

could vote on a document that clearly said the same thing to everyone.

A core group of leaders in the Southern Province are working to conclude a four-year visioning process with the objective of agreeing on a simple statement that answers the question: “Who are we and what do we believe?” If that statement does not clearly and simply affirm our belief in the authority of scripture and its message of salvation through Christ, then I fear this demonstrates the Moravian Church is moving toward apostasy and heresy, in which case believers must call the church to repentance.

Maybe with clear directives from future Synods, PECs will be charged with guarding doctrine and policies related to our faith and beliefs. Maybe pastors will be encouraged by Glenn and other leaders of our church to offer biblical instruction on life issues. Maybe Glenn could find one more blessing to share with all God’s children: the blessing that all Christians enjoy of being called to grow in the image of Christ, called to holiness and righteousness. (Eph 4:24).

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#### **(Footnotes)**

<sup>1</sup> Bob Hoekstra, “A Warning Against Changing God’s Grace,” *Day By Day By Grace*. Blue Letter Bible. 19 Mar 2004. 26 Mar 2004 <<http://www.blueletterbible.org/daybyday/02/0219.html>>.

## **Lorin Miller**

As I read Brother Glenn Hertzog’s recollection of the events that prompted our Schoeneck congregation to lock its sanctuary doors, I remembered the regret we felt over that decision. It did not seem like anyone wanted to prevent someone from finding shelter in our sanctuary. That was in 1969, when I was in the eighth grade at Nazareth Junior High. The lasting impression that episode left upon me at that young age attests to the seriousness with which we treated that decision. Recalling that episode has also caused me to reflect on my own personal experiences while growing up in the Moravian Church at Schoeneck.

I doubt I will ever approach Glenn’s level of devotion and service to the Moravian Church, but our journeys at Schoeneck are somewhat similar. Even so, the paths we followed along the way were considerably different. I was only fourteen in 1969, but I had already experienced locked doors of a different sort as a young member of the congregation.

Since my earliest childhood memories, I have always known that I am gay. It is not something I chose, or something I learned. It has simply always been a fact of life for me. For those of you who still debate this topic, let me assert that homosexuality is an inherent characteristic of my existence that is manifested by my affinity with the same gender in exactly the same way that heterosexuality is manifested by an affinity with the opposite gender. Based on my experience, homosexuality is nothing more than one fundamental and natural trait, among many traits that combine to form my personality.

The locked doors that I experienced at Schoeneck resulted from the message that there was unquestionably no place in the church or in heaven for gay people like me. That is the message I received from our pastor who served during those formative years of my youth. As if that was not enough to squelch all hope, in those days there was no information readily available to learn about what I was experiencing as a young gay person. More than anything, I desired to know of other young people like me who had similar experiences. Instead, the only perspective I knew in my world and my church was one of complete isolation.

In spite of all that, I grew up nurturing a deep and abiding faith in Jesus Christ. By God's grace, this faith developed in me at a very early age. Thankfully so, because by the time I heard the claim that I would be locked outside heaven's door, I was simply not willing to believe it. Why would God choose to deny salvation to me, after all those years of being taught as a child that there is indeed a place for me in heaven? Those locked doors did not seem like much of a barrier then, since Jesus had already been walking by my side.

Many years have passed since those days. I stopped attending Schoeneck for a period of ten years or so, but my faith never subsided. I simply did not sense that I was fully welcome there. Eventually, a new pastor answered our congregation's call, and I was compelled to return. I have been worshipping and serving my Lord there ever since. In fact, if you want to have an idea of my renewed experience at Schoeneck, I

would direct you to the words of Resolution 6. Those words describe rather nicely how I have been living out my faith in our congregation for the last eighteen years. I am grateful that the Northern Provincial Synod has taken this step toward unlocking a door, legitimizing what I have already been experiencing from within our loving congregation.

Unfortunately, there are many more locked doors to be opened. Clearly, many Moravians are unhappy that such resolutions have been adopted. Many would like to keep these doors locked, preventing gay folks like me from participating in the Moravian Church, and denying God's grace from all gay Christians. For that reason, I want to thank Glenn for making a leap of faith by contributing his article. Because this issue of homosexuality is so divisive and controversial, the natural response to it does seem to be one of silence. This has been the response for as long as I can recall whenever a reasonable solution to this issue seems unlikely. Even now, the Unity Synod has responded in a like manner by issuing a moratorium on further action regarding homosexuality in the church. This tendency toward silence will always be the easiest and safest action to take.

I appreciate the way Glenn breaks down the words of Resolution 6 in order to define their meaning so precisely. Obviously such clarification has been necessary, given reactions such as the letter to the editor in *The Moravian* that Glenn cites in his article, as well as some others that I have seen. But I sadly share Glenn's sense of hopelessness in this attempt. Over many years of reading such responses, I have learned there

is often a lack of understanding when opposing points of view are expressed. More often, our real priority is to convince others of our own convictions, rather than gain any understanding of opposing convictions.

Glenn has also highlighted the differentiation between the church and its gay members that is alluded to in Resolution 10. He has pointed out a distinction which is at the heart of not just Moravian, but all gay folks' struggle to achieve equal standing with our fellow humans. It is important that everyone be aware of how hurtful these distinctions can be. Separations such as this only produce more locked doors.

What disturbs me about all of this is that we must delineate so carefully what our church's positions are to be on this issue. That we are forced to parse words as though we are hammering out some sort of legalistic contract completely baffles my concept of what a church should be about. We are not wordsmiths. Why must we spend our precious time and effort on "heretofores" and "whereases," while we ignore the real problem, which is that we continue to proclaim judgment upon and maintain discrimination toward select members of our church?

I believe many more articles on homosexuality in our church need to be written. More debate is the only hope for us to resolve our differences that are already so evident to everyone involved with this issue. I have spent a lifetime waiting for the Moravian Church to come to terms with who I am. Whenever progress stalls, I wonder to myself how much nearer will I be to my life's end, before I am fully accepted by my church?

Will I see this happen in my lifetime? When I encounter fellow Moravians who vow to keep gay folks forever locked outside church doors, I pray that God might bestow upon them the same grace that has opened doors for me.

Jesus said, "I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another." (John 13: 34). Why do we as a church willingly overlook this commandment when responding to gay members of the church? Oh yes, we say we love our gay sisters and brothers. But if we truly embrace this commandment, there will be no alienation, no denial, no fearful attitudes, no differential treatment, and no locked doors. None of these things result out of love, yet they are prevalent in the lives of many gay Christians.

My faith in God and my love of Jesus have sustained and comforted me on my journey as a Moravian Christian. I have never once felt that being gay has conflicted with that relationship in any way. I have always sensed Jesus' unconditional love and acceptance for me. I pray that *everyone* in the Moravian Church might soon direct that same unconditional love to *all* their Moravian sisters and brothers, with *no* exceptions. I long for the day when people like me can enjoy full participation in all that our church has to offer, but I am saddened to think I may not live long enough to witness this for myself. Then I remember a place is reserved just for me in God's mansion, a place with open doors, and all the locked doors here on earth become meaningless to me. Whatever the Moravian Church eventually chooses to do about its locked doors, I'm running

out of time, so I can no longer entrust that those choices have any real bearing on my salvation. Ultimately, the Lord is my only arbiter.

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## **Leslie A. Veach**

I am grateful for the opportunity to contribute to this edition of *The Hinge*, for this topic is one that is dear to my heart. At the same time, I find myself humbled and overwhelmed. After much prayer, internal discussion, notes and a written response the size of a doctoral dissertation, I have managed to pare down the content of my formal response to four issues addressed in Brother Hertzog's essay.

Brother Hertzog comments on one of his "Lebenslauf" events and how it addressed for him the issue of an open door policy within the church. I recently completed the Gemeinschaft I experience in which I took on the exciting and overwhelming task of writing my own Lebenslauf. A central issue for me has been the openness (or lack thereof) of Christians in expressing God's love to one another. Even more specific, I have had my own quest for spiritual understanding of God's will as it relates to human sexuality and sexual orientation.

After years of thought, study and prayer, I feel at peace in my interpretation of God's will in this matter. The fact that there is a need to "legislatively create an environment wherein church members

and friends who identify themselves as same-sex oriented might feel less isolated or segregated within the province's Moravian community" saddens me a great deal. As a life long Moravian, I have found comfort in believing that I belonged to a Christian tradition that valued all people and celebrated the diversity of its membership. To suggest otherwise would negate the part of our motto that rings most loudly in my heart, "In all things love."

The language of Resolution 6, does suggest to me an "us vs. them" understanding of the church's call to dialogue. Not only would I agree with Brother Hertzog that it may seem exclusive to the homosexual Moravians, but it may also be exclusive to the heterosexual Moravians who sympathize with their sexual-minority brothers and sisters.

I agree with Brother Hertzog's comments on the use of the word "pastoral" used in the PEC(N) Interpretive Summary. I have received formal training and study in human sexuality, sexual orientation, and the "coming out process", and I have presented nationally on the topic of "Spiritual Issues in Counseling the Gay, Lesbian, and Bisexual Client." With this background, I applaud Hertzog's warning that attempts to counsel others without appropriate training could cause harm. However, I must also say that, based on national statistics, each pastor should expect that a small but significant number of her or his parishioners personally identify as gay or have a friend or loved one that does. For pastors and counselors alike, it is imperative that we make appropriate referrals when it is in our parishioner's/client's best interest.<sup>1</sup>