

May 15, 2019

Dear Member of the Unity Board, Unity Synod and Bishops of the Unitas Fratrum,

The Concerned Moravians group has recently met and has agreed that a response needs to be sent regarding the letter of rejection which our group received from the Provincial Elders' Conference (PEC) of the North American Southern Province, in their letter dated January 3, 2019. We have a number of concerns regarding their specific responses.

The petition which we sent dealt with the unconstitutional actions taken by the 2018 Southern Province Synod. In our petition, we requested that the PEC forward this formal request to the Unity Board to take action, as called for in the Church Order of the Unitas Fratrum (COUF). This is per Unity Synod's resolution 44 related to the Northern Province's similar decision, which broke the North American province's unity with the Church Order. In this resolution, the Unity Synod stated that their response does not involve the Northern Province alone, but involves everyone who is part of the world-wide Unitas Fratrum. Frankly, the contempt shown by the Southern Province Synod in following our northern neighbors into a disregard of our long-standing world-wide unity is difficult for us to understand. We also feel that the stance of the PEC is also contemptuous, as they remain in support of this decision. As we informed the Southern Province PEC at our last meeting with them, the conflict between the Southern Province Book of Order and COUF disallows any forward movement related to Resolution 14, since it causes our constitution to be in disagreement with itself. No legitimate action can be taken unless or until such disagreement is resolved. Unfortunately, the Southern Province PEC has decided to continue on the pathway to move forward on this unconstitutional resolution.

We have several concerns regarding the PEC's response letter. Part 1 begins by stating that "Insisting that there is only one understanding of this topic is contrary to how our 2018 Synod's determined we will strive to live with one another in our differences." This statement continues to disregard the Unity Synod's resolution 44 and article #657 of the COUF, which state that the Unitas Fratrum has a long-standing belief that there is indeed only one understanding of this topic; that marriage is between one man and one woman.

To move forward in the response letter, we do not understand at all why the PEC included what is written in part 2. None of us have ever not allowed anyone to express their perspective freely without recrimination. Our objection has never been to disrespect or halt discussion on any issue, despite the fact that our members have met with many instances of refusal by provincial employees to let discussions happen on this topic. We have shared a number of examples of this in our meetings with our PEC. Our sole objection is to the synod's unconstitutional decisions and the local leaders' decisions, as PEC members, to move forward in supporting these unconstitutional actions.

We continue with part 3 of the response letter, where it is stated that we had already contacted the Unity Board, who had advised us that the matter is to be decided first within the Province. We were not actually advised of this, but were told, just as our PEC told us, that we needed to send it through the PEC first, in order to follow the steps as stated in the COUF. We've heard this quite often in our meetings with our local leaders, and it's very hard to digest, as the Synod has not followed the steps in the COUF and neither has the PEC. They have disregarded that the legislative committee of last year's synod did not address the unconstitutionality of this resolution, nor have they followed their own directives. In the legislative guide prepared by the Southern Province PEC, it is stated that "The Provincial Synod shall have power: to carry out the principles of the Moravian Church (Unitas Fratrum) laid down by the Unity Synod for constitution, doctrine, worship and congregational life". The Unity Synod has very clearly explained their stance on the unconstitutionality of the Northern Province's 2014 Synod resolution. This then also applies to the Southern Province's 2018 resolution on the same topic. This guide also states, "A PEC or Synod could diverge from the principles and rules of the COUF. This makes the Synod or PEC 'Out of Order'." The guide continues by saying, "This would happen if, rather than asking for an exception from or appealing a Unity Synod decision (or what is stated in COUF), the PEC and/or Synod just did or decided something contrary to COUF. Such divergences would generally be unintended, or undiscovered at the time [these] were decided. Once this divergence was known to the Unity Board it could take corrective action". A similar statement is made in COUF #354 c, "When the Unity Board becomes aware of such a divergence, it has the authority to 'arrange for interchange of opinion on [such] divergences...with a view to the correction of these divergences."

We have followed the COUF by asking our PEC to pass this on to the Unity Board as a concern in our province. There has been no action toward removing or halting action on the unconstitutional decisions made at synod. Thus there has been no resolution of our concerns and this remains an ongoing issue in our province. This matter needs to move to a higher jurisdiction to adjudicate this matter.

An additional concern is in part 3b of the response letter is the following statement, "given the cultural, social and political realities in many of our provinces world-wide it is not possible to have conversation or dialogue within the worldwide church on the matter". This again is a contradiction to our Church Order, which states in article #4 that "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 lives." Further in this article is the statement "We ask our Lord never to stray from this". The Holy Scripture warns us not to stray from God's word in following the traditions of men, which means that cultural, social and political realities should not be playing any part in our church decisions or lives. Further in section b and in the endnotes to the response letter, the PEC discusses homosexuality to a great extent. This is puzzling to us, as the issue as we have presented it is not about

homosexuality. It is about grave disrespect to our long-standing Church Order and to our Unity Synod, and to the decision to move forward on unconstitutional actions. Without a doubt, we would respond in similar fashion to any unconstitutional action that a synod directed us to take. For example, if our synod created a piece of legislation which sanctified lying, worship of idols, fornication or adultery, or any of the sins that keep someone from salvation, which are mentioned in numerous passages in both the Old and New Testaments, we would protest these, as we would any other resolutions which were in disagreement with the COUF.

The last statement we wish to address is the PEC's assertion that "Unity does not mean uniformity in matters that are not of the essentials". Our provincial definition of the essentials of our faith now declares, "God Redeems" and "God Sanctifies". Therefore, God's redeeming action and the sanctification He so freely gives to us are both part of our newly coined essentials. In order for us to allow God to work as Redeemer and Sanctifier in our lives, we are called to confess and repent of our sins, so He will then, as the Holy Scriptures state, "be faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness."

We have the gravest concern for the well-being of churches in our province. We have sadly seen many of our members voting against these actions with their feet and their pocketbooks, which is causing damage to our church attendance and budgets. We are looking for serious consideration to our concerns, with a body having the interests of the entire Unitas Fratrum at heart, and look forward to a restoration of the unity of the world-wide Moravian Church, beyond the desire of provincial leaders to follow the traditions of men in their own corner of the world. Due to the inequitable use of COUF rules and strictures in our province, we are now formally contacting you, the members of Unity Board and Unity Synod, as well as our worldwide group of Bishops and reminding these members that "once they are aware of a divergence", as stated in COUF #354 c, included above, the board has the authority to "arrange for interchange of opinion on [such] divergences...with a view to the correction of these divergences." We are asking you to correct these divergences and restore our world-wide unity as quickly as possible.

Sincerely,

The Concerned Moravians Leadership Team

Kay Adams, Bill Barham, Jerry Carter, Diane Hubbard, Eddie Hubbard, Dick Joyce, Richard Key, Compton Lane, Cindy Morgan, Charlie Stott, Johnnie Tayloe, Judy Tayloe, Tim Trollinger