

Responses

Craig Troutman

I begin with an empathic nod toward the members of the PEC, North, who wondered about “the advisability of reviving some of the strong emotional reactions Resolution 6 generated.” Within the church today, is there a more divisive issue than homosexuality? From other experiences, I know that dialogue around this issue can generate a great deal of heat without producing much light. During the Provincial Synod of the Southern Province in 1995, I chaired the committee that discussed the question of homosexuality, and have not forgotten the strong emotional responses shared in that synod. In the end, our committee agreed that we disagreed, that “the interpretation of Scripture, theological sources, and scientific, psychological, and sociological data is *in dispute* (emphasis added) among Christians who are sincerely and conscientiously concerned with the question of homosexuality.”

Years later, the climate within our church (north and south) continues to be disputatious, so the concern of the PEC, North is understandable. Although there have been occasions when the church has chosen to speak, it should be noted that the church has largely chosen to keep silent on the subject of sexuality. The silence extends beyond issues related to homosexuality and stands in sharp contrast to the explicit sexual conversation heard within the dominant culture.

Given the church’s dis-ease with sexuality and Br. Hertzog’s observation that differing opinions regarding Resolution 6 have resulted in “a reduction in our ministry,” one sees wisdom in the church’s caution. Yet, the conversation continues.

Reflecting upon Br. Hertzog’s article, I agree that the conversation around homosexuality needs to occur, even as I wonder about the advisability of it. I serve a congregation that has never openly considered its relationship with gay members. In my own case, for many years, I hid the fact that my brother was gay. The silence around this issue harbors secrets about homosexuality. It is a silence that masks fears associated with bringing this issue out in the open. It is a silence nurtured by “what ifs.” *What if* people stop coming to worship? *What if* people withhold their tithes and offerings? *What if* people withdraw their membership altogether? Amid our fears, we wonder if this conversation needs to continue.

These days within the Moravian Church it takes courage to speak. Courageously, then, Br. Hertzog offers his words. Moving beyond fear and anxiety, he exemplifies leadership and inspired me to broach this subject with the Raleigh Moravian Church Board who, in the relative distance of the Southern Province, had never read Resolution #6. Before our meeting on February 23, I sent each Board member a copy of the resolution and asked

if they would be willing to devote thirty minutes of our monthly agenda to this topic.

After making this request, I gave each of them a veto regarding this discussion. In other words, if one person on the Board did not want this conversation to take place, it would not occur. I also assured them that this brief discussion would not lead to a decision on our part. The Unity Synod's moratorium on decision-making made this discussion easier for our Board to have and furthered my not-so-hidden agenda, which, simply put, was: could our Board discuss the issue of homosexuality with open hearts and minds?

It did not come as a surprise when every Board member agreed that we could have this conversation. In hindsight, it did surprise me that the silence around this issue was broken so easily. After reading the resolution, one member of the Board said about the resolution's content, "I thought this was understood. Hasn't the Moravian Church always believed this way?" There was, in fact, no one on the Board who objected to the idea of the inclusion of homosexuals in our community of faith. There were those, however, who wondered about the wisdom of our making this an issue. For example, one Board member expressed concern that no gay people were present as the Board discussed this issue. Another noted (as Hertzog did in his article) that the resolution suggests the existence of a "us and them" relationship between the church and homosexuals. "Is it implicit in this resolution that homosexuals have a second class status?"

There was some conversation about the cost of bringing this issue out in the open. "Isn't this a

non-essential?" one person asked. "To bring this issue out in the open would create a mess. There would be strong reaction within our church." Another offered the opinion that it is the church's role "to provide an opportunity for conversations like this to take place among those who feel the need for them." Another voiced concern about the troubling polarization around this issue. "I like being a member of a church that can talk about this issue but understand why there are those who are too afraid to engage in this kind of dialogue."

Too quickly, the thirty minute time limit passed. There was much more that could have been said, but I was pleased that the silence had been broken with thoughtful, non-anxious replies. Looking around the table, I was also proud to be associated with a congregation whose Moravian tradition acknowledges God's grace in the midst of ambiguity and uncertainty.

Our brief discussion left many questions unanswered — not the least of which being — "what outcome is this resolution supposed to produce?" For now, the outcome is yet to be revealed. But Grace abounds. One of the last comments offered during the Board's discussion was this: "Our identity is not defined by our sexual orientation. It comes from our relationship with God." After thirty minutes our conversation ended with a palpable sense of God's presence. In this time of seeking the Holy Spirit's leading, Moravians anticipate more times of conversation, praying for the day when clarity and unity will prevail. Until that day, I agree with Br. Hertzog that God may well judge us less on the content

of our conversation than on the way we spoke with and to one another after the silence was broken.

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Lee Sprinkle

Public acceptance of homosexuality has ignited a debate that draws emotional responses from all sides. To understand the concern that many have over the perceived intent of Resolution 6 we must put that resolution in perspective based on existing documents which the 2002 committee and Northern Province synod delegates would be aware. Glenn Hertzog writes that those who voted against the resolution did so because of a misinterpretation of the term “celebrate.” I think there may have been other misinterpretations at work.

To understand what the word “celebrate” was intended to mean, it is helpful to review the original Second Partial Report, from which Resolution 6 was lifted. This would have been the information that was given to delegates at the 2002 Northern Synod. Resolutions 7 - 9 appeared in the “original” Second Partial report and followed Resolution 6.

Resolution 7: Within the household of faith, those homosexual persons who have chosen to live within the bounds of a committed relationship, be recognized as committed and covenant couples, in full standing with other

committed and covenanted relationships; and be it further

Resolution 8: The final paragraph of the Book of order, paragraph 202. (e) shall be amended to read: “Ordained ministers, while single, are called to a life of celibacy (sexual abstinence); those who have vowed with another to live in a committed life relationship are called to a life of sexual fidelity to their partner;” and

Resolution 9: The 2002 Synod of the Northern Province shall encourage “open and affirming” congregations, where homosexual persons may participate fully in the life of the church, where they would have equal opportunities to commit and covenant their relationships, and where their children may be baptized and raised in the Christian faith;

Glenn writes: “In this resolution [6] no person is directed to celebrate the life of another, and the Northern Province does not declare that it celebrates *anything*.” To those who interpreted the resolution as a directive for the church to “Celebrate the homosexual life style,” Glenn states his disappointment that people have chosen to base an argument on misinformation, possibly from a third party’s emotional misinterpretation, rather than referring to and quoting from the “original document.”

In response, the “original document” [The Second Partial Report], that contained supporting resolutions 7-9, does not support Glenn’s interpretation that Resolution 6 was not a call to “celebrate the homosexual life style.” In fact, it was calling for the minister and church to participate in some of the most