

# Responses

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## Joseph L. Moore

I was thrilled to read Professor Shantz's article on the role of the 18<sup>th</sup> century Moravian community as an inspiration for modern day understanding of gender, worship and ecumenism in the church. It is my belief that too often in the Moravian Church we use our rich history as a merely a quaint glimpse of a charming past. Our history can be much more. It can be used to give us insight into our current challenges and guidance into an uncertain future.

Professor Shantz uses as the foundation for his article a study by Keith Ward, *Religion and Community*. As part of his study, Ward calls for the church of the 21<sup>st</sup> century to be marked by "a new ecumenical or global paradigm, for which the old divisions of Christendom are largely relegated to history...within such a paradigm, the church would be more self-critical, recognizing the historical conditionality of its formulations and the symbolic nature of many of its basic images. It would be more openly plural, accepting a diversity of religious insights, and seeking positive interaction between them...it would be committed to social structures making for liberation and fulfillment for all humans...it would consist of those who have been grasped by a vision of the ultimate goodness of a suffering and universally loving God, of the ultimate hope for the whole world of sharing in the life of God...they will accept that their primary vocation is to witness to the universal love of God in a world of many disputes and many destructive hatreds."

Shantz argues that the Moravian church of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, specifically the Herrnhut community, was a precursor of Ward's vision. By fulfilling the vision of the 21<sup>st</sup> century church in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, Shantz believes that the Moravian Church was "truly a church ahead of their time."

Professor Shantz does a good job of examining the aspects of how the Moravian Church developed in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. By combining the unique biography of Zinzendorf (and his peculiar philosophy and theology) with the arrival of persecuted Christians from Moravia on Zinzendorf's estate, Shantz shows how the community of Herrnhut was formed into an 18<sup>th</sup> century model of the church we need to strive towards in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. His focus is on three areas that are often the source of conflict and struggle in the modern church: worship, gender, and ecumenism.

"Zinzendorf was convinced that the common worship experiences of the community had a greater impact than the experiences of the individual." This conviction gave rise to the liturgical nature of Moravian worship. Worship in the 18<sup>th</sup> century Moravian Church was centered on the singing of hymns and corporate prayers. The theology of the Moravian Church was not systematically spelled out in written form. It was expressed through the words and music of the hymns of the united community. The belief of the church was expressed by the joining of hearts and voices rather than by arguing until intellectual

consensus and academic agreement are reached. The focus was on the communal experience of worship rather than the individual experience.

I found Shantz's point on this matter to be especially relevant to the challenges facing the Moravian Church as we confront the 21<sup>st</sup> century. There is a real danger in ceding to the desire to elevate the worship experience of the individual over that of the community. This change in the focus of worship is evidenced by a shift from "we" language to "I" language. This implies a separation and removal of the individual from the community. When this separation occurs, the experience of worship becomes an exercise in trying to meet one's own spiritual needs rather than a chance for the gathered believers to offer praise and thanksgiving to God. In worship that is focused on the experiences of the individual instead of the community, the individual's need to receive from God takes precedence over the community's need to give back to God out of gratitude for what we have already been received. The church can not effectively do the work that it is called by Christ to do when our focus is on ourselves rather than on others.

Shantz's second area of focus is on the role of gender in the Herrnhut community. He argues that the "power and status of women in the *Brudergemeine* was greatly enhanced compared to contemporary society at the time." Much of this enhanced power and status was grounded in Zinzendorf's theological understanding of the Godhead as a heavenly family with the Father (God), the Mother (Holy Spirit) and the Son (Christ). This belief led to men and women both holding equal roles in the Herrnhut community. One man and one woman filled each leadership

position in the church and community. Even though Zinzendorf's theology of the Trinity as a family has disappeared from the Moravian church, some of its effect on our understanding of gender as relates to church leadership is beginning to re-emerge. The view of men and women as having equal responsibility in church leadership is necessary in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

As a pastor serving in team ministry with my wife, I can certainly see the advantages of this approach. Men and women bring different sensitivities and understandings to all areas of church life: worship, theology, pastoral care, fellowship, and education. It is most valuable to provide leadership and understanding in such a way that we can meet people where they are and not force them into being where we are. One of the ways this can be accomplished is by providing both male and female leadership. This was shown in the 18<sup>th</sup> century Moravian church and is slowly returning to the 21<sup>st</sup> century church.

This brings us to Shantz's third point: ecumenism. The Moravian community in Herrnhut was not seen as a church or denomination as much as it was a place where "various Christian groups could come together and discover their commonalities." When many of our Christian denominations are focused on what divides and separates us, it is refreshing to recall that our Moravian ancestors were focused on things that unite. This allowed their focus to be on loyalty to Christ, rather than on loyalty to church or denomination. In our modern world, this distinction is difficult to maintain. We are so caught up in our society's need and desire for competition that we lose sight of our main purpose and calling: to serve our Lord and Savior,

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.