. For recognizing what makes for faithful Christian witness. Most importantly, for being reminded that our beliefs come to life as we actively engage in relationship with God and one another.

Stay tuned for more of the story in the next issue of the Provincial Ties.

*Submitted by The Rev. Dr. Neil Routh, President, PEC*



## ***Concerns and Celebrations***

### **Deaths:**

We lift prayers of hope and comfort for the Nelson family at the passing of David Nelson on July 4. He is the older brother of the Rev. Dan Nelson (Friedberg), the Rev. Bruce Nelson (PEC Western District President, Moravian Church, Northern Province), and Dr. Rick Nelson (Board of World Mission staff). A service of celebration for his life will be held in Wisconsin on July 15.

We lift prayers of hope and comfort for the family of Margaret Alexander who passed away on July 11. She is the mother of the Rev. Betty Helms (New Hope, Newton, NC). A service of celebration will be held on July 16 at New Hope Moravian in Newton. Visitation will be 1-2 PM and the service will be at 2 PM.

### **Surgeries:**

We lift prayers of healing and support for Pat Byerly (wife of the Rev. Wayne Byerly). She is recovering from hip replacement surgery (June 30) following a fall. She will be receiving rehabilitation at a rehab center in Sandy Ridge, NC. Cards can be sent to P.O. Box 488, Wallburg, NC 27373.

Please lift prayers for healing and comfort for Paul Williams (husband of Andi - member of the PEC). Paul was injured in a bicycle accident on July 8. He has had several surgeries this week to address his injuries. Please keep Paul and Andi in your prayers.

### **Pastoral Changes:**

The Rev. Wayne Byerly was officially installed as the Interim Pastor for Leakesville Moravian on July 2. We lift prayers of encouragement and hope for the congregation and its leaders as they enter this new chapter of shared ministry.

## ***Ordination Anniversaries for July 2023***

Christy Clore.....	18 years
Steve Craver.....	46 years
Anthony Hayworth.....	15 years
Thomas Hensley.....	37 years
Logan Jones.....	40 years
John Rainey.....	35 years
Tracy Robinson.....	17 years
Heather Vacek.....	11 years
Walter Yarborough.....	23 years
Victoria Lasley.....	6 years
Tim Byerly.....	45 years

***Congratulations and God Bless You!***

## Provincial Events Calendar



Going forward, using this link [Provincial Event Calendar](#), you will find all Provincial events scheduled in the Southern Province. The calendar will be updated when the PEC office has knowledge of an event. Please refer to the link often as it will probably change weekly. This link will take the place of the usual calendar items listed in the Ties.

Please contact the PEC office if you have questions or concerns. 336.725.5811

## Provincial Human Resources

### Required Clergy Training from Human Resources:

By now all clergy under call or appointment to ministries in the Province should have received an email entitled "Assigned Tasks." This includes a link to complete two online video training courses. Please respond to this email ASAP and complete the video training by July 28. This is part of an effort to provide support and education to clergy. The participation of all clergy under call or appoint is needed.

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## Moravian Theological Seminary and Lancaster Theological Seminary Announcement

The Rev. Dr. **Heather H. Vacek**, Vice-President and Dean of Moravian Theological Seminary and Lancaster Theological Seminary, has accepted a new position as Director of Accreditation at the Association of Theological Schools (the body that accredits seminaries). She will begin her new position on September 1. Sister Vacek is also an ordained minister of the Southern Province in service to the MTS-LTS communities.

Heather came to MTS in July 2021 just as Moravian University and Moravian Theological Seminary were in the process of partnering with Lancaster Theological Seminary (LTS). Over the course of these past two years, Dr. Vacek has worked faithfully to knit together the faculties and staff into a cohesive group and guided the faculties toward the development of a new, shared curriculum. She will work through August 11 to prepare for new leadership.

Moravian University President, Bryon Grigsby, is working with key leaders, including the Rev. Dr. Betsy Miller (Chair of both seminary boards) to develop a plan to provide strong and faithful leadership to continue the important work of equipping leaders to lead the church.

Please keep Heather and her loved ones, and the people and mission of the University, MTS, and LTS in your prayers at this time of transition.

*Submitted by The Rev. Dr. Neil Routh, President, PEC, Southern Province*

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