

To: Southern Province Provincial Elders' Conference and the Unity Board of the Unitas Fratrum:

We, the undersigned, as congregants of various Moravian Churches of the Southern Province of the Moravian Church of America, are sending this letter to the Provincial Elders' Conference of the North American Southern Province and requesting the submission of this letter to the Unity Board of the Unitas Fratrum, to contest resolutions passed by the 2018 Synod of the North American Southern Province, which are non-compliant with the Southern Province's own "Book of Order" and also non-compliant with the "Church Order of the Unitas Fratrum" (COUF). While this letter will focus on Resolution #14, we feel there are several additional resolutions from this and previous Synods, which are not in alignment with COUF or with the Province's "Book of Order", which would benefit from a review.

Whereas the Southern Province's "Book of Order," in the "Constitution of the Moravian Church in America, Southern Province," Section 4. (Duties and Functions of the Provincial Synod) article # 1 states the duty of The Provincial Synod: "is to carry out the principles of the Moravian Church (Unitas Fratrum) laid down by the Unity Synod for constitution, doctrine, worship and congregational life". In order to have passed a resolution that is not in accordance with COUF, the Provincial Synod would have needed to repeal this section, and

Whereas Resolution #3 of the 2018 Southern Province Synod provides for "interprovincial collaboration between the Provinces in North America", states contradictively, being that as of the end of the 2018 Southern Province Synod, both provinces are in non-compliance with COUF, that "both the Southern and Northern Provinces of the Moravian Church in North America are provinces of the Unitas Fratrum and **adhere to the Church Order of the Unitas Fratrum**", and

Whereas the "Church Order of the Unitas Fratrum," in Section 1 (Church Order), Part 1, article #4 (God's Word and Doctrine) states: "The Triune God as revealed in the Holy Scripture of the Old and New Testament is the only source of our life and salvation; and **this Scripture is the sole standard of the doctrine and faith of the Unitas Fratrum and therefore shapes our life.** The Unitas Fratrum recognizes the Word of the Cross as the centre of Holy Scripture and of all preaching of the Gospel and it sees its primary mission, and its reason for being, to consist in bearing witness to this joyful message. **We ask our Lord for power never to stray from this.**

Whereas in COUF Section 1 Part B, "Sphere of Action of Provincial Synods", article #404 states: The Provincial Synods have the following powers and duties within the bounds of their own Provinces

a) "To carry out the principles of the Unitas Fratrum laid down by the Unity Synod for constitution, doctrine, worship and congregation life" and b) "To legislate in regard to constitution, worship and congregation life for its own Province", and

Whereas in COUF Part F, "The Provincial Boards", article #407 states: "These Boards are responsible for carrying out the Church Order laid down for their Provinces, its districts, congregations, and fields of work, and the other resolutions of the Provincial Synod," and

Whereas in COUF Part F. "The Provincial Books of Order", article #412 states: "Each Province governed by a Synod issues its own Book of Order, which must be in agreement with the "Church Order of the Unitas Fratrum (Moravian Church)"; article #413 in the same part states: Each such Book of Order is valid

only for its own Province. **In the event of an appeal, the “Church Order of the Unitas Fratrum (Moravian Church) in force at the time is authoritative”,** and

Whereas in COUF Part G, “A Unitas Fratrum Code of Conduct”, article #414 states: “In the event of a major conflict within the Moravian Church Province, a code of conduct in the Unity is required”;

The code of conduct will include the following:

- When a conflict, as a rule between several groups or entities within a Province develops and the conflicts involve the leadership, and in the event that the synod, being the highest appeal body within the Province, is unable to find a solution to the said conflict, the Provincial Board notifies the Unity office as early as possible;
- In that case the Unity office strives at its earliest convenience to visit the area with a Unity Delegation in order to learn about the situation, and if possible to call the parties together to a common meeting in order to find a way forward. As no conflict must be left to develop for a longer period of time and subsequently get out of hand, the Unity has the right and the duty to intervene with measures of mediation, even if not invited to do so by one or both parts;
- The Unity Synod, the Unity Board, and the Unity Executive Committee, whichever is applicable, has the right and duty to hear both parties, to give careful consideration to all matters, to seek to understand the issues and seek a way forward.
- Because differences in the understanding of the Moravian identity and theology are accepted within the Unity, based on the fundamental notion of seeking unity in essentials, liberty in non-essentials and love in all things, the ruling principle is that the Unity, through its structure of leadership, does its best to ensure that all members, who wish to be part of the Unity, can remain so.
- This however, does not mean that everything and anything is accepted. **Clear obedience to and agreement with COUF and the Constitution of the Province is paramount. In cases of doubt as to how to understand COUF, the structure of leadership of the unity will offer an interpretation. In cases of a group not wishing to accept COUF, this group might be better off leaving the unity.**
- But first and foremost, all Provinces, all leaders, all ministers are asked always to consider carefully, what builds the kingdom of God and what is to His glory, and

Whereas in the COUF section titled, “Resolutions Continuing Force,” article #885. (Homosexuality) states: In the light of rising division on the issue of homosexuality experienced within and between the various Provinces;

It was resolved that:

- a) Unity Synod should speak to the issue of homosexuality as it relates to the ministry of the Church; and **Unity Synod has not changed its resolutions regarding this topic nor allowed Provincial Synods to make any changes,** and

WHEREAS, The Ground of the Unity declares that “it is the Lord’s will that Christendom should give evidence of and seek unity in Him with zeal and love,” and “in our own midst we see how such unity has been promised us and laid upon us as a charge,” and “we welcome every step that brings us nearer the goal of unity in Him” (Par. 6), and

WHEREAS, When Jesus on the night before he died prayed, in His High Priestly Prayer, concerning his followers “that they may be one...so that the world may believe that thou hast sent me” (John 17:21) was calling his followers to unity; and,

WHEREAS, in Resolution 44 “Message to the America North Province,” the Unity Synod responds with:

Whereas, since the Unitas Fratrum was founded in 1457, marriage, as a bond between one man and one woman, has been a principal and widely affirmed article of both the faith and life of our congregations; and

Whereas the statements of COUF in sections 656 and 657 and the Moravian Covenant for Christian Living 21 through 23 understand marriage to be a bond between one man and one woman; and

Whereas the declarations of the Bishops’ conference from the years 2007 and 2014 affirm the statements in the Moravian Covenant for Christian Living 21 through 23; and

Whereas the Worldwide unity in 2016 accepts the principle, based on its understanding of faith and biblical testimony, that marriage is a bond between one man and one woman and is a precious gift from God; and

Whereas in June 2014, the Synod of the American Northern Province approved a resolution named “The ordination and pastoral service of gay and lesbian individuals, whether single, married, or in covenanted relationships”, in which it allows that ordained ministers of the church practice homosexuality (if they live in a “same-sex marriage” or in a same-sex “covenanted relationship”, and in “sexual fidelity to their partner”); and

Whereas the decision of the American Northern Province in 2014 concerning the ordination and/or marriage of same gender couples does not involve only the American Northern Province, since the issue of ordination and marriage concerns the very essence of practice and life of the worldwide Unitas Fratrum; and

Whereas according to the COUF, “the Holy Scripture of the Old and New Testaments is the sole standard of the doctrine and faith of the Unitas Fratrum” (Church Order of the Unitas Fratrum, The Ground of the Unity, #4), and the practice of homosexuality is in contradiction with Unity Synod 2016’s understanding of Scripture; and

Whereas the issue concerning homosexual lifestyle has been appearing in every Unity Synod since 1995 without resolution; be it

Resolved that Christian Marriage in the Moravian Church is between a man and a woman and be it

Resolved that the Unity Synod 2016 declares to the American Northern Province that the actions of its June 2014 Synod concerning the marriage of same gender couples and the ordination of homosexual people is not in accordance with the 2016 Unity Synod's understanding of marriage based on Unity Synod 2016's understanding of COUF, the Moravian Covenant for Christian Living and Scripture; and be it further

Resolved that the Unity Synod 2016 commissions the Unity Board to observe the development in the American Northern Province, to take necessary measures.”

We strongly believe that the 2018 Southern Province Synod Resolution #14, as well as the 2014 Northern Province Synod Resolution on the same matter has been and will continue to be divisive to our church, causing congregants who wish to abide by the Church Order of the Unitas Fratrum to leave or consider leaving the Moravian Church in these Provinces, as is already happening in both of the North American Provinces. We seek to achieve unity by bringing our North American Provinces back into compliance with the “Church Order of the Unitas Fratrum” and with their own Provincial “Books of Order”.

Therefore, we request that the Unity Board recognize that this 2018 Southern Province resolution and the 2014 Northern Province Synod's comparable resolution, are constitutionally unsound resolutions, as being non-compliant with the “Church Order of the Unitas Fratrum”. We also request that the Unity Board take decisive action on these resolutions, as adopted by both North American Provinces and, per article #414 of COUF, to require these Provinces of the Unitas Fratrum to remove these resolutions and revise their Provincial “Books of Order” in accord with the long-lived, biblically based, and historically well-respected “Church Order of the Unitas Fratrum” as it is currently written. We respect the right for the Unitas Fratrum to make any changes the body of the church wishes to make, but we request that any such changes be constitutionally sound and in agreement with any and all appropriate books of order.

Respectfully submitted,

Concerned Congregants of the Moravian Church, North America Southern Provinces

Enc: Signature pages from various congregations throughout the Southern Province