

Jesus Christ. The 18<sup>th</sup> century Moravians were concerned with leading people to Christ, not with leading people to the Moravian church. Belief in Christ was placed far above any adherence to any customs or practices of the church or community. And this allowed for the customs and practices that arose during this time to have a much greater depth of meaning because they were grounded in their common beliefs.

I see Professor Shantz's article as a challenge and a call to the modern day Moravian church. It is a challenge to re-examine our past and to use the lessons taught by our ancestors to move our church into the 21<sup>st</sup> century. If the Moravian

church can reclaim its past, we can once again become pioneers of a new vision of the church that is largely based upon the ideas and beliefs of our predecessors. We can re-establish a sense of communal worship focused upon the needs of the community to give rather than on the need of the individual to receive. We can continue to stress the importance of gender equality in the leadership of the Christian church. And we reach out to others by focusing more upon what we have in common, our unity in Christ as Lord and Savior, than on the non-essentials that divide us. Professor Shantz's use of our history calls us to use our past to propel us into the future.

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## **Donna Hurt**

When Dr. Shantz had the opportunity recently to immerse himself in our church's story, he obviously developed a deep admiration for the customs and ethos of the Moravian community in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. I can truly understand his excitement, for I experienced a similar sensation, only mine was on the re-entry level, and the century was the 20<sup>th</sup>.

Chapter one of my life belonged to the Moravian Church where I was involved in nearly every 'church thing' a child or youth could do. But as a young adult, chapter two thrust me beyond Moravian territory, meaning I had to join another denomination. At the time, it didn't seem to matter as I grew in faith and served that church in numerous ways for 25 years. (Well, I

must admit it *did* matter during the Christmas Eve services, when I stood there holding a stumpy white candle encircled by a piece of cardboard that felt a million miles removed from sweet-smelling beeswax and red crepe paper.)

Then, God's tug on my heart toward fulltime ministry sent me back to school where I earned a master's degree in Christian Education. Finally, with no idea that any such thing would happen, chapter three brought me back home with my first call as a DCE. Once again I thrive spiritually within the *Unitas Fratrum*.

In reading Douglas Shantz's commentary, it's clear that he found excitement as he discovered Moravians of long ago, rather similar to how I've experienced repeated blessings through re-discovery of my roots over the last few years.

Only now do I realize that my earlier religious formation had tucked away special treasures within my heart. For example, soon after reclaiming my Moravian citizenship, the first time we sang ‘Jesus Makes My Heart Rejoice,’ I was dumbstruck to discover that EVERY WORD was already ingrained in my memory! Add to that the fact that I never had to look in the book to sing ‘Morning Star’ and ‘Hosanna.’ Another example is that a plethora of emotions resurfaced when I returned to our denomination and once again was able to experience Jesus’ last days through Holy Week readings, crowned by the victorious celebration on Easter morning (not to mention the thrill of the band playing outside my window at 4:00 a.m.).

As an educator, I’m often called upon to teach about our church, especially our history and culture, and particularly to those who know very little about our denomination. These opportunities are some of my favorites! And based on his statement that “Moravians were a church ahead of their time and provide a model for Christian community today,” I think that Dr. Shantz feels as energized as I do when he has the opportunity to tell our story to new listeners (especially the foundational Herrnhut and Zinzendorf part).

“Moravians are known outside their church for several reasons,” explains Shantz. The first three he mentions are round-the-clock prayer vigil (or Unity Prayer Watch), Daily Texts, and worldwide missions. All of these are vivid examples of our church’s intercultural nature, with the added plus of our unity across those cultures. By the way, I want our author to know that Moravians are up and running again on the

round-the-clock prayers, as testified by one who took a turn just after midnight on her birthday this year!

Allow me to share a personal example of unity across the cultures. A German couple moved to Mt. Airy and started attending Grace Church. They had their German copy of the Daily Texts, but wanted an English copy, which I got for them. When we compared the books published in two different countries and saw that the scripture passages matched, I was filled with awe. Of course I knew that was supposed to be the case, but actually seeing it was a huge reminder that the Unitas Fratrum is truly connected across the continents, from one province to another.

A second personal example: Our first missionaries went to the Virgin Islands in 1732, and I was there involved in mission work on behalf of our church the summer of 1962. During that time, I lived for several weeks with a Moravian family on St. John. I have never forgotten the loving care shown to me by that family, parents and two children, who were so different from me in color and culture and had very little in the way of worldly goods. You can imagine how elated I was when, several years ago at the Moravian Women’s Conference with people from nearly every province represented, I happened to meet someone from St. John who knew my special family. Once again I was overcome with a sense of our connectedness. I have worshipped in many of our sanctuaries in the Eastern West Indies, numerous German Moravian Saals (including Herrnhut) and several in the Czech Republic, a few of our historical churches in Pennsylvania, and even a rather primitive worship room in Ahuas, Honduras. In every location I felt a deep

sense of belonging as soon as I saw our Moravian seal, no matter the language inscribed upon it.

Brother Shantz highlights one of Zinzendorf's trademarks when he reminds us that "liturgy was the primary way in which the doctrine of the church was communicated." For the Count, "the truths of the Christian religion were best articulated in poetry and song, not in systematic theology." His influence continues still in that regard. Open our current *Book of Worship* and you'll find three dozen liturgies to help us focus on a particular time of the church year or on a specific theme. For nearly three centuries, our denomination has expressed what it believes communally through liturgies and hymn texts; in fact, I'd say those are our Moravian creeds.

Being a music lover myself, I would have been right there with Zinzendorf for the *Singstunden* of the early days. Actually, I did get to step back in time of sorts, when I worshipped in the Königsfeld Church a few years ago on my trip to Moravian sites in Germany. Every week without interruption for nearly two hundred years that congregation has gathered on Saturday night for a *Singstunde*, which Zinzendorf called a 'song sermon'. The bulletin that I still have shows that we sang part of a hymn, heard some Scripture, then sang selections from eleven other hymns, whichever verses spoke to the message or theme of the service. I now realize that our communion services and lovefeasts were birthed

directly from this format. So were our liturgies in a broader sense.

Zinzendorf encouraged Moravians to scatter across the lands sharing the gospel and their heart religion. That message eventually made it to North America, specifically North Carolina, so that today I am blessed to be one of the beneficiaries. For me, there is abundant joy in being a Moravian Christian. It's about the unique and meaningful way we celebrate communion, and it's about our lovefeasts. It's about the openness of our church bands: intergenerational, male and female, varying levels of ability, all invited to make music. It's about what our graveyards symbolize and how everyone seems to know our blessing. It's about the fact that gender does not matter on the congregational level or when we call forth pastors, bishops, and provincial leaders. It's about our heritage, our love for mission and belief in community. It's about our hymns, our memoirs, and our liturgies, especially the one that says "The Lord is risen indeed!"

I know that the professor already has a church connection, but since Dr. Shantz had such a *personally rich experience* immersed in 'Moravianism' back in 2002, I would almost feel remiss if I didn't follow up on that by inviting him to join in worship with one of our congregations in his area. You never know, one visit might lead to another, especially when there's already a special appreciation for this small band of Christians. As for me, I hope I'm home to stay.

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