

# The Author Responds

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Brother Hermann, first I must thank you for the gift of sharing your experience with your daughter.

You mentioned several reasons why “the growing of churches is hard, and not getting easier” before one rang bells in my belfry. “*Perhaps as important as any of these is the splintering of society. One mark of the New Testament Church is the minimizing of the things that divide humans, like gender, social standing, age, race, and even language. We think, ‘I want to be with people like me.’ God says, ‘I like all kinds, and if my church is to reflect me, it will like all kinds too.’*”

As a self-professed xenophile, I much prefer what you have God saying in the above statement to what “we think”.

I, too, am wary of labels, whether political, religious, or any other kind. When I was growing up, I would occasionally run into kids who liked to make fun of the name Woestendiek. I’d often tell myself “Sticks and stones may break my bones, but names will never hurt me” and let it roll off my back.

I didn’t know then what I know now. Whether we attribute it to labels or niches, the insidious fear of being lumped into some undesirable category can so dishearten individual members of our larger society that genuine communication can be short-circuited altogether. Over the past twenty years I have observed a real trend toward cautious—if not altogether inhibited—communication. In that context, pure communication often shines all the more brightly.

I like to think there is a difference between the word “divisive” and the word diversity, don’t you? Do they share a common root?

Brother Neil, after I forgave your use of the words “racism” and “argument,” both of which I tried to avoid in an article that I intended as more reflective than incendiary, I was truly intrigued by what you had to say. I crave more information on the Canadian mosaic model you refer to and can’t help but wish a good dose of it would cross the border. I laughed when you said the notion of something being un-Canadian would probably elicit more laughter than anger.

It seems that the more I think about all of this, the blurrier the line gets between the challenges of the society I live in and the denomination to which I belong. Your references to binary (and “one right way”) thinking hit home hard. And I find myself wondering, how true today are those words about doing as the Romans do which Cervantes put in Don Quixote’s mouth nearly 380 years ago?

What is remarkable to me about the one prescription you offer at the end of your response is not its lack of originality, but the reluctance of our denomination to open their hearts and minds to dialogue on these issues. One pastor who knows how important I think dialogue is for the future of the Moravian Church said, “We don’t know how.” How can we learn to swim if we avoid the water and the waves? If we should one day find ourselves in over our heads, would sidestepping get us any closer to shore?

Brother Edward, as I studied your response there were two parts that struck strong chords for me. The first was your reference to African retention in hymn performance style. And the second was your suggestion to bring together choirs from white and minority churches to sing for and with each other.

The wheels in my head churned as I thought about the differences in the way most white and most black churches sing, remembering the many times I had been so richly blessed to find myself in the midst of the intensity of black church singing. The more I thought about this, the closer I came to having to ask a question I hope the larger Moravian Church is able to ask itself from time to time. Who are we?

Before we can really begin to tear down walls of our own making, we must become aware of what they are. And before we can become aware of what the walls are, we must recognize who we are. What does the Lord require of a denomination that has “people of color” as 80% of its worldwide membership? I don’t have the answer, but I can tell you this much: the question sure has a way of hanging around. It’s been on my mind for nearly as long as I have been a Moravian.

It is my sincere belief that the Moravian Church will flourish when it learns to celebrate its diversity in a way that is no longer only within the walls of our own making. What an example we could set for others if we dared to identify and intentionally bridge a few of our own gaps without getting lost in the quagmire of what Neil referred to as “we/they” or “right/wrong” thinking.

Sister Charlotte, I salute you for noting the absence of *The Ground of Unity* and *The Covenant for Daily Living* in this piece, as well as for your

obvious commitment to your own mid-life career change. I hope you never forget either the unique life experience you take with you into your calling or your own interpretation of the harmony we are to seek “in our midst” to mean “within our local communities as well as within our individual congregations or the world-wide Moravian Church.”

Brother Bishop, I am grateful to you for whatever it took to dig and scratch your way through this article long enough to find the insights and wisdom those interviewed were willing to share. This is why it pained me so to think their words might never see the light of day.

What a privilege it is to have been an instrument in writing an article that contained a “2x4” experience for you! (I trust you have not forgotten the ways reading your article in an old copy of *The Hinge* had a similar affect on me a few years ago.) Frankly, I wasn’t far from viewing the Brother/Sister references as an antiquated custom myself, until Brother Belfield shed fresh light on the subject for me.

I thank God (with a little help from Edwin Markham and Bishop Loppnow) for the impact you say this article had on you. I hope the dialogue we’ve been able to generate in this issue of *The Hinge* will not fall between the cracks, but instead take root among those who would like to see it grow. A few years back, I found myself close to taking the “shrivel up and die on the vine” route of which you write. For me, it was not so much a result of no one’s offering me friendship. It was my own intense fear of waking up five or ten years down the line to discover that I had become so fully assimilated into the Moravian Church that I had become another proud stone in an invisible

and unidentified wall that unwittingly shut others out.

It occurs to me that before we can draw circles that take people in, we must generate a willingness to identify—and discuss—where our existing circles lie. I remember reading a Southern Province “State of the Church” message by Bob Sawyer in the late 1990’s in which he mentioned newcomers leaving the church without so much as a whimper. I knew as I read those words that this was something I should not do. I began to whimper for more dialogue between “old” Moravians and “new” Moravians to heal whatever gaps might exist between those two circles and lead to mutually beneficial understanding, as well as more open doors.

I was directed to submit a proposal to the Vision Committee of the church I then attended. I was told “No” in a tone that implied there would be no discussion or further explanation. Aware of how strongly I continued to feel the need for open dialogue, a pastor friend encouraged me to meet with Revs. Truman Dunn and Lane Sapp to see if they were receptive to this kind of dialogue. By the time my meeting with the two of them rolled around, my whimpering had turned to tears and I was apt to have come across to them at best a fool, at least a near hysterical woman.

Recollections of that meeting have been on my heart frequently over the last two years as the controversy over Truman Dunn’s Moses Lectures prompted the Southern Province to dialogue more as it went through the wringer with our Brother Truman.

Whether we’re talking about race relations, human relations, public relations, Americans,

Moravians or church growth, we have got to acquire the ability to ask each other honest questions. An honest question, (as I was once told and refuse to ever forget) is a question you don’t