

Editorial

Singing in Harmony rather than in Unison

For many of you, this is your first introduction to *The Hinge*, so allow me a moment to welcome you to this discussion forum. *The Hinge* has been in service for over ten years now, and it continues to raise provocative issues for the church to discuss. This is not an official publication of the Moravian Church, and the views expressed are not necessarily those of the editorial board, but we are very appreciative of those who love the Moravian Church enough to take the risk to publish their ideas on controversial subjects, even at the risk of losing their jobs.

This issue of *The Hinge* is a little different from any issue so far. Rather than having one (or two) lead articles followed by various responses, this issue features several short articles by a wide variety of authors. The editorial board asked the authors to write on the one issue or theme that the Moravian Church must address in the near future. It seemed particularly appropriate to do this just before synod and to make this issue available to all synod delegates in the north and south.

We did not know what to expect from our authors, other than passion and clarity of thought. Interestingly, most of the authors dealt with similar themes, although as you will see, from different areas of the theological spectrum. The persistent question (one often identified in this journal) is

our identity as Moravians and Christians. Some have called for greater theological inclusiveness and inquisitiveness; others ask whether it is time to refine the *Ground of the Unity*. Some have called for a new process of discernment that will invite God into the process of our self-discovery and renewal of mission. Many have noted that the Moravian commitment to community is being severely tested at the turn of a millennium, not just in America but in every province.

It is not my job as editor to add an eighth article to those provided here, but I would like to offer an insight that came to me while listening to the singing of the Hallelujah Chorus in my congregation on Easter Sunday. I think that we too often confuse unity and uniformity. We are so afraid that one of our pastors or other leaders will sing a wrong note that we insist on singing in unison. If someone's theology or liturgical practice or form of sharing the good news is not identical to what everyone else is doing, we condemn it; however, in singing harmony we must sing different notes appropriate to our own pitch. The beauty of the Messiah (both the oratorio and the Lord) is diminished if we do not sing the notes that are ours to sing.

Conversely, however, we cannot sing just any notes. Even modern "atonal" music is not a mere chaos of independent voices choosing whatever tunes and pitches they

desire. We live in a society that has made individual style a matter of near-religious faith so that we all tend to create the religion that best suits our tastes. Within a community, though, as within a choir, there are limits to our diversity and self-expression. It is important that we know how to sing our notes in harmony with our brothers and sisters rather than simply trying to overpower them with our volume and vehemence.

At the risk of pushing a metaphor too far, we need to remember also that the choir itself needs to sing different tunes for different occasions. This is one of the beauties of the church year that takes us not only through large portions of scripture and the life of Christ, but also takes us through grief and joy.

It is my fear that we are losing the ability and perhaps even the desire to sing in harmony. In fact, as I look at the provinces around the Unity and the lack of love displayed among those who disagree, I wonder if we are not in the midst of what our ancestors termed a "Sifting." Some of you are familiar with the famous "Sifting Period" of the 1740s, but most of us have misunderstood that phrase and our history. A Sifting was any time that the church was tempted to abandon its identity and mission. Usually a Sifting involved the temptation of some (including leaders) to establish a spirit-

ual elite within the church or to embrace sectarian and divisive doctrines (such as millennialism). A few in the church felt that their personal religious experience should be the norm for all of the brothers and sisters, even those who were far more mature in the faith and in the service of Christ. Those who felt they had a superior experience or who believed in an obscure teaching often tried to bend the church to their will, and failing that, attempted to establish separate fellowships of like-minded persons. Siftings could be very painful, and at times they threatened the existence of the church.

Are we being tested today to see if we are sincere in our love for Christ and one another? Are we being sifted, like our ancestors? Can we learn once again to sing in harmony, valuing the uniqueness of each voice while learning to sing together, or will we dissolve into separate bands of like-minded believers secure in our own sense of righteousness and hearing no other voice but our own?

Editor's Note

We had a strong desire to make this issue of *The Hinge* available to delegates at the Southern Province Synod in April; therefore the editing job was rushed. I apologize to the authors and the readers for any mistakes, omissions, and unapproved changes.