The Ground of the Unity: a year-long study of what holds us together

STUDYING MORAVIAN DOC

Editor's Note: When you ask Moravians, "what does it mean to be part of the Moravian faith?," you'll likely get many different answers about what our church is and what we believe.

While the Moravian Church is known (and respected) for not being overly doctrinal or adhering to strict dogma or rules—thus the many ideas of what it means to be Moravian—at its core, the worldwide Unitas Fratrum/Moravian Church has two important documents that do a good job spelling out who we are and what we believe: *The Moravian Covenant for Christian Living* and *The Ground of the Unity*.

Since these two statements are so important to understanding what makes Moravian Christianity unique, we began sharing these two documents in *The Moravian Magazine*. While both documents are readily available from www.moravian.org—and I encourage you to download them—a constant reminder and review in our denominational publication's pages should prove helpful in continuing the study of our core faith.

Following the outline established by *Jesus Still Lead On*, we cover different aspects of these two important documents each month. In 2015, we discussed *The Covenant for Christian Living*; with this issue and throughout 2016, we'll continue with the *Ground of the Unity*.

This month, we'll discuss the history of the *Ground of the Unity*. In subsequent months, we will share different aspects of the *Ground of the Unity*, along with commentary and thought-provoking questions.

Thanks to Dr. Craig Atwood and the editors of *Jesus Still Lead On* (produced in 2005) for this material. If you are interested in obtaining the entirety of *Jesus Still Lead On*, please contact the IBOC or visit store.moravian.org.

> —Mike Riess, editor The Moravian Magazine

Part I: Introduction

The Ground of the Unity is the official doctrinal statement for the worldwide Moravian Church. The first draft was written in the mid-1950s in Germany, and it was officially adopted as the doctrinal statement of the Moravian Church in 1957 by the Unity Synod. This was the first Unity (or General) Synod to be held in the United States (Bethlehem, Pa.) and in the English language. Although it was first written in German, the official version adopted by the Synod was in English. Much of the discussion of the Unity Synod was about the Ground of the Unity, but very few changes were made by the Synod before it was adopted. Although written as a single document, it was officially adopted paragraph by paragraph so that the Synod could carefully discuss the wording of each section. The title was a translation of the German word Grundsätze, which means "basic principles." In English, "Ground" also brings to mind the idea of a fertile field. Thus, the Ground means the basis for our spiritual growth.

The Eight Chief Doctrines

The *Ground of the Unity* replaced the older statement of eight chief doctrines of the Moravian Church. The eight chief doctrines grew from the four chief doctrines that the church identified in 1775 as part of its reorganization following the death of Count Zinzendorf. In the 1700 and 1800s the church accepted the Augsburg Confession of the Lutheran Church as its official confession of faith, but it also highlighted four doctrines that were most important to the Moravian Church.

They were 1) the Atonement of Christ, 2) the Divinity of Christ as Creator, 3) Universal Human Depravity, and 4) the Gracious Work of the Holy Spirit. These were seen as the essential features of Zinzendorf's preaching, but the language used to express them was taken from Protestant theology. Moravians later became uncomfortable with the idea that Christ rather than the Father is the Creator, and by 1898 that statement was altered. A summary of the four chief doctrines was given in a hymn verse:

That whoe'er believeth in Christ's redemption May find free grace, and a complete exemption From serving sin.

As the Moravians moved away from using the Augsburg Confession of Faith, there was a growing desire to expand the chief doctrines to be more of a creedal statement. In 1818, a statement on the Fruits of Faith (willing obedience and love for Savior) was added. That was followed in 1857, (at the time when the *(Continued on next page)*



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British and American provinces of the Moravian Church were granted independence

from German control) by a statement on the love of God the Father because of concerns that the Moravians were not seen as Trinitarian. Finally, in 1879 statements were added

on the fellowship of believers with each other and the Second Coming of the Lord, making the chief doctrines correspond better to the Apostles' Creed.

As an introduction to the Chief Doctrines, a statement on Scripture was added in1825 and revised in 1836. "The Holy Scripture of the Old and New Testament is and remains the only rule of our faith and life. We revere it as God's word, which He spoke to humanity in former times through the prophets, and in these last days through the Son and His apostles, to instruct people in the way of salvation through faith in Jesus Christ. We are convinced that all truths which are necessary



for a person who desires to be saved to know and believe are fully contained therein." A portion of this statement appeared in the original *Ground of the Unity*. It was revised

in 1995.

There was growing dissatisfaction with the statement of Chief Doctrines in the 19th century. In the American Provinces, the Easter Litany was in-

creasingly seen as a Moravian Confession of Faith instead of the Augsburg Confession. It is instructive that the Easter Litany rather than the Chief Doctrines was included in Philip Schaff's *Creeds of the Churches* in 1877.

In Europe, there was a sense that the Chief Doctrines were not the best expressions of Moravian faith and practice. The language was seen as archaic and there was a sense that the ideas did not capture what was most vital in Christianity. Many theologically educated persons also felt that the older statement was not consistent with modern theological developments. This led to vigorous discussions within the European provinces of the church, but there were no changes to the doctrinal statement at the 1914 General Synod (now called Unity Synod).

Because of war and the economic crisis in Germany, there was not another meeting of the General Synod until 1931. At that time, the British delegation presented a new statement on the faith and order of the Moravian Church which was more narrative than the Chief Doctrines. In light of the economic crisis that was threatening the very existence of the Moravian Church and its mission work, the synod did not adopt any doctrinal changes. However, much of what was presented in the British

proposal was later included in the statement *Essential Features of a Living Church*. Despite the synod's inaction, there was a growing sense in Europe and America that the older doctrinal statement was no longer adequate. There would not be another General Synod, though, until after the Second World War.

Historical Situation in 1957

In order to understand the *Ground of the Unity*, it is helpful to have an awareness of the significance of the Unity Synod of 1957 that adopted the *Ground of the Unity*. This synod marked the greatest changes in the Moravian Church since its renewal in 1727, and it is not accidental that a new doctrinal statement was adopted at that time. Many of the decisions made at the Unity Synod reflected the changes the world experienced as a result of the Nazi era and the world war. Bishop H. G. Steinberg, in *The Moravian Messenger* (Dec. 1957, p. 3) expressed the situation this way: "The strongly-felt need to attempt to give ex-

pression to its basic convictions arose in a large measure from the storm, earthquake, and fire through which some of the Provinces of the Unity, particularly Germany, had passed since 1931."

Here are just some of the major changes which help explain the nature of the *Ground of the Unity* and the modern Moravian Unity.

1. German Moravians in particular had to deal

with the experience of their country having fallen under the sway of Adolph Hitler who



had proclaimed himself a savior of the German people. Most Christians in Germany had given at least partial support to Hitler and his program for Germany. Many Christians had even supported his anti-Jewish policies; however, it was only after the war that Germans and the rest of the world were confronted by the true horrors of the Final Solution. The awareness that Christians could be seduced

into following Hitler had a profound effect on all German churches and theology in Germany. The "banality of evil" seen in the Nazi era profoundly affected our understanding of good and evil.

2. Because of Hitler's war, much of Germany had been destroyed and many of its citizens, especially young men, were dead. One of the actions of Unity Synod was to approve the ordination of women in

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the Moravian Church, in part as a response to the shortage of ministers. The *Ground of the Unity* was written in the awareness of great human suffering, but also as part of the larger task of rebuilding a devastated Germany.

3. Germany and England both lost their leading roles in world affairs and the balance of power shifted to the United States. It was clear to the delegates of the Unity Synod that North

American Moravians were going to have to assume greater responsibility for the world-wide Moravian work. This is why it was decided to hold the synod in the United States and make English, rather than German, the official language for the first time.

4. Moravians also experienced the Cold War that developed between the

United States and the Soviet Union immediately after WWII. Germany itself was divided between the two superpowers, and the historic center of the church, Herrnhut, was behind the Iron Curtain. Communication and the flow of currency were restricted. Christians in East Germany had to learn to live under a Communist regime that was at times hostile to religion. It was not clear in 1957 that the Moravian Church could remain a single institution.

5. In 1947 India's independence from British colonial authority was recognized by Parliament. This was the most dramatic episode in the rapid dismantling of the European colonial system. Nation after nation achieved independence from the colonial powers and assumed their places on the world stage, sometimes in the midst of turmoil and violence. The delegates at Unity Synod recognized that this would affect Moravian missions in a number of ways. One, as countries gained independence, the church would need to be flexible in dealing with new political and social realities. Two, church members in former colonies would naturally share the desire for more self-determination. Three, foreign mis-

> sionaries may not be welcomed in the newly independent nations. Four, the new model for the world was the United Nations: a cooperative body of independent states.

> 6. In 1945 the United States became the only nation to use nuclear weapons in war. In the 1950s, other nations joined in the race to produce more

and larger nuclear bombs. By 1957 it was evident that the United States and the Soviet

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Union had the capacity to destroy all life on the planet. This was the first time in world history that humans had such awesome and terrible ability. It was clear to most people that old standards of war and peace would need to be rethought if the world were to survive. The threat of nuclear holocaust fueled apocalyptic

speculations for many Christians, but the Moravians' response was the *Ground of the Unity*.

7. The Ecumenical Movement was at its peak in the two decades following WWII in Europe and America. The first assembly

of the World Council of Churches was held in 1947, and Moravians were involved in its work. In many countries, there were important church mergers that produced new national churches, such as the United Church of Canada and the Church of South India. In the United States there were several mergers or reunions of Protestant churches, such as the United Church of Christ and the United Methodist Church.

Unity Synod 1957

1957 marked the five hundredth anniversary of the founding of the Moravian Church. Despite the turmoil of recent world history, there was a feeling of optimism and pride in the church. Moravians took a new look at their history and resolved to continue the mission of their forebears in faith. By examining Moravian history, many of the church's leaders recognized that the church had gone through periods of trial and emerged stron-

By examining Moravian history, many of the church's leaders recognized that the church had gone through periods of trial and emerged stronger.

ger. At various points the church had boldly re-organized itself in order to pursue its calling. Certainly the church had suffered tribulation in World War II and was facing unprecedented challenges. Drawing courage from the past, the church's leaders made the decision to reorganize the Moravian Church

completely in 1957.

Previously there had been four provinces in Europe and America with numerous mission fields governed by the Mission Board. Following World War I, the Americans and British had taken over greater responsibility for the work of the Mission Board, but it was clear that

the post-WWII church would need a different structure. There was a strong desire for the mission areas to become financially selfsufficient. The number of missionaries would have to be reduced as well. It was also unclear

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whether the mission fields would be able to remain a part of the Moravian Church when the former colonies gained independence. Some of the new nations adopted Marxist governments or nationalized many businesses. Some restricted the flow of currency in and out the country. The highly profitable Kirsten Co. in Surinam, which was owned by the church, was threatened with nationalization.

Moreover, there was a drive for independence and self-determination in the various mission areas that corresponded with the anti-colonial sentiment. There was a real danger that the Moravian Church would splinter into a dozen or more independent national churches. There was also the possibility that local Moravian churches might unite with other churches in that country.

Unity Synod made the bold move of granting independence to many of the mission areas, giving them the same status in the Unity as the American, British and Continental Provinces. A procedure was established so that any former mission area could achieve status as an independent province of the Unity in the future. The northern hemisphere provinces assumed responsibility for financial and administrative assistance during the transitional period, but the goal was eventual equality among the provinces. Those provinces that chose to stay in the Unity would have equal representation at Unity Synod which would establish the constitution for the world-wide Moravian Church

Later changes in the *Ground of the Unity* The *Ground of the Unity* was written as the doctrinal statement for the reorganized Moravian Church. It was intended to provide the foundation for the various provinces to build their own churches as well as a common statement that united Moravians in many countries. Changes in the *Ground of the Unity* must be approved by Unity Synod. Other than some updating of language, there have been two significant changes in the *Ground of the Unity* since it was adopted. One was the inclusion of a paragraph discussing personal faith in 1981. The other was a rewording of the statement on Scripture in 1995. The Unity Synod of 2002 reaffirmed the *Ground of the Unity* as the doctrinal statement for the entire Moravian Church.

Discussion:

Think for a moment about the situation in the world in 1957 when the Unity Synod met. What is your understanding of that time? Since Americans tend to view the 1950s as a time of peace and prosperity, consider the reality in the rest of the world in the wake of World War II using the section *Historical Situation in 1957*.

- What challenges did these events present to Christians around the world?
- In what ways might churches have responded to such major social changes?
- Is it important to have a statement that is common to all provinces of the world-wide Moravian church?

Re-read the summary of the Eight Chief Doctrines.

- Does this sound like traditional Moravian theology?
- Why do you think that so many people wanted to change it?



Ground of the Unity, Part I

Editor's Note: Following the outline established by the 2005 Jesus Still Lead On study guide, we are sharing different aspects of The Ground of the Unity, one of the worldwide Moravian Church's key doctrinal statement, in each 2016 issue of The Moravian. This month, we'll discuss the introductory paragraphs of Ground of the Unity. In subsequent months, we will share different aspects of the foundational document, along with commentary and thought-provoking questions.

Both the Ground of the Unity and The Moravian Covenant for Christian Living are available on www.moravian.org. We covered the Covenant throughout 2015.

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The Ground of the Unity

Commentary:

Titles are always important because they try to communicate the meaning of a text in just a few words. In the years leading up to the Unity Synod of 1957, German Moravians worked out a statement of basic principles (In Geman: *Grundsätze*) for the reorganized Unity. The word "Ground" was chosen as the best word to express in German and English the idea of foundational principles. According to Bishop H. G. Steinberg "a Statement was adopted which attempts to say in terms of our own day what the Lord's will is for the Church Universal and for the Unitas Fratrum." He pointed out that "ground" was chosen because the church's faith is "rooted" in this ground and can be fruitful (*The Moravian Mes*- senger, Dec. 1957, p. 3).

Unity is an important word as well. Here it refers both to the official name of the Moravian Church, the Unitas Fratrum, and to the idea of a united body of believers. When our ancestors separated from the Catholic Church in 1457, they did not call themselves a "church." Instead they were a union of brothers or a unity of the brethren. In Zinzendorf's day the Moravian Church was known as the Brüdergemeine, or community of the brothers. Unitas Fratrum is the Latin version of the original Czech name for the church as well as the German Brüdergemeine. This idea of the church as a unity of brothers and sisters around the world has been a core belief for Moravians for over 500 years. Sometimes the idea of unity has been used to promote uniformity in the church. At other times, it has been recognized that unity includes diversity.

Discussion:

- What images does the word "Ground" bring to mind for you?
- What would you title a doctrinal statement? Why?
- What do you think of when you think of Unity?
- What does this title say about the Moravian Church and its approach to doctrine?

Called by Christ

Preamble:

The Lord Jesus Christ calls His Church into being so that it may serve Him on earth until He comes. The Unitas Fratrum is, therefore, aware of its being called in faith to serve humanity by proclaiming the Gospel of Jesus Christ. It recognizes this call to be the source of its being and the inspiration of its service. As is the source, so is the aim and end of its being based upon the will of its Lord.

Commentary:

The *Ground of the Unity* begins with a statement on why the Christian Church exists before it begins to discuss the purpose of the Unitas Fratrum. According to Christian teaching, the church has been called into being by Jesus Christ as his body on earth. Despite its many imperfections and failures as an institution made up of human beings, the Church itself is a divine institution. The Church does not exist for its own sake; it exists only to serve Christ. As such, if the Church no longer serves, it is no longer the Church.

The Unitas Fratrum shares in the mission of the universal (or catholic) Church to serve humanity by the proclamation of the Good News of Jesus Christ. It does not exist for its own sake or its own prosperity. Its existence as a church is based on the will of Jesus Christ, our Chief Elder. It is important to recognize that the proclamation of the Good News (or Gospel) is a way to serve humankind, not a way to justify ourselves as Christians. If our proclamation harms others or fails to communicate God's reconciling love in Christ Jesus, then we should reflect on what we are doing and our relationship to the Chief Elder.

Discussion:

- What does it mean that Christ calls the Church into being?
- Why do you think there is a Church? Why does the Moravian Church continue to exist?
- What does it mean to proclaim the Gospel? Is this just in words or in deeds as well?
- How does your congregation fulfill the purpose of the Church? How do you share in this mission?
- How does your congregation serve humanity? How do you?

Next Month: The Belief of the Church; Salvation; and Word, Sacrament and Service.



STUDYING MORAVIAN DOCTRINE Ground of the Unity, Part II

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The Belief of the Church

With the whole of Christendom we share faith in God the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

Commentary:

The Moravian Church does not have a different understanding of God than other churches, but stresses what we have in common with all of the world's Christians. "Christendom" here simply means Christianity. We see here not only the influence of the ecumenical movement on the Ground of the Unity but also our historical perspective that we are part of the one holy catholic and apostolic church. We are a Trinitarian church that proclaims that we experience God in three manifestations or "persons." We do not attempt to explain this mystery, but celebrate the belief of the whole Church, singing praise to Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Sometimes we use the words Creator, Redeemer, and Comforter as another way to express this Trinitarian faith. The Moravian Church does stress certain aspects of Christian doctrine and emphasize certain aspects of the Christian mission, but we make it a point not to be divided from our brothers and sisters in other Christian churches because of beliefs. It is important that the Ground refers to "faith" in God rather than belief in God. Faith is related to the word "trust"

...we share faith in God the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.



Discussion:

- Why is it important that our doctrinal statement includes what we have in common with all of Christianity?
- What is the difference between believing in God and having faith in God? Is it important that the Ground of the Unity says that we share faith in God rather than believe in God?
- How do you understand the idea of God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit?

Salvation

We believe and confess that God has revealed Himself once and for all in His Son Jesus Christ; that our Lord has redeemed us with the whole of humanity by His death and His resurrection; and that there is no salvation apart from Him.

Commentary:

This may be the most discussed sentence in the entire Ground of the Unity in recent years because it deals with a vital and easily misunderstood point of our doctrine. The Moravian Church is a Christian Church, which means that we understand God through the person of Jesus Christ. Historically we have avoided getting entangled in defining the precise nature of Jesus Christ as divine and human, and instead simply affirm that God is revealed in Christ. Therefore the portrayal of Jesus and the teachings of Jesus in the four gospels are at the heart of Moravian devotion. This is what we mean by "Christocentric."

The phrase "once and for all" was an attempt to translate a German phrase (einmal und endgültig) which means one ultimate time or once definitively. The writer probably had in mind Hebrews 9:26 which speaks of the sacrifice of Christ "once - for all." This does not mean that God was revealed only one time. We teach that God was also revealed in creation and through the prophets, but the revelation of God in Jesus of Nazareth was a unique, historical revelation that most clearly expressed the divine nature in a way that humans can understand. We could change this phrase to say that God revealed himself ultimately in Jesus Christ, the Son. What is most important here is not the "finality" of Christ, but the "centrality" of Christ for Moravians. If we want to know who God is, we simply have to look at the actions and teachings of Jesus in all four gospels.

Once we understand that God is revealed in Christ, the rest of the sentence makes more sense. This is the Moravian way of restating Paul's proclamation that God is reconciling the world to Himself through Christ (2 Corinthians 5:19). It is through God's self-giving in Jesus *(Continued on next page)*

Ground of the Unity

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Christ that the world can experience reconciliation with the Creator. Redemption is the divine reaffirmation of the blessing given in creation. Notice that we teach that our personal redemption is part of the redemption of all humankind. Moravian missions are based on the understanding that all people have been redeemed by the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. We go bearing the good news of redemption: of God's sacrificial action in reaching out in love to all people. Traditionally we have taken this message especially to those whom the world has despised and declared less than human.

It is important to note that the Ground asserts that there is no salvation apart from Christ. It does not say that there is no salvation apart from a profession of faith in Christ or even apart from belief in Christ. The Moravian Church has always promoted missions and evangelism so that people may have the joyful opportunity of responding to the love of God in Christ by having faith in Christ. We believe that those who profess faith in Christ have an assurance and an experience of salvation, but we have traditionally rejected the idea that Christ cannot save those who do not profess belief. In particular, the great Moravian theologian and teacher August Spangenberg taught that all children who die before they are old enough to profess faith are still saved by Christ (Idea Fidei Fratrum ¶123).

There is another point being made in this simple statement that there is no salvation apart from Christ. It is important to keep in mind here the situation in 1957 when the Ground of the Unity was written. Millions of people had been seduced by would-be messiahs such as Hitler, Musolini, Stalin, and Tojo into committing unspeakable acts of horror and evil. To say that there is no salvation apart from Christ is to reassert that Christ is our Messiah and Lord. Any effort at achieving a sense of salvation that would separate us from Christ, including obsessive consumerism and self-righteousness, is a false salvation.

Discussion:

- What do you think of the idea that we have been redeemed with the whole of humanity by the death and resurrection of Christ?
- How does this affect our view of other people?
- What does it mean to you that there is no salvation apart from Christ? Why doesn't the Ground of the Unity say "apart from belief in Christ?"
- Do you think that those who have not professed faith in Jesus are condemned or is there a possibility that Christ's saving action extends beyond the Christian Church?
- In what ways do people seek salvation apart from Christ?

Word, Sacrament, and Service

We believe that He is present with us in the Word and the Sacrament; that He directs and unites us through His Spirit and thus forms us into a Church. We hear Him summoning us to follow Him, and pray Him to use us in His service. He joins us together mutually, so that knowing ourselves to be members of His body we become willing to serve each other.

Commentary:

True to the Moravian tradition, our statement of faith moves us quickly from theology to practice. It is not enough that we form an intellectual understanding of Christ and salvation; we also need to focus on the day to day reality of following Christ. We experience the on-going presence of Christ in the reading and proclamation of the Word. This Word includes



the Scripture, especially the four gospels, and the preaching of the Word. Moravians have always understood that words on a page are lifeless until they are taken into one's own heart and mind and applied to one's own life. The "living voice" in preaching is part of that process of making God's Word come alive in the community of faith.

We also believe that Christ is truly present with us in the act of Holy Communion. This is not just an "audio-visual" aid illustrating a biblical truth; it is an important ritual through which we experience the living Christ within and among us. Moravians have often referred to a "sacramental" presence of Christ in Holy Communion to distinguish our view from that of the Catholic Church. The important thing, though, is to recognize that Communion is a vital aspect of the Christian life and is an opportunity for deeper spiritual experience and blessing.

Worship and the reading of Scripture are not ends in themselves. Notice that they are connected to the idea that the Holy Spirit is a living presence in our lives. It is through the presence of the Holy Spirit in the proclamation of the Word and the celebration of the Sacrament that we are formed into a church of Jesus Christ rather than being a social club. We are not made into a church just for our own benefit, we are called into service. Notice that this service is both to our brothers and sisters in the Church and to the world at large. We are united by the Holy Spirit so that we may serve in the world.

Discussion:

- What does the "Word of God" mean to you?
- How do you hear God's Word in your life?
- What relationship do you see between taking part in Holy Communion and being united as a church?
- How can we be united as a church if we have different understandings of Scripture and Communion? Is there more to unity than uniformity?
- How does the Word and the Sacrament call you into service in the world and in the church?



STUDYING MORAVIAN DOCTRINE Ground of the Unity, Part III

Editor's Note: Following the outline established by the 2005 Jesus Still Lead On study guide, we are sharing different aspects of The Ground of the Unity, one of the worldwide Moravian Church's key doctrinal statement, in each 2016 issue of The Moravian. This month, we'll discuss A Church of Sinners and Personal Belief.

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Moravian Covenant for Christian Living *are available on www.moravian.org. We covered the Covenant throughout 2015.*

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A Church of Sinners

In the light of divine grace, we recognize ourselves to be a Church of sinners. We require forgiveness daily, and live only through the mercy of God in Christ Jesus our Lord. He redeems us from our isolation and unites us into a living Church of Jesus Christ.

Commentary:

Here we come to one of the central teachings of the Moravian Church. Christians, unlike many people, know that we are sinners. It is because of God's free gift of redemption that we recognize the full extent of our sinfulness. At times, this recognition does not feel like grace, but what it means is that we can look at ourselves honestly and without self-justification precisely because we know that we are loved with an infinite love. This is not a call to condemn others because of their sinfulness but to recognize that our redemption is real. We do not need to hide from God or from our own true nature because we know that we are of infinite worth to God.

Those who proclaim their own righteousness are trapped by their own need to appear righteous, but those who trust in the mercy of God have the courage to show mercy to others. We are a church of sinners, and that knowledge acts as a hedge against our human tendency to condemn others for the sins that we long to commit. Because we know that we

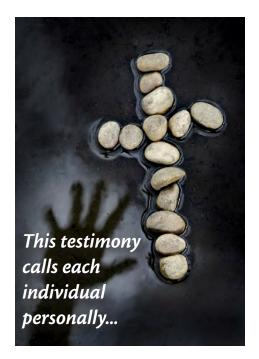
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need forgiveness daily, we can be forgiving to our fellow Christians and all of God's children. In Moravian teaching, a church that is not forgiving is not really a church. This does not mean that we simply accept and condone sin. It is because we are forgiven that we can see our sins and strive to overcome them, knowing that perfection is unattainable.

A good summary of Moravian teaching is found in the line "He redeems us from our isolation and unites us into a living Church of Jesus Christ." Redemption is a matter of being called out from the loneliness of self-righteousness; from the alienation of fear; from the bleakness of hopelessness; from the segregation of sin. Sin, selfishness, fear, and despair leave us strangers to ourselves and others. Like Adam and Eve, we try to hide our shame and flee from our true selves, but Christ seeks us out to bring us back into the true community. He does not make us perfect but joins us together with others into a life-giving community of grace. Moravians understand the Church to be a living community where no one is left alone and forlorn. One of the old Moravian litanies prayed "may no one need to eat his morsel alone "

Discussion:

- How does it feel to say that we are a church of sinners? Does this sound like the church you know?
- How does it affect the way you treat others when you admit to yourself that you are a sinner saved by grace?
- How do you understand the relationship of forgiveness and the call to live a moral life?
- Have you ever experienced being redeemed from isolation? Can you tell the story?
- How should the Church deal with sinners?



Personal Belief

The belief of the Church is effected and preserved through the testimony of Jesus Christ and through the work of the Holy Spirit. This testimony calls each individual personally, and leads each one to the recognition of sin and to the acceptance of the redemption achieved by Christ.

Commentary:

The previous section was the "belief of the Church," which means that it focused on the profession of faith of the Church, not just individuals in the Church. In 1981, a section on personal belief was added to stress the importance of individual commitment. This statement in the Ground of the Unity tries to keep two very important truths in balance. One is our firm conviction that humans are not in charge of the Church, and that God is not subject to human definitions of truth. It is the testimony of Jesus Christ expressed in the gospels and the on-going witness of the Holy Spirit that are the foundations of our belief, not our own futile efforts at understanding the mysteries of God. Therefore we are humble in our expressions of faith. Moravians do not set up elaborate doctrinal systems and rigid confessions of faith that act as barriers to individuals who are called by God.

We also understand that each person stands individually before God and is responsible for his or her own actions. Responsibility is a keynote of Moravian doctrine. It is not enough to experience conversion and "wash away your sins" without acknowledging the harm that you have caused others. In connection with what was earlier stated in the Ground of the Unity, this recognition of sin is a life-long process, not a matter of a single emotional moment of repentance. Honest recognition of one's own sinfulness is not the end of the story, however. There is also the importance of accepting for oneself the redemption that has already been achieved by Christ. Acceptance of redemption simply means believing in the deepest recesses of one's heart and soul that God has purchased you from sin and death; that you are loved with an infinite love that cannot be erased. According to Moravian teaching, we do not save ourselves, nor do we save others, but we are saved by Christ. The moment of our salvation was a Friday afternoon nearly 2000 years ago.

Discussion:

- What is the "testimony of Jesus Christ"?
- How do you think the Holy Spirit works in the Church and in the world?
- What does it mean to recognize your sins? How does this relate to the Gospel?
- Is this important? Why or why not?

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STUDYING MORAVIAN DOCTRINE Ground of the Unity, Part IV

Editor's Note: Following the outline established by the 2005 Jesus Still Lead On study guide, we are sharing different aspects of The Ground of the Unity, one of the worldwide Moravian Church's key doctrinal statement, in each 2016 issue of The Moravian. This month, we'll discuss New Life, God's Word and Doctrine and The Cross.

Both the Ground of the Unity and The

New Life

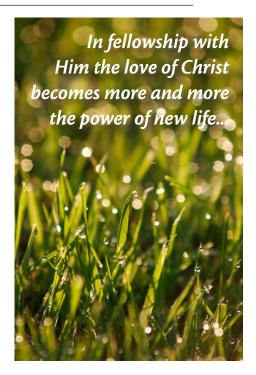
In fellowship with Him the love of Christ becomes more and more the power of the new life, power which penetrates and shapes the entire person. As God's Spirit so effects living belief in the bearts of individuals, He grants them the privilege to share in the fruits of Christ's salvation and membership in His body.

Commentary:

The Moravian Church does not teach that conversion is a once and done event. The Ground of the Unity emphasizes that acceptance of the reality of one's redemption brings us into a deeper relationship with Christ so that we experience the daily reality of his love. Ideally, according to Zinzendorf, children should be raised always in the knowledge of the love of Christ, but for all of us, there are times when this becomes a more conscious experience. There are moments that we can call a conversion or an awakening.

The experience of love and forgiveness is only part of the story. There is continual growth in God's love. Sometimes churches give the Moravian Covenant for Christian Living are available on www.moravian.org. We covered the Covenant throughout 2015.

Thanks to Dr. Craig Atwood and the editors of Jesus Still Lead On for this material. If you are interested in obtaining the entirety of Jesus Still Lead On, please contact the IBOC or visit store.moravian.org. —Mike Riess, editor, the Moravian magazine



impression that you are most Christian at the moment of conversion and then life is a matter of "back-sliding." Moravian teaching is that we all come to God as children and that the Christian life is a life of growth in love and grace. As we grow in age, experience, and in the habits



of Christian virtue, we should grow ever more Christ-like in our actions and attitudes.

For Moravians, there is no real distinction between faith and works because true Christian faith is always formed by love. One of the purposes of the Church is to help each individual at every stage of life experience continual, internal transformation. This is why we talk about the "fruits of salvation." We recognize that some reject their redemption, and that others lose faith and hope. There are those who remain in their isolation, and we are called to reach out to them. The Ground of the Unity does not specify all of the fruits of Christ's salvation, but it is important to note that here again Moravian doctrine emphasizes that belief has practical consequences in the lives of individuals.

Discussion:

- What difference does it make in your life (or the lives of others) to have faith in Christ and believe in redemption?
- What do you think the relationship is between faith and works, in practical terms? (For example, see Galatians, chapter 3 and James 2:14-26.)
- How does the spirit of Christ shape you?
- What do you think the fruits of salvation are? (For example, see Galatians 5:18-24 and Colossians 3:12-15.)

God's Word and Doctrine

The Triune God as revealed in the Holy Scripture of the Old and New Testaments is the only source of our life and salvation; and this Scripture is the sole standard of the doctrine and faith of the Unitas Fratrum and therefore shapes our life.

Commentary:

The doctrinal statements of many churches begin with a statement on Scripture, but the Moravian Church recognizes that Scripture is the witness to faith rather than the source of faith. In other words, we read, believe, interpret, and apply Scripture in our lives because we place our trust in Christ. Scripture nourishes us as Christians, and we rejoice that as we grow as Christians we find new depths of meaning in the multi-faceted stories and instructions of the Bible. We take the Bible so seriously that we do not impose single standard interpretation on it but allow the Bible to speak to us.

In 1995, the original statement in the Ground of the Unity that "The Holy Scriptures of both the Old and New Testaments are and abide the only source and rule of faith, doctrine, and life of the Unitas Fratrum" was changed after many years of careful study and deliberation. The change was made to clarify what had always been the Moravian under-

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Ground of the Unity

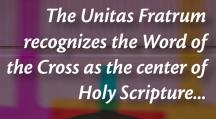
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standing of Scripture and to avoid confusion. In particular, there was a concern that the translation of the German word "Richtschnur" by the English word "rule" did not properly communicate the meaning of the original. "Richtschnur" means a standard or a guide, much like a ruler used for measuring things. In other words, Scripture provides the standard by which we can measure our doctrines and practices as a Church. Just as a measuring stick has different scales for different tasks (inches, feet, yards), we need to apply biblical teaching thoughtfully, discreetly, and with reverence rather than simply taking individual verses out of context.

By the end of the 20th century, it was felt that the older statement on Scripture was causing people to confuse faith in God with faith in the Bible. We believe the Bible to be a reliable revelation of God, but we place our faith in God and we worship God. The new statement clarifies that it is God who is the source of our life, both in terms of our physical life and our life as dearly beloved children of God. Even a casual glance at the history of Christianity demonstrates that people can and do read the Bible in a way that oppresses and abuses other people in direct contradiction to the testimony of Jesus Christ in Scripture. It is because of our human tendency to distort Scripture to justify selfrighteousness and abuse that the Ground of the Unity reminds us of the central teaching of Scripture. God is the Creator, the Redeemer, and the Comforter who leads us into abundant living. Scripture is sacred because it points us to the living God and helps us to deepen our faith, define our beliefs, and form our lives as Christians. This is what the Moravian Church has taught for over 500 years and it is consistent with the teaching of the early Christian Church.

Discussion:

- What are the various ways that Christians view the Bible? How do you relate to people who have a different approach to the Bible than you?
- Do you think that the new statement on Scripture lessens or strengthens the role of Scripture in our church and our individual lives?
- Do you think that the whole Bible is equally valuable, or are there sections that have special meaning and relevance for you?
- Is it possible to turn the Bible into an "idol" that is worshipped? Why would this be wrong for Christians?
- Are there ways in which the Bible can be misused? How?





The Cross

The Unitas Fratrum recognizes the Word of the Cross as the center of Holy Scripture and of all preaching of the Gospel, and it sees its primary mission, and its reason for being, to consist in bearing witness to this joyful message. We ask our Lord for power never to stray from this.

Commentary:

The Moravian Church has always recognized that Scripture is a complex book that can lead to confusion rather than clarity if there are no guiding principles for interpretation. For us, the key to Scripture is the revelation of God in Christ Jesus. The Ground of the Unity refers to this as the "Word of the Cross," using a phrase from 1 Corinthians 1:18. It is a reminder that "the Word of God" (logos) is Christ who hung on the cross. God's true nature was revealed most clearly on the cross, and in that Word we find hope in the midst of our own suffering. "For the foolishness of God is wiser than humans, and the weakness of God is stronger than humans" (1 Corinthians 1:25).

There are some who think that Moravians focus too much on Good Friday and not enough on the return of Christ in glory. That may be true, but we do this because of the danger that we forget the flesh and blood reality of God's revelation in Christ. We also do not want to slip into the fanatical fantasy that we are already angels rather than sinful human beings in need of daily forgiveness.

The distinctive teaching of Christianity is not that God is awesome or that miracles can happen. Many religions teach that. The heart of the Christian message is that God took on real flesh, suffered as all humans do, and died as all humans do. Christianity teaches that we are redeemed through God's full identification with his human creatures. Redemption does not save us from the pain of living, but allows us to live in faith, love, and hope even in the darkest times. We know that Christ has redeemed us, Christ is with us, and Christ will welcome us home.

The Word of the Cross also refers to the words that Christ spoke from the cross, especially the word of forgiveness to the thief and to those who crucified him. We share in that forgiveness and we share that forgiveness with others. This is why the Ground of the Unity calls this a "joyful" message. It is the joy of a mother who knows that the pain of childbirth is real, but the joy of giving birth is even more real. For Moravians, this message of the Word of God on the cross and from the cross is the lens that brings all of Scripture into focus. Both the Old and the New Testaments become for us a witness to the self-giving love of God for all creation ultimately demonstrated in Jesus.

Discussion:

- In what ways do you see the Moravian Church focusing on the Word of the Cross?
- Is the Word of the Cross meaningful to you personally or do you think we should focus on other aspects of Christ's life and teaching?
- How does it change your understanding of the entire Bible if you read it through the eyes of Christ, so to speak?
- ✤ Is the Word of the Cross a joyful message for you? Why or why not?



STUDYING MORAVIAN DOCTRINE Ground of the Unity, Part V

Following the outline established by the 2005 Jesus Still Lead On study guide, we are sharing different aspects of The Ground of the Unity, one of the worldwide Moravian Church's key doctrinal statement, in each 2016 issue of The Moravian. This month, we'll discuss Continual Search for Sound Doctrine and Divine Mysteries. Thanks to Dr. Craig Atwood and the editors of Jesus Still Lead On for this material.—Mike Riess, editor, the Moravian magazine

Continual Search for Sound Doctrine

The Unitas Fratrum takes part in the continual search for sound doctrine. In interpreting Scripture and in the communication of doctrine in the Church, we look to two millennia of ecumenical Christian tradition and the wisdom of our Moravian forebears in the faith to guide us as we pray for fuller understanding and ever clearer proclamation of the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

Commentary:

The Moravian Church traces its roots back to the reforming efforts of Jan Hus and Jakoubek of Stríbro who challenged the dogmatism and scholastic tradition of the medieval Catholic Church. Rather than merely accepting what the Church defined as unchanging dogma, our ancestors shook the foundations of the institutional church by proclaiming the simple teaching of Scripture.

In the 1490s, converts to the early Moravian Church (the Unity of the Brethren), felt that our church had also become rigid and judgmental in its doctrine and practice. Luke of Prague led a doctrinal revolution within the Unity that attempted to restore the gospel message of forgiveness and salvation by grace rather than self-righteousness. Luke argued that no individual can define the doctrine of



the Church for all time. Each generation must faithfully examine Scripture and the traditional teachings of the Church in the light of plain reason and their own historical setting. The search for sound doctrine never ends because the world is in a state of constant flux.

We make it a point of doctrine that we will not be intellectually static and spend our time buttressing ideas that have lost their relevance. Nor should we let important ideas become obscured through neglect. Instead, we maintain a vigorous and faithful on-going examination of our doctrines and practices in light of the revelation in Scripture and the witness of the entire Christian Church through the ages. Here again, though, we see that the Moravian Church does not see itself as separate from the rest of Christianity. We encourage our members to learn from the whole Christian tradition rather than *(Continued on next page)* just our part of it. Paradoxically, perhaps, the continual search for sound doctrine makes us more distinctly Moravian at the same time that we learn from other churches.

Discussion:

- Do you think it is important for the Church (and individuals in the Church) to study the long history of Christianity and the beliefs and practices of other churches? Isn't the Bible all you need?
- In what ways do you think your congregation has been enriched by a fuller understanding of the Christian tradition and heritage?
- Under what circumstances should we adopt the practices and beliefs of other Christian churches?
- Do you have personal experience of other communities of faith? How does this affect your life as a Moravian?

Divine Mystery

But just as the Holy Scripture does not contain any doctrinal system, so the Unitas Fratrum also has not developed any of its own because it knows that the mystery of Jesus Christ, which is attested to in the Bible, cannot be comprehended completely by any buman mind or expressed completely in any human statement. Also it is true that through the Holy Spirit the recognition of God's will for salvation in the Bible is revealed completely and clearly.

Commentary:

One of the key insights in Moravian theology is the recognition that God is beyond human comprehension. To comprehend something is to encircle and contain it. Comprehension implies superiority to what is comprehend...the mystery of Jesus Christ...cannot be comprehended completely by any human mind...



ed. Comprehension also means that there is nothing more to learn. We cannot grasp the phenomenal mysteries of the universe or the mystery of ourselves. How can we comprehend God? The doctrine of the Trinity should serve as a reminder that the reality of God is a mystery beyond our reasoning.

Mystery here does not mean ignorance. God is not a puzzle to solve. A sense of mystery comes from our experience. Think of the person that you know best in the world and to whom you are most attached. You know each other and you trust each other, but you still remain mysteries to each other, don't you? As the years pass, aren't there new depths of intimacy and trust? The same is true of God. This statement in the Ground of the Unity is a way to encourage us to ponder the divine mysteries of God revealed in Jesus Christ. Moravian doctrine is not as concerned with getting the right answers to a dogmatic examination as it is with bringing people into a life-giving and ever-growing relationship with their Creator and Savior.

Scripture lies at the heart of this effort. Moravians are Bible-reading people, but we encourage many ways to let the Bible speak to us. Our litanies and liturgies are taken primarily from the words of Scripture, and we read the Bible privately and in study groups. We recognize that the Bible was never intended to be a simple exposition of beliefs and laws. It is an inspired work that speaks to us in different ways at different points in our lives. We recognize that some portions of Scripture take years to appreciate while others provide the most essential truths for people of all ages.

As Bishop Kenneth Hamilton wrote in an unpublished commentary on the *Ground of the Unity*, "there are mysteries dealt with in the Bible which we can neither completely grasp nor satisfactorily formulate in our teaching. Moravians hold that God has spoken to man plainly enough for our needs, and that central in His Word stands the doctrine of the Saviour's vicarious death." In other words, Moravian doctrine is focused on what is essential and clear in Scripture, but we recognize that this does not exhaust the meaning of Scripture. Moravians are encouraged to study Scripture without hesitation and discuss what they see there without fear.

Discussion:

- What does it mean that our doctrine is based on Scripture and yet we state that Scripture does not have a doctrinal system?
- Why do we teach that Jesus is a mystery instead of offering a definition of his nature and work?
- Is there a contradiction between saying that God is beyond comprehension and saying that God's will for salvation is revealed clearly and completely?
- What is God's will for salvation and how does this affect how we live as followers of Christ?
- What is your understanding and experience of God?



STUDYING MORAVIAN DOCTRINE Ground of the Unity, Part VI

Following the outline established by the 2005 Jesus Still Lead On study guide, we are sharing different aspects of The Ground of the Unity, one of the worldwide Moravian Church's key doctrinal statement, in each 2016 issue of The Moravian. This month, we'll discuss Continual Search for Sound Doctrine and Divine Mysteries. Thanks to Dr. Craig Atwood and the editors of Jesus Still Lead On for this material.—Mike Riess, editor, the Moravian magazine

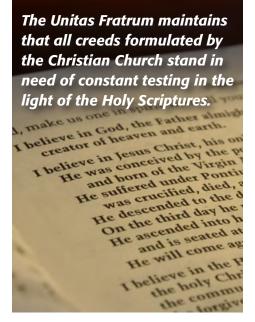
Creeds and Confessions

The Unitas Fratrum recognizes in the creeds of the Church the thankful acclaim of the Body of Christ. These creeds aid the Church in formulating a Scriptural confession, in marking the boundary of heresies, and in exborting believers to an obedient and fearless testimony in every age. The Unitas Fratrum maintains that all creeds formulated by the Christian Church stand in need of constant testing in the light of the Holy Scriptures.

Commentary:

The Moravian Church has an unusual approach to formal creeds and confessions. Some Protestant churches reject all creeds and claim that they hold to "scripture alone." Other Protestant churches use only the ancient creeds of the universal Church, especially the Apostles' Creed. Some Protestant churches, especially those born during the Reformation, define themselves by having a confession of faith that distinguishes their beliefs from other churches.

The Moravian Church teaches that creeds and confessions of faith are very useful, but that they are also all imperfect. Interestingly, the *Ground of the Unity* is not a creed or a confession. It is a statement of foundational principles that leaves much room for personal



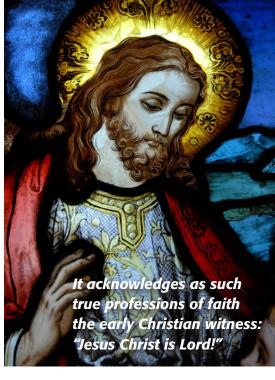
and congregational development. The *Ground* of the Unity assumes that Moravians will study and learn from the creeds of the early Church as well as from our own heritage.

Creeds are an important teaching tool in the Church because they summarize the most important aspects of Christian belief. It is sometimes very helpful to respond to the question "what do you believe" by reciting the Apostles' Creed which speaks of central issues and leaves other matters open. The ancient creeds were short and used mainly at baptism. Later confessions of faith were much longer and more intellectual. It is important to remember that many times when the Church (narrowly) defined its dogma, it actually created heretics by excluding people who had been active members of the community of faith but who could not affirm the new dogma.

The statement about the need constantly to test creeds and confessions confuses many people. This is in part because we forget that doctrine means "teaching." The Ground of the Unity is doctrine, but it does not claim to be infallible or eternal teaching. In fact, the Moravian Church has always recognized that all systems of doctrine or dogmatic statements are subject to error because they are all written by human beings and expressed in human language. The Christian Church has made many dogmatic claims that were later rejected, as Jan Hus pointed out to the Council of Constance. Our ancestors were often persecuted by authorities who claimed to possess divine truth; therefore we have been suspicious of theological arrogance for centuries. We have traditionally held to a principle of self-criticism that includes a continual search for truth.

Discussion:

- What creeds does your congregation use in worship? Are any of them important to you?
- Do you think that everyone who joins the Moravian Church or who confirms their faith should profess adherence to a particular creed?
- Is what is left out of creeds also significant?
- How is it helpful to understand the historical circumstances of creeds and confessions?
- What do you think should be in a creedal statement?
- How do we constantly test creeds and confessions of faith? Does this involve questioning?



Creeds of the Churches

It acknowledges as such true professions of faith the early Christian witness: "Jesus Christ is Lord!" and also especially the ancient Christian creeds and the fundamental creeds of the Reformation. (Note: In the various Provinces of the Renewed Unitas Fratrum the following creeds in particular gained special importance, because in them the main doctrines of the Christian faith find clear and simple expression: The Apostles' Creed, The Athanasian Creed, The Nicene Creed, The Confession of the Unity of the Bohemian Brethren (1535), The Twenty-One Articles of the unaltered Augsburg Confession, The Shorter Catechism of Martin Luther, The Synod of Berne of 1532, The Thirty-Nine Articles of the Church of England, The Theological Declaration of Barmen of 1934, The Heidelberg Catechism.)

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Commentary:

Moravians may not realize it, but this is one of the most surprising statements in the *Ground of the Unity*. It clearly reflects the work of the ecumenical movement and the desire to focus on what unites churches rather than what divides them. It also expresses the traditional Moravian understanding that God works in different ways in different churches. During Zinzendorf's time, this was called the "tropus" idea. We affirm many different confessions of faith as being important to different communities of faith without being overly concerned about their different details.

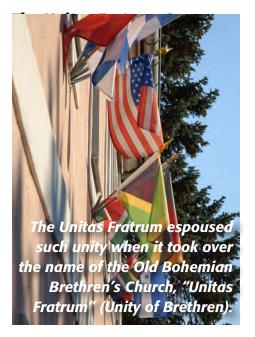
Notice, though, that we do not include all confessions of faith in this list. The principle of selection is not rigid, but basically the Moravian Church affirms the classic creeds of the early church and the confessions of faith of churches most like our own. For instance, the Synod of Berne statement and the Heidelberg Catechism are confessions of the Reformed (Calvinist) tradition that are closer in spirit to the Moravian emphasis on Christian experience ("heart religion") than some of the more famous Reformed and Presbyterian statements.

The *Ground of the Unity* point us to these creeds for our continual theological education and spiritual growth, but this statement also means that these doctrinal statements are already approved as orthodox statements of Christian faith from a Moravian perspective. In other words, when we engage in ecumenical dialogue with churches in the Anglican, Lutheran, and German or Swiss Reform tradition we have the advantage of having already affirmed their doctrine as consistent with our own.

Discussion:

- Which of these creeds or confessions have you read?
- If you were confirmed in a non-Moravian congregation, did you use any of these creeds or confessions?

- Do you think it would be better for the church to simply get rid of creeds altogether? Why or why not?
- What does the Moravian approval of so many creeds and confessions mean to you?



Unity/The Church As a Fellowship

We believe in and confess the Unity of the Church given in the one Lord Jesus Christ as God and Savior. He died that He might unite the scattered children of God. As the living Lord and Shepherd, He is leading His flock toward such unity. The Unitas Fratrum espoused such unity when it took over the name of the Old Bohemian Brethren's Church, "Unitas Fratrum" (Unity of Brethren). Nor can we ever forget the powerful unifying experience granted by the crucified and risen Lord to our ancestors in Herrnbut on the occasion of the Holy Communion of August 13, 1727, in Bethelsdorf.

Commentary:

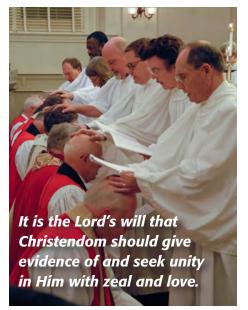
There is no denving that unity in Christ is one of the deepest values of the Moravian Church. The Ground of the Unity reminds us that the famous experience on August 13, 1727, was one of the formative moments in the development of the modern Moravian Church. We sometimes call this the Moravian Pentecost, but it is important to recognize that this means something different than modern Pentecostalism. The experience of August 13 was indeed emotional and many tears were shed, but it was not about receiving dramatic or supernatural gifts. The worshippers did not start praying incoherently, prophesying, healing diseases, or manifesting similar signs of the Spirit. What they did experience was an almost inexpressible joy that was the result of reconciliation to one another and to Christ. The gifts of the Holy Spirit were unity, love, gentleness, courage, and a sense of divine mission. For Moravians, evangelism and world mission has always been connected to reconciliation, forgiveness, and unity in love.

For Moravians, one of the signs of disease in the church is division and fruitless conflict. Our proclamation of the Gospel at home and abroad, in word and deed, should result in an increase of love and unity among the brothers and sisters. We do not believe that it is helpful to sow division or promote narrow interpretations of Christian doctrine that merely serve to divide and breed conflict. We used to pray that God would save us from "untimely projects," which meant in part that some decisions and actions need to be put off until there is greater consensus.

Unity, for Moravians, is not achieved through enforcing certain canons of doctrine, but is a visible sign of our devotion to Jesus Christ and sincere effort to live as brothers and sisters. Unity in the church is like the marriage bond. Our confidence in our unity gives us the freedom to discuss our differences and work toward better understanding.

Discussion:

- What does "unity" mean to you?
- Do you feel that there is unity in your congregation? In the Moravian Church?
- How would you propose that the Church could make unity a reality?
- Are there times when the Church should be willing to face division rather than compromise something essential? What would be such a time?



Unity with other Christians

It is the Lord's will that Christendom should give evidence of and seek unity in Him with zeal and love. In our own midst we see how such unity has been promised us and laid upon us as a charge. We recognize that through the grace of Christ the different churches have received many gifts. It is our desire that we may learn from each other and rejoice together in the riches of the love of Christ and the manifold wisdom of God. We confess our share in the guilt which is

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manifest in the severed and divided state of Christendom. By means of such divisions we ourselves hinder the message and power of the Gospel. We recognize the danger of self-righteousness and judging others without love.

Commentary:

The Moravian Church has always understood that it is a portion of the Body of Christ, not the entire Body of Christ. Part of our Christian mission and calling is to seek good relations with our brothers and sisters in other communities of faith. During the days of the Reformation and the Wars of Religion, the Unity of the Brethren signed two of the most significant early ecumenical statements: the Confessio Bohemica and the Consensus of Sandomier in the 1500s. Bishop Comenius worked closely with Anglicans, Lutherans, and Reformed leaders and wrote some of the earliest works on ecumenical theology. Zinzendorf is often identified as an "ecumenical pioneer" whose vision of the church included Roman Catholic, Eastern Orthodox, and even Coptic churches as part of the mystical body of Christ. The Moravian Church in the 20th century participated actively in the ecumenical effort to restore some of the visible unity of the Church. A Moravian even once served as President of the National Council of the Churches of Christ.

One of the reasons that we are ecumenical is because we have suffered at the hands of Christians who did not see us as brothers and sisters in faith. Through the ages we have refused to persecute others because their understanding of the Gospel differs from ours. We also recognize that it is spiritually damaging to us when we stand in judgment on other churches. Such judgments lead to self-righteousness and arrogance. Instead we embrace an understanding that Christ works in different ways through different churches. Just as we are enriched when we examine the rich history of Christianity, we can also be enriched by our contact with other believers. Moravians acknowledge that no single church has the complete understanding of God, but we discover from each other what may be missing in our worship and our service.

The hardest part of this statement in the *Ground of the Unity*, though, may be the call to confess where we have contributed to the divisions in Christianity. But confession is the first step to improvement. It can seem difficult to be true to yourself while learning from others, but we are best able to establish a loving and close relationship with someone else when we are sure of who we are. It is important that Moravians enter into ecumenical relationships with a clear sense of our identity and the gifts that God has given to us as well as with a sense of humility and sincere desire to learn from others.

Discussion:

- What does it feel like to be a member of a small denomination when you deal with people in much bigger churches?
- Do you think that the Moravians can benefit from discussions with other Christian churches?
- What gifts can the Moravian Church bring to other churches?
- In what ways does the Moravian Church or your congregation contribute to divisions and misunderstandings among Christians? How can we change this?
- Does seeking greater unity among the scattered followers of Christ mean that the Moravian Church should lose its identify or even cease to exist?



STUDYING MORAVIAN DOCTRINE Ground of the Unity, Part VII

Following the outline established by the 2005 Jesus Still Lead On study guide, we are sharing different aspects of The Ground of the Unity, one of the worldwide Moravian Church's key doctrinal statement, in each 2016 issue of The Moravian. This month, we'll discuss Ecumenism, Opposition to Discrimination, The Church as a Community Service and Serving Our Neighbor. Thanks to Dr. Craig Atwood and the editors of Jesus Still Lead On for this material.

—Mike Riess, editor, The Moravian Magazine

Ecumenism

Since we together with all Christendom are pilgrims on the way to meet our coming Lord, we welcome every step that brings us nearer the goal of unity in Him. He bimself invites us to communion in His supper. Through it He leads the Church toward that union which He bas promised. By means of His presence in the Holy Communion He makes our unity in Him evident and certain even today.

Commentary:

The theme of pilgrimage has a long history in Christianity and it continues to be a helpful way of viewing the Christian life. A pilgrim is someone who wanders through the world pursuing a spiritual goal. In the Moravian Church we emphasize that ordained ministers are pilgrims subject to being called to new areas of service. Moravians have also viewed the Church itself as a pilgrim community without a fixed home in this world. We are not to become too comfortable with our current understanding and practice because as individuals and as a church we are on a journey. We also acknowledge that other Christians are also on journeys, sometimes by different paths, but that we are all going to meet the Lord who is coming to us.

This idea that all Christians will be visibly



united when Christ returns is the basis for our belief that all Christians are already spiritually united through our common faith in Christ. Holy Communion, or the Lord's Supper, is the symbol of this already-but-not-yet reality that all followers of Christ are one in Christ despite our different rituals and doctrines. Communion in the Moravian Church is not just a reminder of the sacrifice of Christ; it is also the marriage feast of the Lamb. In Communion we celebrate a foretaste of our union with God and our communion with all the saints, past, present and future. This is why in the Moravian Church we do not exclude members of other churches from full participation in Holy Communion or try to use Communion as a reward for right beliefs. Communion is the Lord's Supper, not our supper, and it is for all who profess Christ as Lord.

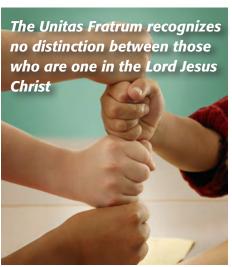
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Discussion:

- What does it mean to you to say that Christians are pilgrims in the world? What journey are you on?
- If we are willing to acknowledge that believers in other churches are Christians, even though they disagree with us doctrinally, should we apply tolerance to people within our church as well?
- What do you think it means to be united in Christ, particularly in light of the fact of conflict between Christians?
- How can Holy Communion be a symbol of unity in the Church when so many churches will not share in communion with other churches?

Opposition to Discrimination

The Church of Jesus Christ, despite all the distinctions between male and female, Jew and non-Jew, white and colored, poor and rich, is one in its Lord. 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.

Commentary:

This statement in the *Ground of the Unity* was very controversial in America in the late 1950s and early 1960s, particularly in relationship to segregation within the Moravian Church. At the time there was a question of whether black children could attend the Moravian camp at Laurel Ridge and whether black Moravians could play in the Easter band on God's Acre. In dealing with both questions, the church's leaders, such as J. Kenneth Pfohl and George Higgins, used this statement in the *Ground of the Unity* to remind all Moravians that the followers of Christ are one in the Lord.

Any effort to divide Christians, especially over such inconsequential things as skin tone and national origin, is an offense to the God who made all people. It is an offense to the Lord who gave his life for all people. While the Church cannot always change the attitudes and opinions of society, it is a sacred task for the Church to become a model of the heavenly community where there are no differences in race, gender, or language.

This is particularly important in the Moravian Church because for over two hundred years we have heard the call to bring the good news of Jesus Christ to the peoples of the world. We have tried to live by the principle that all Moravians, in fact all believers, are united in the one Body of Christ. If some in the Body of Christ are discriminated against, persecuted and harmed, then the entire body of Christ is harmed. If we hate, despise, or reject any of the people of God, then we are harming the Body of Christ, diminishing its mission and sinning against God. In dealing with this portion of the *Ground of the Unity*, it is important to keep in mind that this was written shortly after the Holocaust. Discrimination leads to violence. Violence may lead to genocide.

Notice also that this passage quotes from Galatians to remind us that discrimination against women is also wrong. The same synod that approved the *Ground of the Unity* approved the ordination of women. It is a point of doctrine in the Moravian Church that there is no spiritual distinction between men and women; therefore women may be called into the pastoral ministry. For most of our 500-year history, we stood against the tide of public opinion and educated women. As early as 1750 we ordained women, and now we are blessed by women bishops.

Notice that our concern for equality among Christians includes more than race and gender. Since the earliest beginnings of the Moravian Church in the 15th century, we have recognized that much of the evil in this world is caused by those with power and wealth abusing those with neither. In the earliest decades of the church (1457-1494), nobles were required to sell their estates before they could join the Moravian Church because of concerns over divisions of class within the community. In the Zinzendorf era, many Moravians lived in communities where the differences between social classes were minimized. Today there are rich Moravians, middle-class Moravians, and poor Moravians, but we do not sanctify inequalities in wealth. In the Christian community, rich and poor stand together as sinners saved by God's grace. All Moravians are called to share their resources for the sake of those who are suffering.

Discussion:

- Why is it wrong for Christians to discriminate against people because of the "accidents" of their birth? Is this a political matter, or is it one of the central aspects of the Gospel?
- Are there any signs of racism or discrimination in the Moravian Church today? If so, what can you and your congregation do about this?
- Why is it that so many Moravians around the world are dark-skinned but most Moravians in both North American Provinces are light-skinned?
- What do you think about the role of women in the Moravian Church?
- What is your image of the perfect Christian community?
- In what ways does Christianity challenge the assumptions of the modern economy?

The Church as a Community of Service

Jesus Christ came not to be served but to serve. From this, His Church receives its mission and its power for its service, to which each of its members is called. We believe that the Lord has called us particularly to mission service among the peoples of the world. In this, and in all other forms of service both at home and abroad, to which the Lord commits us, He expects us to confess Him and witness to His love in unselfish service.

Commentary:

In earlier days, Moravian doctrinal statements did not say much about service in the world. This was probably because there was no need to do so in the days when the church was a small community living by a strictly-enforced



called us particularly to mission service among the peoples of the world.

discipline. There was also a strong sense of alienation from the world. By the 20th century, though, the Moravian Church and the world had changed; the *Ground of the Unity* reminds us of our centuries-old understanding that service is the true mark of the Christian. All members of the Moravian Church are servants of Christ, but that does not mean that we have to do all forms of service individually. Some of our service is performed through others, but we are all expected to demonstrate Christ-like humility in serving others.

The Moravian Church has traditionally seen its particular area of service to be proclaiming the gospel to the different people of the world and entering into loving relationship with them. For Moravians, there is no dichotomy between missions as preaching and missions as providing for personal and social needs. We proclaim the gospel when we establish schools in villages where there are no schools. We proclaim the gospel when we provide medical care in the remotest regions of the inhabited globe. We serve people's deepest spiritual and personal needs when we share with them the message of divine forgiveness and invite them into relationship with their Creator and Savior. We serve people at home and around the globe when we help them see that death is not the final answer and that love is real.

The precise nature of our mission service is ultimately less important than our motivation and attitude in going out to demonstrate that no people are God-forsaken. We go as servants, not masters. We go out of genuine love for those whom we serve and seek to protect them from all harm. We seek the good of others and treat them with great respect because we represent the love of Christ.

Discussion:

- Why do you think it is helpful to include a statement on service in the world in a doctrinal statement?
- What makes Christian service in the world distinct from other types of volunteer activity?
- What is the danger in doing missions with an attitude of arrogance and self-centered-ness?
- What do you think it means to proclaim the Gospel in the world? Do you think this is a central task for the Moravian Church?
- Do you feel adequately prepared to do this? If not, how can your church help prepare you?
- Has the mission of proclaiming the Gospel changed now that America is welcoming immigrants from all areas of the world?

Serving Our Neighbor

Our Lord Jesus entered into this world's misery to bear it and to overcome it. We seek to follow Him in serving His brothers and sisters. Like the love of Jesus, this service knows no bounds. Therefore we pray the Lord ever anew to point out to us the way to reach our neighbors, opening our heart and hand to them in their need.

Commentary:

This passage of the *Ground of the Unity* contains one of the most eloquent and profound summaries of Moravian doctrine ever written. "Our Lord Jesus entered into this world's misery to bear it and to overcome it." This is the heart of the Gospel message, and it does not require great philosophical or scientific knowledge to understand it. God saw us in our isolation, our self-righteousness and our misery, and in the person of Jesus, experienced our misery in order to lift us up. We serve the world because God entered the world himself. We follow Christ best when we are willing to share another person's pain, troubles and heartache.

We sing about the boundless love of Christ, but it is even more important that we become agents of that love in the world. Our individual love is limited, but through Christ we can have the strength and courage to break down the walls that divide us. It is very significant that the *Ground of the Unity* calls us to prayer in this regard. In the Moravian tradition, prayer is less a matter of seeking help for our personal needs (although that is important) than asking God for eyes to see where our neighbors are in need. We pray for open hearts and open hands because we are God's agents in the world.

This section of the *Ground of the Unity* puts into simple form the parable of the Good Samaritan. Too often our religious practices serve to confirm us in our selfishness and self-righteousness, blinding us to the pain of others. Therefore, we Moravians pray that we will be able to see the suffering of our neighbors and that we will be able to help because it is in serving that we are brought closest to our Lord and Savior.



Discussion:

- Reflect quietly for a moment on the ways in which God has helped you in the midst of your misery. What was that like? Did he use other people as his agents of mercy for you?
- Is there anything wrong with being self-reliant and encouraging others to do likewise?
- How can engaging in visible acts of service bring us closer to Christ and help us grow in our faith?
- What types of service in the world do you engage in?
- How does your congregation serve the community around you?
- How does the Moravian Church as a whole seek out those in misery?

We will continue our study of the *Ground of the Unity* in our next issue. ■



STUDYING MORAVIAN DOCTRINE Ground of the Unity, Part VIII

Following the outline established by the 2005 Jesus Still Lead On study guide, we are sharing different aspects of The Ground of the Unity, one of the worldwide Moravian Church's key doctrinal statements, in The Moravian. In our final installment, we'll discuss Serving the World, Authority of Christ and the Conclusion of the Ground of the Unity. Thanks to Dr. Craig Atwood and the editors of Jesus Still Lead On for this material.

Serving the World

Jesus Christ maintains in love and faithfulness His commitment to this fallen world. Therefore we must remain concerned for this world. We may not withdraw from it through indifference, pride or fear. Together with the universal Christian Church, the Unitas Fratrum challenges all with the message of the love of God, striving to promote the peace of the world and seeking to attain what is best for all people. For the sake of this world, the Unitas Fratrum hopes for and looks to the day when the victory of Christ will be manifest over sin and death and the new world will appear. -Mike Riess, editor, The Moravian Magazine

in our communities that we have withdrawn from the world. The horrors of the 20th century demonstrated that Christians cannot leave the world to go its own way. Unless people of faith are engaged actively in promoting the message of God's love for his creation and for all of his children, humans will destroy themselves and their environment. We have the technology and the hatred to destroy all things, but Christians know that "God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son."

Moravians do not give credence to the apocalyptic fantasies that are peddled on newsstands, nor do we appeal to people's fears and anxieties in order to increase our mem-

Commentary:

We love the world because Christ loves the world. This has been something that the Moravian Church has struggled with through the centuries. There have been many times when we were so concerned with our own spiritual development and purity

...we must remain concerned for this world. We may not withdraw from it through indifference, pride or fear.

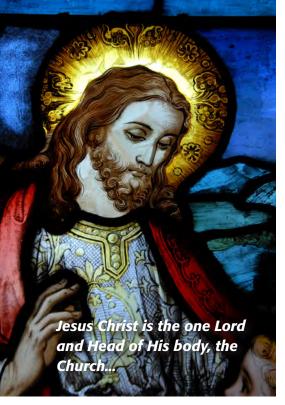
bership. In following Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior, we commit ourselves to the world that he has redeemed. Pride and fear often seem to rule the world and even the Church, but the Christian message is that we can be filled with faith. love and hope. We can challenge the world with the message of

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peace and reconciliation even in the midst of war and terror because the Prince of Peace strengthens us. We know that violence and evil do not have the final word. We know that we can fight with the weapons of faith rather than huddling behind the weapons of war. We do not need to be afraid because we know that "perfect love casts out fear."

This message of peace is most needed when it is the least welcome. The *Ground of the Unity* makes it clear that we are called to seek what is best for all people rather than using people for our own benefit or making enemies. We stand opposed to the exploitation of the weakest people of the world and are called



to raise our voices in their defense. We do not need to make others conform to our way of doing things. Rather, we are called to help them seek what is best for them. We do this because we look forward to the day when Christ's kingdom is manifest on earth. Until that day, though, we are called to do what we can to make this world a reflection of heaven's perfection.

Discussion:

- How can Christians work for peace and justice in the world? Is this separate from or related to the task of evangelism?
- What is the danger if Christians withdraw from the world and build their own protected communities divorced from others?
- Why is it hard to be a peacemaker in the midst of conflict?
- What does it mean to "seek to attain what is best for all people?" How do we know what is best for others?

Authority of Christ

Jesus Christ is the one Lord and Head of His body, the Church. Because of this, the Church owes no allegiance to any authority whatsoever which opposes His dominion. The Unitas Fratrum treasures in its history the vital experience of the Headship of Christ of September 16 and November 13, 1741.

Commentary:

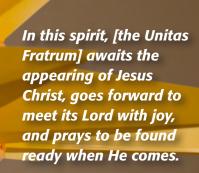
Moravians celebrate the election of Christ as Chief Elder of our Church every year, but we do not always take this idea seriously enough. It is important for us to realize that Christ is head of the entire body of Christ, not just our community of faith. We are grateful that this truth was experienced in a particularly significant way in our own history, but it is even more important that we make this a constant reality in our lives and in our community. This paragraph of the *Ground of the Unity* clearly reflects the Theological Declaration of Barmen (1934) by which some German Christians took a stand against Adolph Hitler and his messianic pretensions.

Christians owe their ultimate allegiance to God alone, and we know the will of God through the revelation of Jesus Christ. It is important for the sake of our own souls and for the good of the world that Christ loves that we never oppose his kingdom. This takes some discernment, but in general it is clear to most Christians when governments and other organizations stand opposed to the most fundamental Christian values. It is not as hard to recognize genuine evil as one might think.

What is hard is having the courage to resist evil in the name of Christ. It is hard to stand opposed to genocide, wanton destruction of creation, abuse of women, children, and men when our opposition may be costly. This is when we most need our faith in Christ. When we are doubting and wavering, we need to ask, "where Christ would be?" Would he be with the victims or the victimizers? If Christ is our Head and Lord, then we cannot let any lesser authority make us oppose Christ and his peaceable kingdom.

Discussion:

- Why is it vital that all Christians recognize that there are times when human authorities have become so corrupted by sin that it would be evil to obey their orders?
- What does the doctrine of Christ as Chief Elder mean to you?
- How do you know what would be opposed to Christ's kingdom?
- What are ways in which authorities might ask you to oppose the Kingdom of Christ?



Conclusion

The Unitas Fratrum recognizes that it is called into being and has been sustained hitherto only by the incomprehensible grace of God. Thanksgiving and praise for this grace remain the keynote of its life and ministry. In this spirit it awaits the appearing of Jesus Christ, goes forward to meet its Lord with joy, and prays to be found ready when He comes.

Commentary:

One of the hallmarks of the Moravian Church through the centuries has been a sense of joy and peace that comes from knowing Christ and serving Christ. Contrary to the opinion of many in the world, it is in following Christ that we

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find our true happiness. This joy is not a fleeting emotion, but a deep awareness that nothing, not even our own failings, can separate us from the love of God. We do not presume to understand why God loves us or calls us into relationship with him. Rather, we simply rejoice in our experience of grace and look for ways in which to show our love for the Lord through humble and courageous service in the world.

The *Ground of the Unity* reminds us that we do not serve Christ under compulsion, like hired hands. We serve as dearly beloved children and friends of Jesus who strive to do what is pleasing to God. There is no division between our worship and our work, our praise of God and our love for one another. All is united in our joyful anticipation of the day when all things are restored. Therefore in the Moravian Church we stress that Christians look toward the return of Jesus or our going home to God with eager anticipation rather than fear and trepidation. We do not need or even desire to know the day or the hour of Christ's return because we strive each day to be doing what the Lord requires of us: "to do justice, love mercy, and walk humbly with our God."

Discussion:

- Why is it important for us to remember that our church exists because of the grace of God rather than because of our own endeavors?
- Why are thanksgiving, praise, and joy essential features of the Christian life?
- What does it mean to be ready when the Lord returns?
- Having studied the entire *Ground of the Unity*, is there anything that you think needs to be changed?
- Has the study of Moravian doctrine changed your attitude toward the Moravian Church or your understanding of your faith? How?

The full text of the *Ground of the Unity* and *Covenant for Christian Living* are available on www.moravian.org. The *Jesus Still Lead On* study guide is available from the Interprovincial Board of Communication. ■

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For more information on Jesus Still Lead On by the Rev. Dr. Craig Atwood, please visit store.moravian.org.