

The fact remains that in the world at large, there is less religious diversity now than at any time since the dawn of civilization. The world is now divided between three major competing and absolutist faiths. Islam, Buddhism, and Christianity each claim to being the only path to lasting happiness and right living. Each sends out missionaries with their message of salvation. Each dominates a major geographical region of the world and now each infringes on the others' traditional spheres of influence. Each has been the victim and the perpetuator of violence and domination. For Cobb, the only way to avoid continual and fruitless conflict is for the major faith traditions to accept their relativity. Just as in physics all motion is relative motion, so in religion, all faith is relative to time and place. Each religion has changed dramatically through the centuries and truths once held as absolute have been abandoned in favor of better understandings or new revelations. Why not go a step further and acknowledge that other faith traditions may also have relative truths? In specific, Cobb argues that Buddhists and Christians as Buddhists and Christians need to work together from their own faith traditions to engage in work to repair our damaged world.

Most people who know of Cobb's earlier works will probably be surprised to read the essay "Proclaiming Christ in a Pluralistic World," because there he asserts that Christians need to preach Christ in words and actions. The goal of proclaiming Christ is the conversion of the world (including the Christian church) to the mission that Jesus proclaimed in the world. We do this best, Cobb says, when we live by faith rather than relying on ancient confessional statements. "A healthy, confident Christian faith is much more likely when we recognize that we do not know what we will believe in the future, but that we know that for now God in Christ calls us to learn all we can" (p. 184). Although you may reject Cobb's presuppositions and conclusions, it is instructive to see the development of his thought. And the questions he addresses will be the most vexing ones for Christians in the twenty-first century..

-- Craig Atwood

Letters

Dear Craig:

I am writing to comment on the Winter 2003 Hinge, Readiness for Ordination: A Statement by the PECs. I am in agreement with the "Notes from the Editor" specifically the statements "Few clergy report being happy and fulfilled in their work" and also "Pastors in distress more often choose to leave the ministry rather than move to a new congregation." Even though these two statements are certainly nothing new, I am glad that they are being pointed out.

I joined the Moravian Church while at Moravian Theological Seminary as part of the process for ordination. As of this writing I will have served in parish ministry nine years. The fact that morale of Moravian clergy is low and conflict between pastors and those they serve is high doesn't surprise me at all. Neither am I surprised that some of the frustration is traced to the call process itself. I do not believe the call process itself is all that difficult to understand nor are the expectations placed on clergy serving in the Moravian Church. The job description is spelled out in the document, "Steps to Ordination" and the call process is the way the minister "applies" for the job.

On the surface everything seems clear and upfront. Unfortunately, the call process is not without its faults. As I see it, there are two particular problems. The first is that the call process can take a long time depending on the church. Smaller churches, high maintenance churches, and churches suffering financial hardship are less likely to go through the process quickly. When a church of the above description does finally install a pastor, they are often "fresh out of seminary." The simple truth is that the small church can't afford a more experienced pastor and because the newly graduated candidate is fearful of turning down that first call.

This leads to the second problem which is (despite the efforts of denominational leadership) that pastors are not always well-matched to the congregation. Again this mostly affects seminary graduates and smaller congregations. It is my opinion that the average seminary graduate is not prepared for life in the small to medium size congregation. Despite the best efforts of our seminary instructors, the average seminary graduate cannot fully understand the difficulties involved with pastoring these kinds of churches until they are actually serving one. Likewise, the laity of these churches do not fully appreciate the amount of pressure the newly ordained person is under. It is possible that both the congregation and the newly ordained expect too much from one another too soon. It is here that morale begins to suffer. If a church has a particularly troubled history, things can begin to deteriorate even more quickly. Since most ministers in the Moravian Church will probably remain in small to middle sized congregations *and* since many of those congregations are high maintenance, it is not hard to understand why morale is low across the boards.

Rev. Kevin J. Henning, Moravian Congregation of Egg Harbor, NJ

Dear Craig:

Maggie Wellert and Margaret Leinbach get it right in their essay in the Winter 2002 issue of the Hinge, “The Good Samaritan as Metaphor for Ministry.” The pastor as guide among a community of mutually supportive Good Samaritans is, in my opinion, a good model for professional ministry. Note her the term, “professional ministry.” Wellert and Leinbach distinguish between professional ministry, “the priesthood of all believers,” and “mutual ministry.” I agree.

Indulge me for a moment to list some verbs, adjectives, and nouns that Maggie and Margaret employ so effectively: *watchful, attentive, stands in, looks out for, preaches, administers, models, sinners, sick, poor, needy, healing, reconciliation*. Read them again faster, then as fast as you can until they blur together. What stands out for you? “Empowers” and “facilitates” stand out for me.

My job title is “Training Officer.” I work in something called “Training and Standards Bureau.” We training officers in training and standards bureaus are concerned with things like recruitment qualifications, task analyses, and training objectives; qualifications to perform specific tasks, to do which we will train you.

So, what are the personal qualifications we should be looking for in individuals whom we hope to recruit for professional ministry in the Moravian Church? What specific tasks do we expect them to perform? How do we train them to perform those tasks? And how do we evaluate their performance? I submit the following from Maggie’s and Margaret’s article:

Qualifications: *watchful, attentive*.

Tasks: *listen, elicit, know, respond, look out for, preach, administer, model, facilitate, empower*.

What we, the Moravian Church, need to do, then, is to find and recruit watchful and attentive people who can be trained to listen, elicit, know, respond, look out for, preach, administer, model, facilitate, and empower. They must be willing to be servants (even slaves) in their ministry to sinners, the sick, the poor, and the needy. Their ultimate goal must be to heal and reconcile.

Here we have gleaned from the insights of two most reliable sources what it takes to professionally minister in the Moravian Church. These should be the standards by which we measure candidate’s readiness to be ordained. At least we should use these techniques to evaluate how we regard ministry, professional and mutual, in our Moravian Church.

John Scepanski, Christian Faith Moravian Church, DeForest, WI