

Finally, I found Brother Hertzog's remarks regarding his personal enlightenment regarding The Parable of the Talents very interesting. This demonstrates a concept I hold as essential in our journey together as Christians and as Moravians: openness to new understanding from the study of the Holy Scripture. Furthermore, my own struggle lies in judging others who claim "righteousness" in the judgment of others. In this I risk becoming a closed-minded liberal, too enlightened to need the Holy Spirit.

I love the Moravian Church. It is here that I feel called to grow as a person in relationship with Christ. However, in order for me to continue to grow in spirit, I must also feel safe. If my gay best friends do not feel safe in the Moravian Church, I do not feel safe. If the woman in the pew beside me who is struggling with her son's homosexuality, does not feel safe in the Moravian Church, I do not feel safe. It is my opinion that Resolution 6 provides a secure place for persons on multiple sides of the homosexuality debate. However, let us never cease listening for the guidance of the Holy Spirit. Surely, *this* is an *essential*.

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(Footnotes)

¹ For further reading on pastoral care for gay, lesbian and bisexual persons, I recommend James L. Empeur, S.J., *Spiritual Direction and the Gay Person* (New York: The Continuum Publishing Company, 1999).

Kathy Barnes

I would like to thank Craig Atwood for inviting me to respond to this article, based on my personal experience within the Moravian Church and my own life rather than any formal theological education. I also appreciate Glenn Hertzog's willingness to continue open discussion about an issue which causes more anger and discord than my experience of the Moravian Church allows me to comprehend.

I grew up in the Moravian Church and have always experienced one overwhelming commonality throughout the Moravian faith - our belief that God is a God of Love. Because this was modeled throughout my life by parents, Sunday school teachers, ministers, and fellow Moravians, I too have been fortunate to grow up with a sense of security that God's grace is for all His children, including me. I have tried to teach this to my children, and I am eternally grateful for the love and support given to both Sarah and Jon by their Home Church extended family.

One example of this love and support has been experienced through the years by my children at Laurel Ridge Moravian Camp. From Home Church Day on the mountain, weekend family retreats, and their summer camping experiences to name a few, my children have grown in their faith and the knowledge that they are loved by a large extended family of Moravian brothers and sisters.

To my great sorrow, it was also at a summer camping experience at Laurel Ridge when my son revealed to his friends that he is gay that some of the youth and adults who had played important

roles in his faith journey, turned their backs on him. They belittled, taunted, and rejected him, and made his last experience of Sr. High Camp one of the most painful experiences of his life. As Jon said to me when he returned home, “How could they be my friends for all those years and suddenly change their minds just because of my sexual orientation? Do they not realize that I am still the same person?”

Is he not also a beloved child of God? No matter how my husband and I have attempted to model Christ’s unconditional love to our children, this experience proved to be a turning point in our son’s faith journey. After all, how can we call ourselves Christians, when what we model to others is anger, hatred, and bigotry toward any human being? Why would anyone *choose* to subject themselves to such humiliation, if sexual orientation is, as many ignorantly claim, a choice?

When I first read Resolution 6, I was aghast that the Moravian Church, whose very motto contains the mandate “In All Things, Love”, would find it necessary to categorize its members as Homosexual or Heterosexual and to state whom we will or will not support. Resolution 6 contains some language which, I believe, is consistent with the ideals of the Moravian faith; “Individuals shall be supported and affirmed by being allowed to celebrate their lives as individuals...completely within the bounds of the church and under the grace which our Creator imparts to all persons.”

To All Persons! Isn’t this exactly what we have always known about God? That He loves and celebrates each and every one of us as His own

child and calls us to love one another even as He has shown His love for us? Why then, do we think it is necessary, or even appropriate, to divide the human race into specific groups of people which we will choose to affirm or not affirm based on our own arbitrary judgment of who is worthy and who is not? If we begin categorizing members of Christ’s body as acceptable or unacceptable of our support and affirmation, where will the self righteous judgmental attitudes end?

This resolution, according to Br. Hertzog, continues “... a series of resolutions... (which) attempt to legislatively create an environment wherein church members and friends...might feel less isolated...within the...Moravian Christian Community.” I would suggest that the only way the Moravian Church will create this type of environment is when each member opens his or her heart to every one of God’s children with the same unconditional love and acceptance that Christ modeled throughout his ministry, not when Synod resolutions attempt to legislate what is in our hearts and our actions.

I share this experience in hopes that it will allow us to continue to open doors and lines of communication. It is only by being open to the value that each one of us brings to Christ’s body, that we will be able to live faithfully, fully, and in a way that is pleasing to the Father who made us all. We must move beyond our fear, for fear is the root of all anger and anger is what makes this issue such a divisive one. We must pray earnestly that God will open our eyes to see each of His children as our brothers and sisters, as His sons and daughters in whom He is well pleased.

As Harold Stassen once said, “Whoever kindles the flame of intolerance is lighting a fire underneath his own home.” It is my belief that if the Moravian Church continues to kindle the flames of intolerance for *any* of God’s children, we are lighting a fire underneath our own denomination and insuring that God’s love will never be known through us.

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Jon Barnes

Brother Glenn Hertzog describes the chasm in the Moravian church over the issue of homosexuality as part of an ongoing effort for intra-congregational dialogue on this issue in order that we may eventually find unity and strengthen the integrity of the *Unitas Fratrum* with a greater truth. Resolution 6 of the Provincial Synod of the Northern Province asserts that “individuals shall be...allowed to celebrate their lives as individuals...within the bounds of the church and under the grace which our Creator imparts to all persons.” As stated in this regard the resolution seems very basic; so why was this resolution the product of years of discussion? Why does this excerpt’s preceding term “Homosexual” delineate a group of individuals from such a self-evident principle of human kindness and dignity?

Concurrent with the change in times, is the change in the modern context to which we apply ‘God’s word.’ If God had truly intended the

scriptures to be applied in a *literal* sense, he also intended to stop the progression of time and with it the progression of humanity. Although Biblical scripture is considered to be the word of God, who is to say that God’s word is fixed and unchanging? God’s creation is constantly changing, so why should his word (as transcribed by his creation) be unchanging? Almost 2,000 years removed from the Bible’s inception, Moravians (as well as other Christians) today are dealing with the questions of a woman’s role in the church, homosexuality, and Christ as people’s sole salvation.

According to the Unity Synod, the question of homosexuality as an issue “does not rise to the doctrinal equivalent of the New Testament confession, ‘Jesus is Lord’.” Unity Synod is simply skirting the issue at hand, indeed, avoiding the potential for dialogue and learning, in fear of risking the unity of the Moravian Church. If the Synod deals solely with issues that rise to such a “doctrinal equivalent,” I should doubt the utility and value of the council to the modern Moravian community, a community which is beyond the questions dealt with at the Council of Nicaea in 325 AD.

It is only through dialogue that knowledge shall be acquired. If we are content with an ancient and antiquated interpretation of scripture, then we have failed to utilize one of God’s greatest provisions: the measure of time. Times are constantly changing, as are the people living in them — our languages, culture, knowledge and our way of life. Moravians believe that ‘Jesus is Lord,’ but he was also a part of humankind. As such, it is the duty of the Synod to address the ever changing issues facing our Moravian