

Letter to the Editor

I just read the Winter 2008 issue of *The Hinge* built around the paper by Sr. Elizabeth McOwat. She and all of the respondents make compelling arguments from both a Christian theological perspective and from several sociological, political and psychological perspectives as well. I was quite comfortable with these readings since I share those convictions. However, I was left with the very queasy feeling that this issue will do little to advance dialogue within the Church given the simple fact that not one writer took a stand in favor of the death penalty. In other words, for a dialogue to begin there must be two sides, if I still remember what that word means. The purpose such a dialogue would serve would be to move the discussion from the presentation of what amounts to position papers of one side of an argument toward a true discussion of the practice of theology among the people of the Church at the local level. I see some merit in this if *The Hinge* and other theological journals seek to serve the Church, as well as to speak to it.

I believe a blind poll of local, particularly local small town and rural, U.S. Moravian churches would likely find a majority of members in favor of the death penalty. Many of those members are articulate and would likely be willing to respond given the opportunity.

As it is we have now before us an articulate set of statements opposing the death penalty. But if we are to move towards resolution of a vexing issue within the local churches, then a true dialogue must be established. Conflict resolution in any social setting will not work unless both sides feel that they are equally and fairly heard. Were I to open a dialogue on this issue within the congregation that I serve using this issue of *The Hinge* as the primary resource, for example, no one in favor of the death penalty would likely come since they would feel that they were being forced to play with a stacked deck. And they would be right.

The Hinge has provided a valuable service by showing one side of this issue. Whether in *The Hinge* or elsewhere within the Church leadership, I would think the next step would be to show the other side of the issue as seen by Moravians who do not share the views expressed in *The Hinge* articles. With such a balanced presentation of the issue perhaps then a true dialogue within the Church could emerge on this most important topic.

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Editor's Note: The Hinge Editorial Board rarely knows what position respondents will take before they submit their responses, and sometimes it is a surprise when there is little disagreement on a controversial issue. Readers are encouraged to express their own ideas in Letters to the Editor.