

**Subject:** Special Edition Provincial Ties - September 25, 2019

**Date:** Wednesday, September 25, 2019 at 3:54:34 PM Eastern Daylight Time

**From:** Johnson, Beverly



# PROVINCIAL TIES

*September 25, 2019*

— LATEST NEWS & EVENTS —

## *PEC News*

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

The Provincial Elders' Conference has prepared this special edition of the Provincial Ties newsletter. We are taking this opportunity to share the following:

### **A Pastoral Letter from the Bishops in our Province**

This August 26 letter was distributed to pastors in early September with the invitation for those in congregational settings to share it with their church board(s) or fellowship committee, and with the membership.

If you have not already done so, we again invite you to share this communication from our bishops.

### **An Update to Pastors and Church Leaders**

This memo shares information about activities related to Concerned Moravians since May of this year. The PEC has not provided this kind of update since November of last year, and we trust this will be helpful.

### **Questions and Answers Regarding Resolution 14**

It is important that accurate information is available about events and activities surrounding and following our 2018 Synod and Resolution 14. The PEC prepared this document to provide some background, to correct misinformation and otherwise provide answers.

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We are sending these things out via the normal e-mail distribution list for the Provincial Ties newsletter. We invite pastors and church boards to read and review these materials and to share them in the congregation or fellowship as seems best.

As Provincial Elders we lift up a statement which was approved by our Synod in Resolution 14:

. . . that our unity in Christ is far greater than our differing views and understanding about homosexuality and the church and, that we can be welcoming, respectful and loving toward one another in our differences;

And, we repeat the call that our Synod made some 17 months ago for congregations "to engage in continued study, prayer, reflection and conversation."

The Provincial Elders' Conference



August 26, 2019

A Pastoral Letter from Bishops Residing in the Southern Province

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

Grace, mercy, and peace, from God our Father and from the Lord Jesus Christ, be with you all.

We write to address certain matters which have arisen in the Southern Province following the 2018 Provincial Synod, specifically questions regarding the 2018 Synodal process and the Provincial Elders' Conference administration related to Resolution 14, "Leadership Roles and Diversity of Views" (a resolution which affirmed the freedom of conscience of individual congregations and pastors "whether or not to administer a rite or sacrament in any particular situation" including the rite of marriage to same-sex couples).

It is not our place as bishops to interfere in any way with the administration of the Province or a Synod. Ours is a pastoral role which seeks to encourage unity and love within the Province and the Unity. While the office of Bishop is valid throughout the Unity, all bishops function under the authority of the Provincial Board and Synod of the Province in which they reside. Acknowledging the sincerely held differing beliefs and opinions of Moravians in the Southern Province on topics related to homosexuality, we understand that there needs to be continued discussion and discernment among Moravians on this matter. Therefore, as a Bishops' Conference we have not prepared a

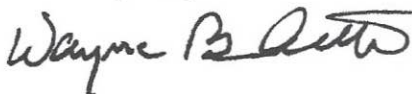
statement regarding the church's response to homosexuality; rather, we seek to foster mutual understanding, respect and unity-in-diversity among all Moravians.

As Bishops and pastors residing in the Southern Province, we served as voting delegates to the 2018 Synod of the Southern Province. In that capacity we participated in all pre-Synod events and meetings, served on Synod committees, and presided over daily celebrations of Holy Communion at Synod, in addition to offering ongoing intercessions for the Lord's guidance for the Synod. It is our unanimous opinion that the way in which the 2018 Synod of the Southern Province was planned and conducted was in every way consistent with the Constitution of the Moravian Church Southern Province and the Standing Rules of Synod. We give thanks for all the work done prior to Synod and during Synod to make the process as efficient and transparent as possible and open to the leading of the Holy Spirit.

Likewise, we believe that the Provincial Elders' Conference, duly elected at the 2018 Synod, has been faithful in implementing the actions of Synod, specifically actions approved by Resolutions 14 and 13. We are saddened that some within the Southern Province have called into question either the process of Synod or the administration of the Provincial Elders' Conference. We will continue to give prayer support for our elected Provincial Elders and the ministry they provide on behalf of the Southern Province.

Our hope is that the spirit of Resolution 13 of the 2018 Synod will govern our thoughts, words and deeds, "Resolved, that any person, group, congregation, agency and entity within the Southern Province retains the right to make opinions related to LGBTQ+ issues known, without fear of recrimination, provided such opinions live up to our covenant: 'We will not hate, despise, slander, or otherwise injure anyone'." (Moravian Covenant for Christian Living, V. Our Witness in the World, A Love Toward All. Par. 29) More than ever perhaps, our world needs the witness of Christian Unity and love one for another. May our Chief Elder continue to lead and guide us to demonstrate that witness.

Grace and peace,



Wayne Burkette



Carol Foltz



Sam Gray



Graham Rights



Lane Sapp





**MORAVIAN CHURCH IN AMERICA, SOUTHERN PROVINCE**  
*Provincial Elders' Conference*

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**September 23, 2019**

**Memo to Pastors and Church Leaders from the Provincial Elders' Conference**  
**Update regarding activity related to Concerned Moravians**

Dear Sisters and Brothers,

In response to questions we have received, the Provincial Elders' Conference would like to update you about developments over recent months in relation to the Concerned Moravians group.

As background, beginning in an August 2018 meeting with leaders of the Concerned Moravians group, the PEC has repeatedly informed Concerned Moravians that the Church Order of the Unitas Fratrum (COUF) states the process to be followed to appeal a decision of a Provincial Synod:

**#601.** In the case of the Provinces governed by a Synod, the individual members, congregations, institutions and boards shall have the right of appeal to their Provincial Board. The final court of appeal in these cases shall be their Provincial Synod.

In September 2018, against our guidance, the group delivered a petition directly to members of the Unity Board. The proper course of action – following COUF #601 – was reinforced to them in a meeting with the Unity Business Administrator (October 2018).

Concerned Moravians held a prayer service in January 2019, and additional meetings in February and June. You may have been aware of or received information about these.

On May 15-16, Concerned Moravians sent a cover letter and a document to the members of the Unity Board and asked that it be shared with bishops in the worldwide church. (Unity Board is composed of the PEC Presidents or representatives from each PEC of the Provinces.) This direct appeal to the Unity Board was contrary to COUF #601, what our PEC had advised, and what they were told by the Unity Business Administrator.

In response, the Chair of the Unity Board and the Unity Business Administrator sent a letter to the members of the Unity Board which reaffirmed that this was a matter to be resolved within the Southern Province, following what is stated in COUF #601-603.

On May 21, Bishop Armando Rusindo, resident in the Cuba Unity Mission Province, informed the PEC he had accepted an invitation to be a guest speaker at the Concerned Moravians' June 1 meeting. PEC wrote Bishop Rusindo respectfully requesting he not do so, as it would amount to interference in an ongoing challenge within our Province

and the ministry of the bishops within our Province. We asked him to let us know whether he would honor our request. Prior to the June 1 meeting Bishop Rusindo shared the PEC's private letter with the Concerned Moravians, which they subsequently published on their website. They allowed the invitation to Bishop Rusindo to stand, and he participated in the meeting.

After our PEC made the chair of the Unity Board and the Unity Board Administrator aware of this situation, they wrote to Bishop Rusindo reminding him of the role of the bishop within the Unity, and that bishops carry out their ministry under the direction of Provincial Boards. We note that brother Rusindo requested and was granted a three-month leave of absence by the Cuba Province PEC, June-August. During that time he was on a spiritual retreat and not performing functions as a bishop.

Our PEC has been in contact with the PEC in Cuba to assure accurate communication about these matters and to reaffirm the partnership we accepted from the Unity Board in 2012 to accompany our church in Cuba in development as a Mission Province within the worldwide Unity. The PEC in Cuba invited representatives of the world-wide Unity, our PEC, and the Board of World Mission to visit Cuba to discuss this situation and the ongoing partnership. This meeting (absent a representative of our PEC) occurred in Cuba Sept. 16-18, and included conversations with Bishop Rusindo and the Provincial Board.

In June, someone altered the online Wikipedia article about the Moravian Church in the section that described Provincial Synods. The changes echoed Concerned Moravians' statements elsewhere and promoted the group. The Executive Director of the Interprovincial Board of Communication became aware of this, and took steps to restore and to monitor the article. Due to the open nature of Wikipedia, the identity of the person(s) who altered the materials is difficult to determine.

On July 24, against the May 2018 advice of the Unity Board Chair and Unity Board Administrator, the Czech Province PEC sent a letter of support and other materials to the Concerned Moravians group. On August 14, our PEC responded to the PEC of the Czech Province advising them that their communication to the Concerned Moravians group constituted interference in our Province and asking them to adhere to COUF #601. Interventions in the internal affairs of a Province are by, or under the direction of, the Unity Synod or Unity Board, and not by the PEC of a sister Province.

PEC has also received complaints about members of the Concerned Moravian group attending congregational events open to the public, and –without prior permission, or informing anyone – using it as an opportunity to distribute material and engage others in conversation about their group and its efforts.

PEC has reviewed materials posted on the Concerned Moravians website, and also heard about conversations taking place among the members of the Province. We feel there is a great deal of inaccuracy, misinformation or mischaracterization in circulation about Resolution 14. We address these things in a separate document and encourage you to read and to distribute it as you determine is best.

We remind everyone of important decisions made by our 2018 Synod in Resolution 13:

**RESOLVED, That** the Moravian Church Southern Province will recognize among its membership the adherence to and expression of differing opinions related to homosexuality; and,

**RESOLVED, That** any person, group, congregation, agency and entity within the

Southern Province retains the right to make opinions related to LGBTQ+ issues known, without fear of recrimination, provided such opinions live up to our covenant: "We will not hate, despise, slander, or otherwise injure anyone." (MCCL, V. Our Witness in the World, A. Love Toward All, par. 29.).



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**Memo: 2019/09/23**

**To: Pastors and Church Leaders**

**Re: Questions and Answers Regarding Resolution 14**

Dear friends,

PEC has reviewed some of the materials posted on the Concerned Moravians website, and also heard about conversations taking place among the members of the Province. We feel there is a great deal of inaccuracy, misinformation or mischaracterization in circulation about Resolution 14. The following addresses some of these things in a "question and answer" format. As always, if you have questions or need further information to help in your interpretation of and response to our Synod's decision, please be in contact.

**1. Were pastors and Synod delegates informed in advance that the topic of homosexuality and the church might be addressed at the 2018 Synod?**

**Yes.** Pastors were informed in October 2017 (and asked to inform Synod delegates) that same-gender marriage would be a possible topic at Synod, and that PEC planned to convene a group of pastors with diverse views to explore whether a consensus proposal to Synod could be developed. That group of pastors was formed and opted not to be publically identified and to work in private. The PEC honored their request. Pre-Synod proposals about homosexuality were distributed to delegates and to the appropriate Synod Committee(s) prior to Synod via the normal process which was communicated in advance of Synod.

Note that a Synod is not a public expression of representational democracy in which all matters are publically known in advance by the general membership and elected delegates are expected to vote under the instruction or direction of their constituencies. Proposals to Synod are only distributed to the elected delegates of Synod, because they are the persons set apart to prayerfully deliberate, discern and decide about them. Proposals are just that – proposals, which may or may not move forward to consideration and decision, based on how Synod Committees or Synod itself determines.

**2. In 2018, was there a "moratorium" in effect that prevented Provincial Synods from addressing homosexuality and the church?**

**No.** From 2002 until 2009 Unity Synod placed a "moratorium" on decisions about homosexuality and the church by the Provinces (COUF #885). In 2010, the Unity Board clarified that the moratorium ended in 2009, but asked Provinces not to make decisions until after the 2014 Unity Board meeting. The 2014 Unity Board meeting did not extend this waiting period. Since that time there have been no limitations on Provincial Synods

considering and deciding matters related to homosexuality and the church, including decisions that may differ from what is stated in COUF or what a Unity Synod has decided. In its report to the 2016 Unity Synod, the Unity Committee on Theology (2011) stated: *"We believe this issue does not rise to the doctrinal equivalence of the New Testament confession, 'Jesus is Lord', but it is a biblical, theological and pastoral issue to be addressed in the various political, cultural and social settings of the Unity."* [Emphasis added].

### **3. Did the PEC "force" Resolution 14 through Synod?**

**No.** In our conferential system of governance, it is not possible for a PEC to force a Synod to do anything. In fact, during a Provincial Synod, the PEC does not exist, as the Synod supersedes the PEC as the governing body. The prior PEC members have no authority other than as delegates to the Synod. The newly elected PEC is sworn in during Synod's closing service. Resolution 14 followed the normal process for all Synod resolutions. It was submitted under established guidelines; referred to, considered, revised and approved by the assigned Synod committee; presented to the full Synod; and, after lengthy deliberation, approved by a vote of the Synod by a 64% majority.

### **4. Was the voting process at Synod proper and in good order?**

**Yes.** The voting process at Synod, both in Committee and in the plenary sessions, was proper and in keeping with what was stated in the Standing Rules of Synod and in pre-Synod materials distributed to delegates. A five-position consensus decision-making model was suggested by the Planning Committee for use in Synod Committees, and information was provided to delegates. This consensus model in no way obscured the majority view within a Committee. It is actually designed to help identify minority views and allow those voices to be heard and considered.

Electronic voting in plenary sessions was by the majority vote prescribed by Roberts Rules of Order, or in the Constitution of the Southern Province. This voting was managed independently and professionally by a company contracted to provide those services.

Resolution 14 made no changes in the Constitution of the Moravian Church, Southern Province, nor was it in conflict with any section of the Constitution.

### **5. After Synod were pastors and delegates encouraged to report and communicate the decisions of Synod in their congregations, including Resolutions 13 and 14?**

**Yes.** In an email the day after Synod (April 23), the PEC noted that pastors may already have plans to inform church boards and congregation members about Synod decisions. PEC did ask that church boards delay any decision in response to Resolution 14 until the PEC communicated suggestions about a decision-making process. An April 27 letter (five days after Synod) from PEC included a summary of synod to help pastors *"review with your boards and congregations all the actions taken by Synod."* The letter included the full texts of Resolutions 13 and 14 to share with church boards. May 3, PEC communicated initial guidelines for sharing Resolution 13 and 14 within the congregation and suggestions for response and decision-making by church boards. May 11, PEC sent a memo to pastors providing further, more detailed guidelines regarding communication, response and decisions by church boards, and additional resources.

### **6. Did the PEC communicate in advance, and after its publication, about an**

## article in the Winston-Salem Journal in early May 2018?

**Yes.** Via email May 3, the PEC President informed pastors that he had been contacted by the Winston-Salem Journal and would be interviewed that afternoon, and advised that the article could appear in the paper as early as May 4. Following standard practice, the email to pastors said: *“to make certain there is a common message, it would be helpful for you to refer any media inquiries to the PEC office.”* The interview took place. The reporter asked for additional sources, including pastors of congregations. The PEC President provided names and contact information for three persons and the reporter decided independently whether to interview those people. The reporter was asked, as a courtesy and to allow notice within the church, to inform the PEC President of the publication date. He did not. On Friday, May 11, PEC notified pastors via email that we did not know the publication date. The article ran on May 12 (not May 11). The reporter’s story included quotes from the PEC President and one of the suggested sources. That morning, the PEC President emailed pastors making them aware of the article, providing some background information, and repeating some points from the initial guidelines shared May 3.

### 7. Is the decision of our Synod in Resolution 14 unconstitutional?

Synod’s action was not unconstitutional.

Unity Synod decides on “official statements of the general principles of the Unitas Fratrum in regard to constitution, doctrine, congregation life and the ministry and spread of the Gospel. (COUF #240, #253). These are embodied in the Church Order of the Unitas Fratrum (COUF).

A Provincial Synod has the responsibility to “carry out the principles of the Unitas Fratrum laid down by the Unity Synod for constitution, doctrine, worship and congregational life” (COUF #207, #404a), and also “to legislate in regard to constitution, worship and congregation life for its own Province.” (COUF #404b, emphasis added). A Provincial Synod “develops a Constitution and Church Order for its particular area adapting it to local conditions.” (COUF #208, emphasis added).

In fulfilling these responsibilities, a Provincial Synod may disagree with Church Order of the Unitas Fratrum (COUF) or actions of Unity Synod. This is what occurred when Resolution 14 was approved.

COUF defines ways in which such disagreements may occur and be managed. A Synod or its PEC may: ask questions of the Unity Board (COUF #354 f), appeal a decision of Unity Synod (COUF #602,603), ask the Unity Board for an exception to a decision of Unity Synod (COUF #354 g), or diverge from a principle of Church Order, which may prompt engagement by the Unity Board about this divergence (#354 e).

Synod’s decision in Resolution 14 allows pastors and church boards to continue their traditional roles in determining matters related to church membership, participation in rites and sacraments, use of facilities, and decisions in call processes. This includes decisions about whether or not to perform or to host same-gender marriages. The Resolution also reaffirms the traditional role of the PEC in decisions related to ordination.

The Resolution opens the possibility that pastors and boards will approve, perform, or host same-gender marriages, since such marriages are legal. Doing so would be in disagreement with COUF (COUF #657) and a decision by the 2016 Unity Synod that “Christian marriage in the Moravian Church is between a man and a woman.” (COUF



#819) The Resolution also provides freedom for pastors and church boards to not perform or host same-gender marriages.

Since Resolution 14 allows pastors and boards make such choices, it can be viewed, in itself, as a decision to disagree with and diverge from what is stated in COUF and what 2016 Unity Synod decided. But, again, such a decision is not unconstitutional.

**8. If there is disagreement within our Province about a Synod decision, is the proper action to appeal directly to the Unity Board?**

**No.** For information: The highest authority within the worldwide church is not the Unity Board but the Unity Synod, which meets every seven years. The Unity Board (composed of representatives from the 24 Unity Provinces, typically the PEC Presidents) has limited authority in carrying out the actions of Unity Synod.

Appealing to the Unity Board ignores the important role of the Provincial Synod in governing the affairs of the Province. This includes taking action to change any decisions or actions of previous Provincial Synods, and acting as the final court of appeal (COUF 404 j) within a Province. A direct appeal to the Unity Board by any individual members, congregations, institutions and boards is contrary to the appeals process found in COUF #601-603.

#601. In the case of the Provinces governed by a Synod, the individual members, congregations, institutions and boards shall have the right of appeal to their Provincial Board. The final court of appeal in these cases shall be their Provincial Synod.

**9. Did the PEC request that the 2018 petition of the Concerned Moravians be delivered with the signatures of the petitioners?**

**Yes.** The petition document submitted to the PEC in November 2018 began: *"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."* [Emphasis added.] In asking for the petition signatures, the PEC was fulfilling its responsibility to make certain what was presented in the letter was a valid petition. The PEC informed Concerned Moravians of this prior to their submitting the petition, via letters on August 30 and Oct 25, 2018.

**10. Did the PEC take action on the petition of the Concerned Moravians group?**

**Yes.** The specific request from Concerned Moravians was for PEC to deliver the petition to the Unity Board. In its response, PEC said we would not do that for several reasons: a) the Concerned Moravians had already delivered the petition to Unity Board (in September 2018), b) our PEC and the Unity Board Administrator had advised them this was a matter to be decided first within the Province, c) the cultural, social, political and legal challenges within the worldwide church prevented a full and open discussion of this matter by the Unity Board, and d) we understood the role of a Provincial Synod to legislate for its own province. [See the text of the Jan. 3 PEC response.]

**11. Does our Province remain in unity with the worldwide Moravian Church?**

**Yes.** Our Synod did not sever ties with the worldwide church. Our Province is not under discipline by Unity Synod or Unity Board. Our PEC will continue to be in conversation with the leadership of the Unity and take part in its work and witness.

While our Synod decided to allow disagreement, according to conscience, with statements in COUF related to marriage, we continue to follow other parts of COUF as a Province of the Unity.

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