

will soon be distributed to the churches of the province.

There seems to be no end to the needs that come before the Commission on Church and Society. Along with the Bible and *The Moravian Daily Texts*, I keep *The Ground of the Unity* at my elbow as a guide to carrying out our responsibilities.

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Something to Stand On

Douglas C. Rights

My first call out of seminary was to serve as the associate pastor of the Kernersville Moravian Church in Kernersville, North Carolina. One afternoon I visited one of our members whose name was Pink Smith. “Miss Pink” was one of our older members who had been a part of the Kernersville Moravian church family for years. During our visit in her living room, I noticed she had a large, thick Bible on her coffee table. The Bible looked worn and used. Seeing an opportunity for our conversation to have more of a spiritual aspect, I said to Miss Pink, “I like your Bible on the table, and it looks like you read it a lot.” Miss Pink looked at me and replied, “Oh I don’t read that one anymore because it’s too large to handle. Now I use it to pull down my shades.” Miss Pink then pointed to one of her windows. At the top of the window was a shade. She had difficulty reaching far enough to pull the window shade down. She solved her problem by taking her large, thick Bible, placing it on the floor, and standing on it to reach the shade. When she told me that, I thought to myself, “Here is someone who literally stands on the Word of God.”

As Christians it is important for us to stand on God’s Word and to let its teachings be the foundation of our lives. Jesus himself said in Matthew 7:24, “Therefore, if anyone hears these words of mine and puts them into practice, he is like a wise man who built his house on rock.” Knowing God’s Word and applying it to our lives keeps us grounded in our faith. As Moravians, *The Ground of the Unity* helps serve that purpose as well.

I am a person who likes to keep things simple. I like things that are clear, concise and to the point. These are some of the things that I appreciate about *The Ground of the Unity*. I love the way Moravians of the past have taken the numerous books, chapters and verses of Scripture and narrowed it down to the clear, concise, and to the point document that we call *The Ground of the Unity* which shows what we believe in the Moravian Church.

I will have to admit that for a number of years when people asked me what the Moravian Church believed, my answer came from John Groenfeld’s book, *Becoming a Member of the Moravian Church*.

The chapter “What We Believe” shares a list of beliefs Groenfeld felt are essential to the Christian faith. This list includes such items as Jesus being the Son of God, humans are sinful, our only forgiveness is through Jesus, the Second Coming of Jesus, and so on.

Several years ago at a Ministers Retreat, I heard Bishop George Higgins talking with other pastors. They were discussing the beliefs of the Moravian Church. I remember Bishop Higgins saying, “Groenfeld’s list of beliefs are not the essentials of the Moravian Church.” Whoa! That got my attention! Did the Bishop mean that the Moravian Church does not believe that Jesus is God’s Son? That we are not forgiven of our sins through Jesus? That Jesus is not going to come again? Fortunately as I continued to listen, that is not what Bishop Higgins meant. The Bishop was talking about what we officially recognize as what the Moravian Church believes. He was referring to decisions passed at our Synods. Bishop Higgins shared how Groenfeld’s lists of beliefs had never been brought before any Synod, while *The Ground of the Unity* had. Bishop Higgins’ point was the Moravian Church’s official, Synod-approved statement of belief is *The Ground of the Unity* and not Groenfeld’s list. From that discussion, I realized I needed to get more familiar with *The Ground of the Unity*.

As a Moravian I am grateful to have *The Ground of the Unity*. I am thankful for the fact that I can point to something that tells me what the Moravian Church believes. As a pastor I am also appreciative of *The Ground of the Unity*. When I teach a New Members Class, I am proud to give class members a copy of *The Ground of the Unity*. I tell the class members if they want to know what the Moravian Church believes, this is it. In my preaching there have been times when I have talked about certain issues and I share portions of *The Ground of the Unity* to show what the Moravian Church says and believes. In discussions when people question Christian beliefs, *The Ground of the Unity* enables me to say to that person, “that may be your opinion, but this is what we believe in the Moravian Church.” When our church has struggled with the threat of changes involving our essential beliefs, it has been helpful to hear a church official say, “Nothing has changed about what the Moravian Church believes because nothing has changed in *The Ground of the Unity*.”

As I read and reflect on *The Ground of the Unity*, I am inspired like those who wrote this document. I read how Jesus is the source of who we are and what we do. I read how our salvation is through Christ, how we need Jesus, and how he is here for us. I read how we are shaped and empowered by Christ’s love, and how we are to share the good news of Jesus with the world. I read about the emphasis the Moravian Church places on unity, fellowship and love.

I believe *The Ground of the Unity* is a tremendous asset of the Moravian Church. There is one thing, however, that I would like to see in it. There is this statement in *The Ground of the Unity*: “The Unitas Fratrum takes part in the continual search for sound doctrine.” I agree with this statement because there are things we continue to learn about Scripture and God’s will for us. I also struggle with this statement because it seems anything can be questioned. I feel there are some things that we do not need to question. As Christians, we do not need to question the reality of God. We do not need to question Jesus being God’s Son. We do not need to question that our salvation comes through Jesus. If there

is anything I would like to see in *The Ground of the Unity*, it is a strong statement which says there are some essential beliefs in the Moravian Church that are unquestionable and unchanging.

It is my hope and prayer for the Moravian Church that we will continue to look to God's Word and to *The Ground of the Unity* for our guidance and direction in our individual lives and in the life of our church. Just as Miss Pink physically stood on the Word of God, may we spiritually be grounded and stand tall as we reach for the blessings of life that come from living the truths of God.

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The Ground of the Unity — an Attempt for Our Time

Hans-Beat Motel

Editor's Note: This paper was written by Hans-Beat Motel for the use of a theological discussion in Bad Boll, Germany. Readers are encouraged to write responses.

Preface: *The Ground of the Unity* was written at the Unity Synod 1957, which took place in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania. This synod was one of the most important events of the worldwide Moravian Church, because it succeeded in building bridges between provinces which were deeply affected and burdened by two disastrous world wars, and it paved the way to our global Moravian fellowship as it stands today. It was most helpful and decisive, that this synod took place in the "New World" — for the first time in the history of our church.

The Ground of Unity was never intended to form a creed or a confession. The idea was to establish some guidelines and a foundation for what the Moravian community believes. It contributed to bring the Moravian Church together, and it has served well as a summary of some basic Moravian doctrinal statements ever since. Because it has never been understood to be a text which is valid for centuries, but rather a document of a certain time, there have been some changes in the text, e.g. by the Unity Synod 1995.

According to my conviction, it is time to look at the ground of the Unity as a whole, and to start an attempt to come to a new text which reflects better the situation of the Moravian Church today and the needs of Christian statements of our time. Also this text, of course, should not last for ever, but must be adapted when the need arises. If this text provokes a discussion which might lead to a draft to be presented at Unity Synod 2009 — the much the better!