

## **Brad Bennett**

After reading Margaret's article on forgiveness I did my best to work my perceptions down to their simplest form (my thoughts are pretty simple to begin with, so this wasn't too hard). My reaction is, basically, that to forgive is to no longer let some "wrong" done to me by another person have any significant power over me—a reaction that closely resembles the Howard Zehr quotation in the article. My comments on Margaret's article are through the lens of such simplicity, though none of the issues are simple. The article is indeed thorough and covers a lot of ground, so my comments will work in and around her work as best as they can!

A distinction I want to make, though, is that I don't think a simple disagreement with someone over something—even something we both perceive as important—necessarily means that forgiveness is needed between us. We simply don't see something the same way. I was never a fan of George W. Bush as president, but I see nothing requiring forgiveness between me and someone who was, even though both of us may hold strong opinions. Now, if somebody calls me an idiot because we disagree, then I may need at some point to think about forgiving his or her stupidity for calling me an idiot! Okay, that was a bad joke (forgive me), but it shows how disagreeing may be the first step toward wronging someone. Simply disagreeing, however, does not necessarily need forgiveness.

It seems, though, that our sensationalistic,

entertainment-oriented news and other media tend to exacerbate disagreements to the point that it is hard to disagree without wronging another. Any real relationship that has any depth will experience disagreements and the occasional wrongdoing requiring forgiveness. The key is to keep disagreements from reaching the level where wrongs are done. But often in today's politics and "reality" shows, disagreement is not a matter of seeking understanding, trading ideas, finding common ground, etc.; it is a mission to search out and destroy the one who disagrees with you. It's survival of the fittest, a contest that will produce a clear winner and loser. How do you go about forgiving someone who has gone out of his or her way to utterly destroy you because you disagree?

Another problem is that in today's disposable and cafeteria style culture—which includes the church—people don't seem to see much need for forgiveness anymore. If a person feels wronged by something someone says or does, that person can just leave. (Or, in keeping with the search-and-destroy mission, another popular response these days is to destroy the offender and then leave.) There is no shortage of congregational ballet when something happens at one church and there's a migration to another one. Then there is the extreme where a group wants to break off and start their own church—forget the rest of them, no chance for forgiveness or reconciliation there.

Margaret's title implies that forgiveness is no longer a part of Moravian life and worship and needs restoring. Perhaps she's right. The

more diversity we see in our world—and perhaps in our churches—the more too many people want to wall themselves up with only people who agree with them. But it's important to remember that forgiveness for a wrong done doesn't mean there is no longer any disagreement. People can disagree—even on important things—and still be in community with one another if they so choose.

Margaret goes far beyond my simplistic view of forgiveness. Theologically, my view doesn't hold up because it suggests that God, in forgiving me for some wrong I've done, is deciding not to allow me to have power over God. What conceivable power could I have had over God, whatever I might have done? Human forgiveness is between two equal human beings. God's forgiveness is in a whole other category, because for God to forgive me, there has to be grace involved. But that's what Jesus is all about. Jesus is the human/divine picture of God's grace and forgiveness.

If we Moravians are in a postmodern "Sifting Time," then in many respects we may look very different in, say, ten years. It may be that many will have left. Perhaps others will have come on board. Forgiveness and reconciliation will certainly be a part of the new order. But so will different ways of thinking about community, which will include repentance and forgiveness (in whatever order) for however our ways of thinking and living have caused division, pain and suffering. But those ways of thinking will also acknowledge that we will never all see things the same way and perhaps it's okay if

people think and live in different ways. Even Christians. Even Moravians.

*The Rev. Brad Bennett has been director of youth and college ministry for the Board of Christian Education in the Southern Province for 13 years. He is also one of the facilitators of Come & Worship, a coffee house worship ministry in downtown Winston-Salem, NC.*

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## **Bradley Jones**

"When I think about all that I have experienced in the church in the past few years, I realize that in many ways I am still recovering from all that has happened." I spoke these words to some friends of mine, the Rev. Brad Bennett and his wife, Sue, the night before Christmas Eve. I was rather surprised by this revelation, which had suddenly dawned on me during this late night discussion at a bookstore.

The words were a reflection on some tumultuous experiences I had encountered in the Moravian Church in recent years. Those years began with fighting in the Southern Province over what Jesus as the sole source of salvation means and over the issue of homosexuality. Around this time I became acquainted with the Czech Moravian Church through two mission trips; again I felt the blow of fighting in the Moravian Church, this time on another continent.

In both the Czech church and the Southern Province, I have walked with many Moravians through both the mountain peaks of personal