

Neil Routh

Given the events of the both recent Synods (Northern and Southern Provinces), I wonder what is happening to the culture of ministry for ordained clergy within the Moravian Church in America and Canada? What difference will the “Readiness for Ministry Statement” (RFM) make in assisting candidates for ministry in their discernment? Most importantly, does this statement support an environment that intrinsically promotes the well-being and wholeness of persons in ordained ministry?

When I returned from attending the Southern Province Synod, I became painfully aware that the expectations many people have for our clergy seem to be growing larger and more rigid. Others are worried we are losing sight of the general ethos and practice that has operated within the church for many years. At a time when creative and inspiring leadership is needed, clergy seem all the more anxious and fearful that they will be misunderstood.

Instead of fostering a corporate sense of excitement for ministry, many clergy are anxious to take a lower profile and just serve in virtual anonymity until retirement sets them free. A statement made by Robert Sawyer during his “State of the Church” address continues to ring in my ears: “There is latitude (in the church) for an individual to express doubt and to wonder... Those who serve the church as ordained pastors have a somewhat different calling and responsibility.” It was one time I truly wish there had been a question/response time. I wanted to know what is implied by “a different calling and responsibility.” What are

the real boundaries within which a minister is expected to live and serve? What obligation does a minister have to honor such expectations if they significantly change from those that existed when he or she was first ordained?

Regarding the RFM, it seems to do a good job of clarifying what behavior is expected of the minister but not at defining what the minister can expect of the church. By its existence, it seems to represent a “corporate policy” on the part of the PECs for how a minister is expected to act without being a covenant on their own part. For example, I wonder what happens to a candidate that becomes a minister only to discover at a future Synod that a new policy is passed that makes continued service in the Moravian Church impossible?

We all want assurances that no present or future debate will derail us, at least the part of the church in which we personally have a stake. The character and example demanded of clergy today has never been more crucial. My guess is that this document reflects the attempt of the Provincial Elders to define this reality. But it seems to lack a covenant on the part of the PECs to the candidate to support his or her well-being and wholeness, thus it appears to be a statement of professional obligation rather than a sacred covenant.

The Alban Institute recently indicated (September/October edition of the Alban Institute website magazine) that the vast majority of clergy in America do not experience joy in their work. It noted that thirty percent of clergy are happy, while another thirty percent feel ambivalent and forty percent are

in the some stage of burn out. The article noted that personal spiritual formation, appropriate leadership skills, and a breakdown in relationship between the judicatory and the minister were primary factors for this alarming trend. It suggested that the antidote for this demise involves a combination of ministers taking better care of their own well-being and spiritual nurture and developing more relevant leadership skills for the present times. In addition it stated that much of the onus is on the respective judicatories to find more affirming ways to relate to the clergy who are under their supervision.

The RFM statement seems to reflect well what has always been expected of clergy in the Moravian Church. This is great stuff, as long as conflict is minimal. What are the PECs prepared to do when conflict is significant or when the minister feels overwhelmed? “No one is an island,” we say, and certainly no minister can succeed without being a part of a team with the boards and the PEC. The RFM stands as a partial document in need of an equal commitment on the part of the boards, PECs and general members of our provinces to support an environment that is conducive to ministry. Without such a mutual covenant, the RFM is just a “policy.”

Keith Weatherman

I considered going into the ministry many years ago. I was a high school student and I really had no idea what I wanted to do with my life. When I investigated through the

I respect the PECs for attempting to make abundantly clear what has always been expected of ministers, but in the past these expectations have been clearly conveyed by seminary teachers, bishops, and collegial mentors. What has changed in our network of relational ministry to now make these “lived norms” into a “policy”? Is it assumed that these expectations will be more readily a part of a minister’s behavior by doing so? Is it also possible that this behavior cannot be taught but must be caught, which will require a lot more relational connection between PECs, bishops, seminary teachers and ministers?

The reality is that the well-being and wholeness of clergy in the Moravian Church seems to be at great risk, which is demonstrated by the number of pastorates that were terminated in the last year by the PECs. This certainly cannot be blamed on one party, but is likely a combination of factors present in our society and the church. What is needed, however, is a different approach to leadership than policy statements – something that is more relationally based, direct and reflective of the Body of Christ.

Dr. Neil Routh is the pastor of Christ Moravian Church in Winston-Salem.

Church, seeking answers, I was discouraged from the notion. I was told that I would have to be certain that I had been “touched on the