



# PROVINCIAL TIES

January 2024



— LATEST NEWS & EVENTS —

## “Finding Common Ground”

Once during a presentation in a high school class on the topic of the art of debate, a wise teacher impressed upon the class the importance of finding a middle or common ground where opposing convictions that carry lots of emotional energy could be stated and debated for the purpose of reaching shared understandings and mutual respect. She called it “the golden mean.” At first it sounded too simplistic to be reasonable. We can all work on being nice and polite and not letting debate get personal. But then she noted how deeply held convictions come with hot emotions. The challenge is to state the important keys to a given conviction while holding respect and space open to hearing opposing views. When emotions are running high, this is a great challenge. Why is that?

*continued on page 2*

Is it due to a lack of mutual trust or common ground? Is it due to the shifts in how news is promoted with social media platforms toward hot emotional responses to drive a viral wave of interest? Is it due to a lack of modeling a better way? What does it look like when civil discourse actively engages debate with high emotions while demonstrating mutual respect and common ground? Two of the best examples I know would be long past their 100th birthday if they were still with us. There are so few living examples of persons who debate respectfully.

Let me invite you to join me throughout 2024 in exploring the general topic of “common ground.” Each month I will offer a brief reflection on what prior Moravian leaders have noted. I will invite you to search for a copy of that resource in your church library or at the Provincial Resource Center, so you can read it for yourself. When possible, a link will be embedded in the electronic version of this newsletter. As this process unfolds, I will pause periodically to invite you to note common features these historic statements share. My goal is to invite you to celebrate how common ground has been defined in the history of the Moravian Church, and to challenge you to join me in living out a witness of modeling it in all the places where your witness is shared.

Making space for debate, listening, and mutual trust building has been one of the great dramas of humanity. No one has found it easy to do. But too many have chosen to make enemies out of those who hold opposing views to their own. As congregations and ministries face the challenge of sharing God’s Good News through word and action to an increasingly unchurched culture, the courage to nurture common ground in our church has never been more critical.

You should know that I am a first-generation Moravian. While it is the only Christian tradition I have known, it is not the tradition of my parents or subsequent generations of my extended family. Let me also note that I have spent the majority of more than three decades of ordained ministry in the Moravian Church serving congregation outside of Forsyth County in NC. Being the pastor of the only Moravian congregation in a given community means you get accustomed to the questions about core beliefs and values of what it means to be Moravian. This is the tradition I continue to gladly choose.

At times I wonder if the Moravian Church would have benefited more from having a systematic expression of doctrine and theology clearly set out by numerous spiritual ancestors to define what we believe. However, I hold an even deeper heartfelt respect that with each age of the Moravian Church, our ancestors declined from developing systematic theologies. The closest we come to it is what can be found in the *Moravian Covenant for Christian Living* (also known as the Brotherly Agreement outside of the North American Moravian provinces). There is also the *Ground of the Unity* statement shared by the worldwide Moravian Unity (1957). To find a copy of these statements go to

<https://www.moravian.org/southern/category/spirituallife/>.

*continued on page 3*

Both expressions point to *what we do* to live out our faith - individually and together. They define what the practice of Christian living and community life should be, without being completely definitive in a legalistic manner. For Moravians, doing faith equates to responding to God in every circumstance of life with faith, love, and hope the best we can. Each point of what these two documents capture in meaning make sense as you put them into practice. This is especially wonderful with people who seek to be in relationship with God and one another. It can be a struggle if there is not a shared commitment to what these values represent, or when faith, love, and hope are set aside.

There is something new adding to the problem of finding common ground. In the last decade, there has been a vast shift in social media. News outlets play upon hot issues to inspire views and responses. Increasingly this has been driven by advertising dollars, which have shifted toward offering news content through brief quotes or video clips. Since short clips that invoke sharp emotional response also become viral, including an exposure to embedded advertising, news reporting has changed toward sensationalism. And with this change public conversation has reflected more emotional fighting than modeling common ground where there are strong differences of opinion and high emotions with shared respect. Like every other corner of culture, Christians and their communities have become divided with tension.

I heard an intriguing quote recently responding to the polarization of Christian views in current North American culture. A youth pastor was stating the problem of boundaries by noting his opinion that “progressive Christians” make a similar mistake that “fundamental Christians” do. He went on to stake a claim that sounds very Moravian to me: “Healthy Christianity is when you know you are rooted in what are the essentials and what are the non-essentials. Holding tightly to what are the essentials and being gracious with others about the non-essentials.” (Austin Molt: Instagram -@austinmolt - “The Problem with the Deconstruction Movement”).

As I viewed this clip from an Instagram post, I suddenly had a new appreciation for why our spiritual ancestors within the Moravian tradition consistently pointed to outcomes of putting faith, love, and hope into action over writing volumes of systematic doctrine. Join me in subsequent articles as we explore how our Moravian “common ground” has been described by key leaders. Looking forward to February - a review of and reflection upon the Rt. Rev. Clarence H. Shawe’s publication: [The Spirit of the Moravian Church](#) (revised and enlarged by the Rt. Rev. Edwin K. Kortz, Moravian Church in America: 1979).

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

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## Concerns and Celebrations

### Pastoral Changes:

The Rev. **Christy Clore** has accepted a call to serve as a Faith Formation Specialist with the Commission on Congregational Development. Christy began this work on Tuesday, January 2, 2023.

### *Ordination Anniversaries for January 2024*

Ray Burke.....	47
James Doss.....	49
Truman Dunn.....	50
R. Burke Johnson.....	57
Roy Ledbetter.....	50
Russell May.....	18
Virginia Tobiassen.....	11
Evette Campbell.....	4

### *Congratulations and God Bless You!*

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## Moravian Ministries Foundation Association

### *Save the Date for Moravian Day of Giving 2024!*

Join us on February 13, 2024, for a day of impact and generosity during the 4th Annual Moravian Day of Giving! It's more than a date—it's an opportunity to embrace the spirit of our community, driven by shared values and a commitment to making a difference.

Mark your calendar and be part of the collective generosity that defines the Moravian Day of Giving. Together, let's make a lasting impact on individuals and communities! Stay tuned for more information.



#IGiveMoravian

*Submitted by Hanna Cheek Jackson, Communications and Marketing Specialist, MMFA*

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## PEC Announcement

The Rev. **Christy Clore** has accepted a call to serve as a Faith Formation Specialist with the Commission on Congregational Development. Christy began her work on Tuesday, January 2, 2023.

As Faith Formation specialist, Christy will be engaging with congregations to support and build upon current discipleship practices in local contexts. She will help strengthen the outreach and witness of congregations through education and spiritual formation for all ages.

*continued on page 5*

She will also serve as the denominational representative to the Association of Partners in Christian Education organization that brings together resources for discipleship and faith formation through ecumenical partnership. She will be available to help with curriculum suggestions and resource sharing with congregations. As a vital part of the Commission on Congregational Development staff she will contribute to the planning and implementation of training events and connecting us with outside courses and resources to enhance the local ministry of congregations and communities. Please pray for Christy, David and their son, Miles during this exciting time of transition.

We will be sharing more details about Christy's role and it's align with the goals and priorities of the Commission on Congregational development through *The CCD Essentials* newsletter and through other CCD channels. If you don't already subscribe you can join our mailing list [here](#).

## 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.



## From the Provincial Financial Office

**Pastor's Pension Increase** - The pension payments for pastor's have increased from \$2,300 to \$2,500 per year. Please submit \$208.33 monthly for your pastor's pension payments.

**IRS Mileage Rate** - The IRS has set the allowable business mileage reimbursement rate for 2024 at 67 cents per mile. For moving or medical expense, the new rate for 2022 is 21 cents per mile. The rate for charitable purposes remains at 14 cents per mile.

**2024 Church Budgets** - The 2024 Budgets were due to the Provincial Financial Office December 15, 2023. There are right many that have not been submitted. Please get those in as soon as possible.

*Submitted by Robyn Glance, Chief Financial Officer*

## *For Your Address Book*

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