

Holy Spirit is somehow our possession that we must take to those who are without? Do we still believe in the power of truth to conquer as Hus taught, knowing that we do not possess the truth but pursue it as our common good? Do we still believe that all things ought to be taught to all people from all points of view as Comenius taught, seeing this as the only possible path to peace?

Just as you don't have to become a Moravian to be a Christian, we don't have to become like everyone else to survive. Historically, spirituality has meant living deeply into a particular tradition until one

has a place to stand, a point of view, a sense of perspective. If we can no longer offer such a spirituality, we have lost our reason for being; we have traded our soul for a mess of porridge. The present time calls for an intentional, deep living into our tradition and a living out of this identity with integrity in a world hungry for something authentic. We can offer a genuine feast of spiritual riches, if we but remember who we are!

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Judy Knopf

Vision Discernment in the Southern Province

As I have met with Moravians in the Southern Province, I have continually heard us name and claim one common core value: community. Community means different things to different people even though they claim the same word as a "value." This is very confusing for many of us, but, strange as it may seem, the concept that there can be unity in diversity is an underlying principle in this discernment process. Drawing upon the work of Thomas Bandy in Moving Off the Map (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1998), we can see four movements toward rediscovering our identity and claiming our mission in our current Vision Discernment Process. These are Core Values, Bedrock Beliefs, Motivating Vision, and Key Mission.

Taking the core value of "community" and following it through to a possible conclusion will hopefully assist us in a better understanding the discernment process.

By engaging in this process we hope (as we have many, many times before) to rediscover and uncover our identity as Moravian Christians in the Southern Province. By inviting people into small gatherings of pastors, DCE's, Youth Directors, Pastoral Assistants, Synod Delegates, and congregational members, every person has had the opportunity to participate in sharing who we are, what we believe, and in discerning our vision. During these small group gatherings we have discussed Core Values and Bedrock Beliefs, the first two movements. The results

of these meetings were compiled by the PEC and announced to our pastors and congregations. We hope that our congregations will engage in an active time of prayer, discussion, and discernment of these values and beliefs, and then share with us their visions for the Southern Province.

The visioning process in our congregations requires the creation of a "climate of active waiting" in which the fertile values and beliefs are brought into creative interaction with prayer, scripture stories, and also the stories and experiences of individuals. The interaction between a personal story with a biblical story helps us to reconnect with God's story. In the mystery of this connection, we have the opportunity to open ourselves to God and God's vision for us. These will assist the PEC and Synod in formulating a mission statement for the Southern Province. To me it is very exciting to think that any Moravian who chooses may offer input that could be vital to the life and work of our province in the first decade of a new century.

As our PEC has discussed rediscovering our identity and how we might speak the truth in love about our present values and beliefs, the members began to investigate the revitalization process of the Board of Evangelism and Homeland Missions. After some consideration, they chose to initiate BEHM's process for the whole Southern Province and provide an arena for honesty. In the words of Eric H. F. Law, "In the grace margin, we invite the outsiders and the

insiders to come together to share and listen to each other. In order to do that, we need to create an environment in which there is a symmetry of authentic revelation, compassionate listening, and reciprocal exchange of power." Inclusion (St. Louis, Missouri: Chalice Press, 2000), p. 97.

Although these small groups are only scratching the surface, they are providing useful and necessary information. This process offers us an opportunity to begin anew and hopefully build toward our future. Given our diversity in the South, we're not accustomed to gathering around a table together; however, I believe that God is calling us to establish mature friendships with our peers even in our diversity. Our image of God is skewed when we neglect honest relationships with our mature peers.

To understand this process a little better, let's look at Core Values. These are one-word preferences that are actually lived out in the daily lives of Moravians. These are the preferences that are consistently prioritized in the behavior of people. These choices reflect our basic foundation, our DNA, so to speak. They are not ideals that we strive to attain but the real preferences that we make over and over again. They reflect what we choose to be or do. Any member can name a core value, even a child.

During the process of naming and claiming our values and beliefs, we begin to rediscover how we are connected or disconnected with one another and God. For many of us, the value of "community"

sounds right because we understand it to mean "acceptance." A number of persons have expressed it this way, "I was accepted by this congregation and immediately felt at home." Others say that they were drawn to the rich traditions. Most who joined the Moravian Church as adults say they came searching for something that was missing in their own lives and found it here. Others speak of their own tenacity, saying that after many years they helped to create authentic community within one of our churches. A few have confessed that they wanted to be a part of a particular church and just stuck it out or fought it out until they were received into a particular group!

As our groups talked about the positive aspects that community offers, we imagined an open landscape with an empty lawn chair for each of us in the attributes of acceptance, fellowship, inclusiveness, affinity, kindredness as brothers and sisters in Christ, and commonality. In this view, we usually think of our beloved August 13th experience where everyone rallied around the "Brotherly Agreement" or to the colonial period, say around 1760, when everyone worked and lived together in "community," or to the delicious chicken pie suppers we now experience in our fellowship halls. However, as we dared to reveal the negative aspects of community, we found an illusion: an open pasture terraced like a maze denoting exclusiveness, legalism, nostalgia, and sameness.

In this view, we earnestly desire to maintain what was or is good, but somehow we confuse outsiders by the landscape we've designed. It is like the "ha-ha" on the Monticello Plantation, a small trench that originally separated the livestock from the manor house. If one were sitting on the patio of the manor house, one could look out over the landscape and see beautiful rolling natural pastureland with no boundaries visible. But if one were out in the pasture looking up to the manor house, one would see one trench after another in the terracing of the land. The "ha-ha" made it quite impossible for livestock to navigate a trench, much less vault onto the higher plane on the other side of it. Sometimes it's like this with a core value like community. What appears to be a home where everyone is welcome is really a citadel separated by barrier after barrier.

In the small group discussions we had the opportunity to listen to various viewpoints on a value or a belief. Pastors have had an opportunity to continue the Vision Discernment Process in their own congregations, encouraging their people to reflect on the common "core values" and "bedrock beliefs" of the province. The local pastor actually leads his or her people through the "Key Vision" movement of this process. It is imperative to study scripture, investigate church traditions, seek out other's opinions, observe what's going on in the culture around us, and pray for God to offer a vision of what God wants us to be and do in

the world today. This is a time when some will challenge us to maintain status quo while others will challenge us to move ahead. Some will challenge us with quotes from our visionary contemporaries like Loren Mead who says, "God is always calling us to be more than we have been."

This visioning process is a time of spiritual formation, not strategic planning. In the corporate world the visioning process is part of a larger planning process to increase productivity, open new markets, multiply more effective services, and improve performance. Biblical visions, however, are part of a larger spiritual life. Biblical visions shape the inner person and ones daily living, not just the programming of the church. The result of vision could certainly include new, effective missions, but these are the fruits of deeper spiritual growth. The vision from God will be the foundation on which we will build our goals and strategic plans.

As Michael Green says, "The church has, on the whole, not been very strong in following Jesus' example. We are much more comfortable when functioning inside the church building. We have become a club for the like-minded, rather than a light out there in the darkness or salt in among the meat that would otherwise go bad. We forget that the church exists for the community." *Evangelism for Amateurs* (Hodder and Stoughton, 1998), p. 93. This is another slant on the word "community," but in this view "community" refers to something larger than a church or congregation. This

resonates with one of the vision scriptures where Peter boldly begins a sermon at the threshold of Cornelius' house, "I truly understand that God shows no partiality, but in every nation anyone who fears him and does what is right is acceptable to him. You know the message he sent to the people of Israel, preaching peace by Jesus Christ -- he is Lord of all" (Acts 10.34-36).

In the willingness to trust the creative interaction between "core values," "bedrock beliefs," scripture, personal stories, cultural observations, and prayer, a greater truth emerges. There is a larger community out there than we perceive when we are busy planning! Is this truth God's truth? The discerning group under the pastor's leadership decides if this truth is one of consolation or desolation. Some would call this new understanding of the word "community" as a "value change." Even though the "core value" is the same value as before, it has new meaning that when re-uttered from our scriptures sounds like the right word for the right time. So the vision could come in this way. But only God knows how God will reveal the vision.

It came to Simon Peter on the rooftop of a friend's house one day in Acts 10. Did it literally fall out of the sky as the scripture says? Do you think Peter thought of a "Mission to the Gentiles" before? Could this have been gnawing issue within Peter for days, months, or even years? I encourage you to review Peter's life and traditions before and after his sermon in Acts 2. A

new understanding transformed a person like Peter. It can transform each of us: our groups, churches, and even our denomination through the power of God's spirit through Jesus Christ working in and through us. After an intentional period of acknowledging the mystery of how God speaks to us, we discover our unity in God as we wait, question, and listen. It is then that we can talk about vision. Each congregation has the opportunity to come together and talk about their deepest hopes, and dreams. When we place all of our hopes and dreams together, we begin to discover the vision that God has already planted deep within our hearts.

I am reminded of why I trusted this process in the first place. To quote Sarah S. Henrich, "For Christians, the way in which we form groups and manage hospitality

speaks among believers and to outsiders of the character of God." Inspire Bible Study Series (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress Press, 1997, p. 25). I envisioned "community" to be a diverse group of persons willingly sitting around the table, speaking the truth in love. This willingness, I believe, is a leadership skill of the twenty-first century. It's a new beginning for those of us who have experienced too much sameness! As a province we can challenge one another to commit time and energy to "actively wait" for God's vision as Habakkuk did (Hab. 2.1-3). We can step out boldly and trust God in this process, despite our imperfections, graced by God's affection for us.

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Why Do They Hate Us?

In the fall of 2000 fifteen Moravian clergy gathered at the Unity Seminar in Suriname South America. The goal of this gathering was three fold. First, to deal with theological and church issues relevant for the worldwide Moravian Church. In this case we explored the effects of Globalization and Pluralization on the Moravian Church. Second, to get to know the life and work of one Unity Province. And third, to form a fellowship of younger brothers and sisters coming from

different cultural and regional background of the Moravian Church. During this experience I came to see that one of the greatest challenges facing the Church in the next ten years is the disparity of wealth between Christians in industrialized nations and their Sisters and Brothers in third world nations.

One of the more memorable experiences I had took place not long after I arrived. One