

## **Next Steps in Full Communion with the Moravian Church**

*Issued by the Office of Ecumenical and Interfaith Relations of The Episcopal Church*

**What happened at General Convention with Moravians?** In 2009 the General Convention of The Episcopal Church approved a proposal for full communion with the Moravian Church in America, Northern and Southern Provinces. Moravians and Anglicans have been in dialogue in the United States since the 18<sup>th</sup> century, and the bilateral dialogue with the Episcopal Church was authorized by the 1997 General Convention. The dialogue met from 1997-2006 and drafted the full communion proposal, in consultation with our common full communion partner, the ELCA, and the Inter Anglican Standing Commission on Ecumenical Relations.

**Are we in full communion with the Moravians?** Not yet. The Northern and Southern Provinces of the Moravian Church must approve the same proposal that was passed at the 2009 General Convention. The Southern Province votes in April of 2010, the Northern Province in June of 2010.

**What happens if all three approve the proposal?** The proposal calls for a ceremony celebrating full communion, at which point all Moravian bishops will receive the gift of the historic episcopate. Moravian presbyters will be interchangeable under an amended Article VII of the Constitution, which allows “an ordained minister in good standing in a Church with which this Church is in full communion as specified by the Canons” to serve in the

Episcopal Church. It is at that point that the two churches technically will be in full communion. So if all three bodies approve the agreement, it will probably not be until late 2010 that full communion will come into effect, after the ceremony inaugurating full communion.

**What does full communion mean?** Full communion means there will be interchangeability of presbyters and bishops. It also calls Moravians and Episcopalians to work together more intentionally in mission and witness.

**What about deacons?** There are some important differences in how Moravians and Episcopalians understand the diaconate. Moravian deacons are ordained to a ministry of word and sacrament, preside at the Eucharist and at baptisms, and serve as pastors of congregations. Episcopal deacons are ordained to a ministry of word and service. The proposal commits the churches to further study of the diaconate; however, because of these differences, Moravian deacons and Episcopal deacons are not interchangeable.

**There aren't any Moravians in my diocese. What does this mean for us?**

Moravians tend to be concentrated in several states, including Wisconsin, Ohio, North Carolina, New York, and Pennsylvania. This is a dialogue which will have more impact on local settings where there are Moravians and Episcopalians.

Another important aspect of the relationship is that the Northern and Southern Provinces of the Moravian Church are part of a worldwide communion, called the Unity of the Brethren or

the Unitas Fratrum – just like the Episcopal Church is a province of the worldwide Anglican Communion. It is our hope that other provinces of both churches could agree to sign on to this arrangement.

**Who are the Moravians?**

The Moravian Church is also known as the Unitas Fratrum, or Unity of the Brethren. The Unitas Fratrum was formed in 1457 as part of a movement for reform of the Catholic Church in what is now the Czech Republic. In 1467 they secured an Episcopal succession and maintained a threefold ministry of bishops, presbyters, and deacons. For almost 150 years, the Unitas Fratrum functioned as an alternative to the Roman Catholic Church. Severe persecution during the Thirty Years' War (1618-1648) resulted in untold suffering and the near extinction of Unitas Fratrum, reduced to a handful of believers. In 1722, the last surviving members found refuge on the estate of German nobleman Nicolaus Zinzendorf (d. 1760). The Unitas Fratrum underwent a renewal and rebirth in the 1700s, seeing themselves as a reform movement within the broader Christian church, heavily influenced by the Pietist movement of the 1700s. They also consecrated new bishops from the last surviving Moravian bishops. Now commonly called Moravians because they emigrated from what was known then as Moravia, they became known for their lively piety, communal living, hymnody, and passion for missionary work. In fact, the Moravians are credited for beginning the Protestant missionary movement.

Moravians came to North America during the colonial period, founding settlements in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania and Salem (now

Winston-Salem), North Carolina. They were involved in missionary work among Native Americans but did not attempt to convert other European Christian settlers (one of the reasons their numbers are small).

The Unitas Fratrum grew through emigration and missionary work into a global church, comprised of nineteen different provinces. There are approximately 750,000 Moravians worldwide. The majority of Moravians are non-European, with significant presence in Honduras, parts of South America, parts of Africa, and in the West Indies.

Moravians in North America are divided into two provinces: the Northern Province, centered in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania, and the Southern Province, centered in Winston-Salem, North Carolina. Alaska and Newfoundland are separate provinces of the Moravian Church, as are the West Indies and Jamaica. Most candidates for ministry study at Moravian Theological Seminary in Bethlehem. In terms of membership, there are roughly 50,000 Moravians served by 220 pastors in the Northern and Southern Provinces combined.

**What do Moravians believe?** The Moravians are a creedal, liturgical church. The authorized liturgies of the Moravian Church date back to the original Unitas Fratrum of the 1400s, and are a revision of the Western liturgical service. The Moravians have also been pioneers in hymnody and church music, particularly during their rebirth in the 1700s. They believe in the presence of Christ in the Eucharist and celebrate the baptism of infants as well as baptism of adults. The Church of England and the British Moravian Church reached

significant theological convergence in their discussions held in the 1990s.

**How are they governed?** Each province is governed by a Provincial Synod, similar to General Convention, which meets once every four years. The Provincial Synod has the authority to amend the Book of Order (similar to the Constitution and Canons). Synods also elect bishops. In between meetings of Synod, oversight is provided by a Provincial Elders' Conference, made up of clergy and laity elected by Synods. In addition, once every seven years a Unity Synod is held, with representation from all the member provinces of the Unitas Fratrum. The Unity Synod alone has the authority to amend the Church Order of the Unitas Fratrum (the governing constitution for the global Unitas Fratrum).

**What about their ministry?** Since 1467 the Unitas Fratrum has retained a threefold office of deacon, presbyter, and bishop. In the ancient Unitas Fratrum (pre-1700s) these offices functioned much as they do in the Episcopal Church and Anglican Communion. However, under the influence of the Lutheran state church in the 1700s, the order of deacon became part of the ministry of Word and Sacrament. Moravians deacons preside at the sacraments and serve as pastors of churches while under the supervision of a presbyter. After normally 3-5 years, they are consecrated presbyters. Consecration as presbyter involves a spiritual recommitment to the ministry of the church. Moravian bishops are elected by Provincial Synods. Moravian bishops are not diocesan in nature: rather they serve a pastoral and consultative ministry to their province as a whole (including presiding at all ordinations),

and only function in an administrative fashion if elected to a relevant body of oversight.

**What difference will any of this make?** This would be an historic agreement: the first time three churches (the ELCA, Episcopal Church, and Moravian Church) entered into full communion on the basis of separately negotiated concordats of full communion. It would also be the culmination of over 250 years of Anglican-Moravian conversations. It would facilitate mission and ministry in places where there is significant Episcopal and Moravian presence, such as North Carolina, Pennsylvania, Wisconsin, and other areas. It would serve as a witness to Jesus' prayer in the Gospel of John, that we all should be one, so that the world may believe (John 17:20-21).

#### Resources

For any questions or for further information, visit the website at [www.episcopalchurch.org/ecumenism](http://www.episcopalchurch.org/ecumenism). The full text of the full communion proposal, "Finding our Delight in the Lord," may be found there.

Website for the Unitas Fratrum, the worldwide communion of the Moravian Church: <http://www.unitasfratrum.org/>

Website for the Northern Province: [www.mcnp.org](http://www.mcnp.org)

Website of the Southern Province [www.mcsp.org](http://www.mcsp.org)

