

We can! This year at the Moravian Church of Downey, we will be hosting an August 13th Hootenanny in the alley behind the church building. We hope to have jugglers, stilt-walkers, folk music, hula hooping, art booths, a taco vendor, etc. This is one of our attempts to put the celebration and love back into our customs and festivals, which, while rooted in our history, must remain joyful and relevant to people today. What is important to preserve is not the nostalgic details of our festivals, but their celebratory nature.

History indeed plays a defining role in the renewed Moravian Church. Renewal, however, is ongoing—not a one-time deal.

## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> Czech Republic - The Official Website. Operator: Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Information on folk costumes found at <http://www.czech.cz/en/culture/charm-of-traditions/folk-costumes>.

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## Corey Whittaker

What's in a name?

As our culture becomes more cynical about organized religion, more hesitant to step in the doors of a church and less likely to really engage with congregational life, church leaders must always ask, "What are the speed bumps at the entrance to my church?" We're not talking about roadblocks, which keep people away altogether, or potholes, which damage

people as they come in, but speed bumps that slow people down. These may be things under our control, like the appearance of our facilities, or out of our control, like bad press about churches in general. Either way, our job as leaders is to lead people into the body of Christ with as few bumps as possible, but without at all compromising the whole Gospel. The first impression is very important, whether that impression comes from a friendship, an advertisement or a sign on the road.

Many churches try advertising in different and catchy ways. Some of these advertising methods are just fine; some perhaps go too far. Other churches have community events so that new folks find it easier to cross the threshold. Still others try to make their building look and feel welcoming. Probably a bit of all of this is good as we look at reaching out and drawing others in.

One of the speed bumps that we recognized at Christ the King is the word "Moravian." Now, before readers get defensive, let me emphasize: The *word itself* is the speed bump. Not the meaning, or the history, or the traditions; just the word. For this reason, we decided to remove it from our sign at the road, which now just says "Christ the King." If you come in the door, you will see Moravian band and lovefeast pictures, the Moravian seal and that very word "Moravian" on bulletins and other places. But you see, you came in the door.

When new members join our congregation, they come to the board and talk about their faith and anything else they want to share, so the board can know them better and welcome them. Two themes regularly come up in these

conversations. The first theme is “At first I drove by.” Many people say they first drove by the church but did not come in, because they did not know what a Moravian Church was. For some, years passed before they came in for a visit. Their unfamiliarity with the word made it a speed bump.

The second theme often begins with the phrase “As soon as I walked in.” People tell us that as soon as they walked in, they began to feel at home, or feel loved, or feel God’s presence. Without exception, however, no one felt loved or welcomed as they just drove by. So, historically, our hook is just inside the front door—if they can get there.

In my own case, when I was searching for a youth ministry job nine years ago, I came across the ad for a position at Christ the King Moravian Church. Even having had church history classes, I had to refresh my memory about the Moravians. I did not want to pursue a job in a church with which my beliefs would be fundamentally incompatible theologically or culturally. So even in looking for a job, the word Moravian became a speed bump. People looking for a church usually take even less time considering each option, and any possible deterrent can send them down the road. Most people will not do the research. They will just keep going.

In our area the Moravians do not have a long history. Christ the King Moravian Church was established in Durham in 1989. We have many people here from the Midwest, the Northeast and other areas who are totally unfamiliar with the Moravian name. If you moved here from

Pennsylvania, you might readily be drawn to the Moravian label, and if you searched for Moravian and Durham online, you would certainly find us. But for many, that one word is a barrier to fellowship, simply because it is unknown. There also may be someone driving by who has unfortunately had a bad experience in a Moravian Church and will not even give us a chance because of our sign. Our concern is for our neighbors who drive by every day, yet keep going just in case Moravian means something weird. It is often said—I don’t know if it’s true—that people confuse Moravian with Mormon. That’s not a mistake we want to happen.

We believe one of our greatest assets is our love for each other and for those who visit us. The Moravian Church has a long tradition of hospitality, and we experience it in the church today. When you join us, you learn that rich history of proclaiming the Gospel in word and deed. We don’t hide our Moravian identity at all; we simply don’t announce it to those it may confuse. When I meet people, I don’t introduce myself as “Corey Whittaker Christian Person.” The fact that I am a Christian comes soon enough in conversation and is very important in my relationships. But if I talked like that, many conversations would end just as soon as they started. We want the opportunity at Christ the King to introduce ourselves and let our actions and words define “Moravian.” We don’t want ignorance, uncertainty or ambiguity to do that for us.

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