

2023 MCNP Synod PEC Outgoing President's address

Brothers and sisters, siblings in Christ it is good to be here. It is too good to get out of that COVID exile and see you face to face. It is good to give thanks to God for bringing us safely back together again to be about the ministry of the church. **The mission of the Moravian Church Northern Province is to equip people and congregations to be agents of God's transforming love in the world no matter who you are or how you identify.** You are embraced and affirmed by God's expansive love. The role of the province, the PEC, the bishops, and our staff is to equip you and your congregations to claim our agency, our individual and collective power and influence to be part of God's transformation and healing of the world. God's love can transform and heal the world. (Can I get an "Amen" on that?) God's love can heal and transform the world. This is the hope we claim through the power and the presence of the Holy Spirit. God calls us, us to be about God's mission to transform and heal and bless God's world. That's why we are here and that's who we are when we go back home. In the Northern Province everyone, everyone is part of this work – this call, this transformation.

When I was a little girl, my father and I had a bedtime ritual. I'm sure it's familiar to many or some of you. It would start out like this how much do you love me tonight? This much oh, how much do you love me tonight, this much this much, this much and always ended with that long. And this went on long after I knew how it was going to end right. Because my father wanted to make absolutely sure that I knew how much he loved me and that his love for me was wider than the stretch of his arms, wider and bigger and richer and deeper than he could name out loud. Despite how big and wide my father's love for me. It was minuscule compared to God's love for us. No matter who you are or how you identify, if you are male or female or nonbinary or transgender, if you were gay or straight or bi, if you are black or brown or indigenous or white, if you are young or old if you have a disability or are currently fully abled, if you are a lifelong Moravian or a brand-new Moravian, you are embraced and affirmed by God's expansive love.

For us, the Moravian Church Northern Province has been slowly and relentlessly living into and naming God's expansive love for all. Like any church or denomination, we are a long way off from the wideness of God's mercy. Nevertheless, God calls us to continually stretch the embrace of the church to mirror God's expansive embrace so that we can say to everyone we love see God loves you, this much. The theme for synod is for the healing of the world. God's world needs healing on many fronts – physical healing from the ravages and grief of the pandemic and the horrific escalation of gun violence, global healing from the climate crisis, emotional healing from the isolation and depression exacerbated by the pandemic, divisiveness by the political landscape and systemic healing from the sin of racism. We as Moravians have been part of the brokenness and we as Moravians can be part of the healing. How we live as the community of faith here these days at Synod and back home in our congregations represents our witness and our participation in God's ongoing mission to the world.

I've been honored to witness this Church work toward healing and wholeness in this inter synodal period. I'm humbled by the creativity resilient courage and downright scrappiness of pastors and congregational leaders who responded in the midst of the pandemic with faith and adapted just about everything so that you could proclaim the Good News of Jesus Christ. That's

why you did all that techno babble stuff, so that you could proclaim the Good News of Jesus Christ and provide pastoral care to your people and distributed food and other supplies to a world that was terrified and in need of hope and healing. Thank you! Thank you to all of you who got up every day and did what it took. And I am aware that navigating everything that accompanied the pandemic has worn you down sapped more energy out of you than you can possibly fathom. I acknowledge your fatigue and thank you for showing up day after day to be faithful to your call. We are here to support you and walk with you.

I'm also honored to be part of this province's response to the 2018 Synod call to address systemic racism that is evident in every facet of our lives. Soon after that Synod the PEC members listened deeply to our clergy colleagues of color share their experiences of racism in the US. It was sobering and humbling and I said at the time I want to take off my shoes because we are on holy ground. In response, the PEC formed a racial justice team and called Sister Sue Konig to be the director of racial justice and healing on 1/4-time basis. And field tested a pilgrimage to Montgomery AL with the PEC, the bishops, and members of the racial justice team. Delayed two years by COVID, we brought finally brought 75 clergy and seminarians that's almost 90% of our clergy together last September for a heart-rending pilgrimage to Montgomery with spiritual guides Dr. Catherine Meeks and the Reverend Dr. Frank Crouch offering profound wisdom. And we'll hear from Frank tomorrow night. Our prayer is that the transformation and healing that began during our time in Montgomery will continue and ripple out from the pastures to the congregations to the communities in which you live and serve. Thank you to the members of the racial justice team and to all the clergy and seminarians who bravely embarked on that pilgrimage. And to the congregations who supported their pastors as they went.

As we have lived into God's expansive embrace of all people. We've also stretched our understanding of who may be called to serve in pastoral leadership. We are in some ways reclaiming our history as we welcome lay pastors to lead congregations. One example is the Ohio shared ministry led by brother Dave Guyer. Three congregations have multiple lay leaders serving alongside one ordained pastor. A team of lay leaders across these three congregations have worked tirelessly to bring this experiment to life as it offers a wonderful model to other cluster congregational settings. Thank you for that brave experimental effort.

We're also developing a growing cohort of what we call licensed lay pastors lay people at various stages in their lives responding to God's call to a specific ministry in a specific setting. After careful vetting with educational resources, we are continuing to develop these servants are deployed to serving congregations that might otherwise not have pastoral presence. Even as we continue to work out some of the complexities of this process, we are hopeful that congregations without ordained ministers will find blessings through these servants. There are others who have responded to God's call to serve in the Moravian Church Northern Province.

Thanks to the information about Moravians being more readily available online folks are discovering us. Who knew I've long said that the Moravian Church is what the world has been looking for but hasn't yet met. "Everybody Needs a Moravian". It's a new slogan! Well, T.C. and Osheta Moore and the Roots congregation in St. Paul, MN met us online and they wanted to learn more. And as they watched their own denomination limit its welcome of their LGBTQIA siblings, they sought a denomination in which they could fully live into their radical embrace of

all God's people: “Misfits on a Mission”¹ as they call themselves. So, after a lot of prayer and study on their part without us even knowing about it, they contacted Bruce Nelson and me to find out what it would take for TC to transfer his credentials to the Moravian Church, for Osheta to be received as the license lay pastor and for the Roots congregation to become a Roots Moravian congregation? And in good PEC leadership Moravian fashion, Bruce and I said, “we don't know, we've never done that before, but we'll figure it out”. And so, we got to know them, and they got to know us. And I have to tell you, I wish every one of you could have been on that zoom call with TC and Osheta. They told us everything they appreciated about the Moravians. It was like a date, I guess. That would be called online dating. Where someone tells you everything, they love about you and guess what, all of it was true. They articulated the gifts and graces about who we are as Moravians that we have forgotten or too often take for granted. Friends, the Moravians are a gift to the world. (Can I get an “Amen” on that) So, two months ago Bishop Kay Ward presided as TC was received as a Deacon in the Moravian Church both TC and Osheta were installed on the pastoral staff and Roots closed their charter² to become the roots Moravian Church the newest Moravian Church in the Northern Province. TC you stand up.

There are others who have discovered the Moravian Church and decided to join our ranks. Did you know that of the students from the Northern Province who are studying at Moravian theological seminary all but one are brand new Moravians. Yeah, like brand new. A couple of them had to wait, had to wait long enough to join so they could, you know, get that call process or the candidacy process started. Four of them are in this room in one capacity or another. Yeah, (clapping) like so who else is out there waiting to meet the Moravians for the first time and fall in love. How are you sharing your witness? How are we sharing our witness? Well, the Province chose to get serious about telling our story when we hired Sylvie Hauser as our communications consultant. Sylvie shares fresh content with social media and in print any other way she can so. If you're on Facebook or Instagram, follow us and share on your feed. I gotta tell you, it's great you know I have this idea I can write well but you know making it look good. I said so silly here's what I want to do is like boom it happens. She's amazing! So, thank you.

So, who else is out there waiting to respond to God's call to serve? There were people young and old in your congregations that are open to God's nudge. They simply need you to notice their gifts. Name those gifts and nurture those gifts toward that time when they can fully articulate out loud or call, they hear from God. Raising up the next generation of pastoral leaders is not rocket-science. It does take intention and prayer. And I can tell you that Moravian Theological Seminary is ready to equip them to serve. Who else is out there waiting to hear the Good News of Jesus Christ? Thanks to the faithful courage of many of you, we are finding new ways to reach new people in new places in this inter-synodal period. Through the leadership of the emerging ministries committee the province continued to offer support to Esperanza for Bethlehem and Trickle Beat Cafe in Milwaukee, we are delighted to offer new support to You Belong in Green Bay, WI and Essentials Cafe here on the west side of Bethlehem.

¹ From the website of Roots Moravian Congregation. “A Community of Misfits on a Mission” **Added Reference not in speech**

² Roots had formerly been associated with the Evangelical Covenant Church of America. <https://covchurch.org/> **Added Reference not in speech**

Despite hiring a director of church planting and emerging ministries however we struggle to start new worshipping communities. And emerging and existing congregations we also have struggle to resource these new efforts through finite funds. There are people out there in the neighborhoods of your congregation who long to hear the Good News of Jesus Christ and God has called you and you have responded and shown up day after day. Those of you who lead long established congregations with aging buildings still find creative ways to proclaim the Good News of Jesus Christ. And to share God's love by feeding people and hosting AA groups and educating folks making a difference in your neighborhood. Thanks to all of you for who you are and what you do.

So, in the midst of new energy, there are sobering realities as well surprise newsflash. Our membership is shrinking and as a consequence our congregations' capacity to support the districts and Province through a common ministries' commitment is diminishing. Collectively all our congregations are behind in denominational support in an amount that equals the provincial annual budgeted income. We say that again, we are behind as much as our budget is every year. That's not good news and I know that for the most part congregation you're not withholding the money out of spite. Your income at the local level is also shrinking and you have to pay the pastor, do VBS, fix the leaking roof, do all that you sense God calling you to do along with trying to support the Province and the districts. We get it and we try to support you in that. And yet the PEC is then forced to make difficult decisions based on an absence of the income that we would need to do what we sense God calling us to do. I'm sure the Finance Committee will have a few things to say about that. As we proceed through this time so we have funds that function as endowment and they have grown sadly through the sale of closed congregations. And they have diminished sadly through investment returns we need to increasingly draw on that endowment fund to support current ministries. And like any home budget or congregational budget we know that that is not sustainable in the long term.

The call process is challenged as budgets shrink congregations cannot afford to call the full-time pastors that had the gifts and graces, they feel they need to take the next step forward. We need to explore new models of ministry new ways to support our clergy and our congregations. Yet through all the challenges opportunities and exciting new ideas we have been led by an incredible staff here at the church center. People who are currently of the people that are currently working at the church center, only two were there when I arrived 13 years ago. So, you have been led over these last 13 years by a talented group of people who bring gifts and skills to their work as if it were a ministry because it is a ministry that they are pleased and deeply committed to offer. We've had turnover. We've had excitement. We've bid farewell to Gloria Reisinger after 26 years and we continue to grow in how we work and serve you. So, at this time I'd like to ask our lay staff to come forward and just stand in front so that we can recognize you and thank you. There are the voices on the other end of the phone. the answer to your e-mail, the analysis that helps the PEC make wise decisions. They are Brenda Cahill and Tammy Curcio and finance Jackie Petco and Marissa Stone and HR benefits Mark Santor. In IT Jeffrey Long as project manager, Sylvie Hauser as communication. Communications Sharon Hergenrother in the Eastern District office and Joanna Heft in the PEC office who literally was an answer to prayer when she stepped into the PEC roll last summer. Please join me in thanking. Reside in the Province they prayed for each of us and all of us they have checked in faithfully and they have reminded us of God's abiding presence. Hopeton Clennon, Blair Couch,

Chris Geisler, Paul Groff, Doug Kleintop, Kay Ward would you stand where you are so that we can thank you. (Applause)

I want to ask how they all got in the center section but since before I arrived here 13 years ago the Province was capably led by attorney Rick Santee, our provincial chancellor, Rick was the wise counsel for every challenge and guide for a host of legal matters. And on speed dial last year, Rick notified the PEC of his intention to retire as provincial chancellor effective June 30th this year - like that's next week. So, the PEC engaged the services of a partner in Rick's law firm Ricky Santee, Rick's son. I think it's the family business, lifelong Moravian. So, Ricky has shadowed Rick all year so that he is familiar with a variety of matters that come before the chancellor. [He] has actually been working prior to that time and variety of matters in the Eastern District and around the Province. So, we welcome Ricky who says he's memorized the Book of Order. I think there should be a test moreover. We offer deep gratitude to Rick for decades of faithful service. This cross stitch says really why in "Essentials Unity, Non Essentials Liberty".... Rick, we love you. We thank you and we wish you God's blessings as you play more golf. Thank you. He was often on an environmental conference on Friday afternoons.

(Speaking to Rick Santee: So, you're going to sit or what?) Throughout these last five years we have been led by an incredible group of individuals who together formed the provincial elders conference. To our lay leaders Susan Dreydopple, Valerie Wagner, Ralph Wannamaker Bruce Shogar. Thank you for your faithfulness. Thank you for your time. Thank you for your wisdom and prayers. Thank you for your bravery as we try new things and made difficult decisions. These four people have served as volunteers giving of themselves for God's work during the first three months of COVID. We met every week trying to do what we could to provide wise counsel to all of you. And like many around the Province, they graciously agreed to serve an additional year due to the delay of this synod. To our district presidents for three years Greg Weir and David Bennett for the past two years David Jones and Melissa Johnson, for all five years Bruce Nelson. These individuals have provided exemplary leadership and guidance to this province driving, flying, zooming, praying to equip all of us to bless God's world. Each person brought unique gifts that merged together to form a cohesive thoughtful and yes, of really lot of fun groups. So would you stand so that we may acknowledge you. Finally thank you for the privilege of serving God with you for 13 years.

You know you can't be in this position this long without hurting some folks along the way. For the things I said and did, and for the things I didn't say and didn't do, please forgive me. Thank you for the incredible honor of learning from you and leading with you of representing you within the Province and beyond in ecumenical circles and in the worldwide unity. Throughout this work, this ministry I have seen Moravians that work throughout the world, and I've made friends around the Unity. It's been hard work. It's been good work. It's been rewarding work. It has been a labor of love and I've had fun almost every day. It's been humbling to pray with you and for you through the prayer list. It's been a delight to serve alongside you as together we joined God's mission to transform the world. And as we look to the next chapter, I offer my full support and prayers to the new PEC president and who together with colleagues on the PEC will lead us in new and exciting ways. Let it be so, thanks be to God. I love you this [hands stretched out] wide.