

MORAVIAN CHURCH IN  
NORTH AMERICA



**Evangelical Lutheran Church in America**

God's work. Our hands.

# One Flock, One Shepherd: Lutheran-Moravian Relations

## ***One Flock, One Shepherd: Lutheran-Moravian Relations***

Since 1992, North American Moravians and Lutherans have been in dialogue about what it means to be churches seeking unity under one Lord and Savior. In 1998 and 1999, the Moravian Church Northern and Southern Provinces, and the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, voted to establish a relationship of full communion. This relationship would recognize a mutual commitment to faith, practice, the nature of baptism, and the Lord's Supper. Since 1999, these denominations have made visible commitments to evangelism, witness, and service, and work hard to keep one another informed about decisions around faith and life. As a result of this full communion relationship, Moravians and Lutherans listen to one another in decision-making and encourage ordained ministers to serve in each other's churches.

This summary, *One Flock, One Shepherd: Lutheran-Moravian Relations*, promotes further conversation and relations between Lutherans and Moravians. In 2007, the Eastern West Indies Moravian Province joined in full communion along with Moravians and Lutherans in North America. Likewise, an invitation was extended to the Moravian Alaskan Province to join as well.

### **I. Looking Back: The Lutheran-Moravian Relationship:**

While we have been close to each other geographically, ethnically and theologically, Lutheran and Moravian churches in North America proceeded on separate denominational tracks. European and Native American influences in culture, tradition, and perspective, are mutually enriching for the entire life of the church. Jan Hus and the Bohemian Brethren, on the Moravian side, organized themselves as the *Unitas Fratrum*, preparing the ground for Martin Luther's German Reformation. Luther and his colleagues encouraged and recognized the Brethren as partners in the renewal of the gospel. Persecuted and driven from their Bohemian and Moravian homelands in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, some of the members of the *Unitas Fratrum* eventually found refuge on the estate of the Lutheran pietist noble, Nicholas Ludwig, Count von Zinzendorf.

Lutherans and Moravians developed separate church organizations and identities in North America. This had much to do with the patterns of immigration from Germany and the diverse religions which came to characterize English-speaking North America. In the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, Moravian and Lutheran missionaries worked cooperatively in areas from Alaska to the Caribbean. Today, in Asia, Africa and Europe, Moravians and Lutherans enjoy what is now termed "full communion," including

Eucharistic hospitality and the full interchangeability of members and clergy. In some respects, one could say that Lutherans and Moravians in North America are catching up with their counterparts around the world.

## **II. What Do We Have in Common? Moravians and Lutherans ...**

- Use the Scriptures as the source of faith and life.
- Confess the historic creeds and consider the Unaltered Augsburg Confession and Small Catechism to be true expressions of the Christian faith.
- Believe that justification by faith through grace is vital to understanding salvation.
- Acknowledge the real presence of Christ in the Eucharist.
- Affirm the centrality, power, and authority of Jesus Christ as the good news for the sake of the world.
- Regard themselves as distinct members of a single flock who are following their Shepherd in mission and ministry.

## **III. Lutherans and Moravians – Side-By-Side:**

### **LUTHERANS**

**Members:** 4,930,429 in the U.S.

**Congregations:** 10,585 in the U.S.

**Sacraments:** Holy Baptism and Holy Communion

**Origin:** Europe in the late 1500's as followers of Martin Luther, a Roman Catholic Augustinian Friar who is credited with starting the protestant reformation.

**Clergy:** 17,694 women and men who are educated in 8 seminaries, 28 colleges and universities, and numerous grade schools and pre schools.

**Worship Traditions:** Practice a liturgical worship style with a variety of music traditions including classical and contemporary.

**Best Known For:** Hymnody, theological studies and practices

*We are saved by grace through faith alone in Jesus Christ*

### **MORAVIANS**

**Members:** 740,000 World-Wide, 50,000 in the U.S.

**Congregations:** 1,200 World-Wide

**Sacraments:** Holy Baptism and Holy Communion

**Origin:** Czech Republic, 1457 as followers of the reformer John Hus, 60 years before Martin Luther began his reformation.

**Clergy:** Women and men educated at Moravian Theological Seminary in Bethlehem, PA. Other schools include Moravian College, and Salem College in Winston-Salem, NC.

**Worship traditions:** Liturgical and non-liturgical.

**Best Known For:** Missions, Music, Easter dawn worship, and lovefeasts (simple, symbolic meals eaten during worship to mark our common love for one another and for God.)

*In essentials unity, in non-essentials liberty, and in all things love.*

#### **IV. The Model of Full Communion – What Is It?**

Denominations around the world are seeking deeper relationships with one another. One way of seeking deeper relationships is through a model called Full Communion. The model of Full Communion promotes visible Christian unity in ecumenical work around the world; it is also a model to which the ELCA and the Moravian Church (Northern Province, Southern Province, Eastern West Indies Province) are committed.

Full Communion takes place when denominations act together for the sake of the gospel in the world, and not for themselves alone. Denominations reach consensus while also respecting important differences. In this way, Lutherans and Moravians have developed a relationship based on a common confessing of the Christian faith and a mutual recognition of baptism and sharing of the Lord's Supper. The ELCA and Moravians pursue joint-worship together, are able to exchange clergy, and are committed to evangelism, witness, and service in local communities and in the world.

For the ELCA and the Moravian Church (Northern Province, Southern Province, and Eastern West Indies Province) the characteristics of full communion include at least the following:

1. A common confessing of the Christian faith;
2. A mutual recognition of Baptism and a sharing of the Lord's Supper, allowing for joint worship and an exchangeability of members;
3. A mutual recognition and availability of ordained ministers to the service of all members of churches in full communion, subject only but always to the disciplinary regulations of other churches;
4. A common commitment to evangelism, witness, and service;
5. A means of common decision making on critical common issues of faith and life;
6. A mutual lifting of any condemnations that exist between churches.

#### **V. How Do We All Benefit from Full Communion?**

The priesthood of all believers is important to both Moravians and Lutherans. We agree that all baptized members of the Body of Christ are called to pray for one another, proclaim through word and deed that Jesus is Lord, share the reconciling message of forgiveness and grace in Christ, and live so that we may bear the fruits of the Spirit.

Throughout North America, Moravians and Lutherans have worked together in recent years in areas from global mission to congregational development. Both denominations recognize the importance of sharing a meal together, being present at the table in each other's communities, learning each other's languages, and uplifting one another's traditions. Moravians assist Lutherans in exploring their piety through song, and Lutherans assist Moravians in an interpretation of the church as continuously reforming.

In local communities, from North Carolina to the Caribbean, and Pennsylvania to Kansas, there are examples of Moravians and Lutherans working shoulder-to-shoulder in ministry. This work is largely determined by the specific needs of a congregation or community of faith. Together with lay-people, clergy and bishops, Moravians and Lutherans seek greater opportunities to express their unity for the sake of the gospel in the world.

## **VI. Taking the Journey toward Full Communion:**

Lutherans and Moravians have common understandings of the Gospel of Christ, justification by faith, and of the work of God through the sacraments of baptism and Holy Communion. They complement each other in their beliefs and understandings of church and have much to learn from each other as they find unity in their diversity. Their theological differences have the potential to be mutually supportive. If Moravians counsel Lutherans about the risks of doctrinal polemics, Lutherans counsel Moravians about the need to develop greater clarity and consistency in stating their interpretations of the faith. Both approaches are needed to discern God's purpose and action within the world.

For Moravians, one's faith is founded in relationship—relationship with God, with the faith community, and with the world. The journey toward affirming each other as part of one flock necessarily entails a walk hand-in-hand, with members in both churches carrying on the work of Christ in partnership. Lutherans respond to our Lord's will that Christians join in closer community and cooperation for the sake of mission in the world. Moravians and Lutherans bring distinctive gifts to a mutual calling to share the gospel.

The journey toward full communion requires an intentional commitment to getting to know one another, exploring our similarities and differences, and to listening to the Spirit's call to ministry in our world. Steps along this journey include:

1. Visiting each other's churches to share in worship and prayer
2. Sharing meals, conversation, and opportunities to learn about each other as ways to bridge language and cultural barriers
3. Establishing discussion groups with members of both churches present in order to dialogue over the various elements in our faith traditions
4. Consulting with other congregations who have walked this journey before
5. Continuing dialogue between Lutherans and Moravians at the local, regional, national, and international levels
6. Pursuing joint efforts and resources for faith-based organizing, and confronting together issues before the church, such as the high suicide rate, alcoholism, and domestic violence
7. Cooperating further in youth ministry, including ecumenical participation in scheduled youth gatherings and other opportunities

This above list is just a beginning of ideas for building relationships that promote awareness. We are one flock with numerous gifts that contribute to our mutual

ministries. These ministries can unite in how we follow our shepherd for the sake of the world.

## **VII. Contemporary Ethical Issues**

With regard to contemporary ethical issues in the lives of our church, the Lutheran-Moravian Coordinating Committee members offer the following reflections: We are living in a world with challenging, complex issues that require significant ethical discernment. Issues that we often face include, but are not limited to, abortion, sexuality and the implications of same-gendered relationships in the church, the death penalty, homelessness, hunger, alcoholism, and the effects of globalization on local communities.

### **Abortion:**

Relative to abortion, Moravians and Evangelical Lutherans understand human beings to be of intrinsic value, dignity and integrity. Although both denominations express unbridled sadness for the circumstances that lead a woman to consider abortion as the best option available to her, Moravians and Evangelical Lutherans are called to live in communities of compassion. In this way, both Moravians and Evangelical Lutherans stand in prayerful solidarity with those who struggle with decisions to end pregnancy. Pastoral responses must be a gracious affirmation of the value of women's lives and assistance in dealing with ongoing implications of their decisions for their own well-being and their relationships.

The Moravian Church affirms its belief in the quality and sanctity of life. As such, abortion should not be used as a method of birth control or controlling population growth. It should not be taken lightly or without consideration of alternatives and professional counseling. The ELCA likewise affirms that abortion ought to be an option only of last resort.

Both Moravians and Evangelical Lutherans affirm the complex nature of decisions surrounding abortion; it should be a matter of personal decision, but should only be accepted as an option when all other possible alternatives will lead to greater destruction of human life and spirit. Abortion should be viewed in the perspective of bringing mercy to a difficult situation where other options may be more destructive.

### **Human Sexuality:**

As the world changes in its perceptions of human sexuality, the ELCA continues to regard sexuality as a mysterious, life-long aspect of human relationships. All human beings sin and fall short of the glory of God. Those of heterosexual and homosexual orientation are welcomed into the body of Christ. For the ELCA, every individual is

understood to be a child of God, composed with an equal measure of dignity, integrity and love. The ELCA recognizes that for some people homosexual orientation is a given and not in itself blameworthy. People who are homosexual who abstain from homosexual intercourse may therefore serve in the rostered ministries of the ELCA. Discernment around human sexuality is not a simple matter. Churches today struggle to understand same-gendered roles in the clergy, and the issue of ordination of those in same-gendered relationships continues to be a matter of significant discussion. Communities of faith attempt in these cases to be authentic and faithful.

The Moravian Church notes the lack of agreement on scriptural interpretations regarding homosexuality. Currently pastors who are active in homosexual relationships cannot be ordained into the Moravian Unity. The Moravian Unity Synod has called for further dialogue and understanding before decisions can be made regarding these issues. Some provinces of the Moravian Unity recommend full participation of homosexual persons in the congregation, whereas other provinces are in disagreement or continued discernment.

### **Capital Punishment:**

On the basis of Scripture and the Lutheran Confessions, the ELCA holds that, through the divine activity of the Law, God preserves creation, orders society, and promotes justice in a broken world. God works through the state and other structures of society necessary for life in the present age. However, this does not mean that governments have an unlimited right to take life. Nor does it mean that governments must punish crime by death. As a denomination, the ELCA opposes the death penalty and works actively in ministry with and to people affected by violent crime. Capital punishment focuses on retribution, sometimes reflecting a spirit of vengeance. Executions do not restore broken society and can actually work counter to restoration. Moravians do not believe that capital punishment is an option for criminal jurisprudence, and oppose it as a means of punishing human beings. Moravians likewise work in ministerial contexts to mend the brokenness of communities where violence produces harm and even death.

### **Homelessness:**

In our country today homelessness persists. Hundreds of thousands of people continue to live without housing within a society of abundance. The number of elderly people, women, and children among the homeless is increasing. Families are the fastest growing segment of the homeless population. Homelessness is a reality in urban, suburban, and rural communities. Millions of people exist on the precarious edge of homelessness.

The Moravian Church and the ELCA encourage support and participation with ecumenical agencies such as Bread for the World and the World Council of Churches in addressing policy issues as well as in taking interventions to fight hunger worldwide. Both denominations claim responsibility for the church to deal with social issues, which include homelessness.

### **Alcoholism:**

The issue of alcoholism is a significant concern for the church. Moravians and Lutherans respond in ministering to addicted members and their families, providing programs of information about substance abuse and support groups and providing local congregation assistance programs and referral services, including programs for pastors and education of upcoming clergy.

### **Suicide:**

Suicide is a complex social issue filled with heart-ache and suffering that affects both Moravian and Lutheran communities. The suicide rate in North America is unacceptable to both Moravians and Lutherans. In particular, suicide among North American Indians and Alaska Natives are well above the national average, with a disproportionate number of suicides among young men. Where Moravians and Evangelical Lutherans partner together, this will invariably enable both denominations to combat the social ills and difficulties that contribute to suicides both within and outside of one another's faith communities.

### **Globalization:**

As the world becomes smaller, smaller communities often feel its effects. The ELCA joins hands with those who are experiencing these difficulties and looks forward to working more closely. As stewards of God's love, we are ultimately called together to discuss, discern and enact change within our communities and in our world, recognizing and appreciating our historical position while navigating the unsure waters of the future. In a full communion relationship, these issues do not detract but rather enrich our partnership to work for the betterment of all of God's people and creation.

Both the Moravian Church in North America and the ELCA promote further study by congregations of issues related to globalization and encourage members to work for poverty eradication, justice in international trade, responsible lending and debt cancellation, sustainable and just use of natural resources, the rights of countries to define and manage the use of their goods and defense of biodiversity.

## **VIII. Glossary of Terms:**

**Acolyte (Congregational):** A person recommended by the joint board of the Moravian congregation and approved by the Provincial Elders Conference (PEC). Congregational acolytes assist a pastor in various areas of ministry including the distribution of the elements of Holy Communion. A Moravian Southern Province term.

**Acolyte (Provincial):** A person appointed by the PEC to serve as a lay pastor with permission to administer the sacraments only in the Moravian congregation served. A Moravian Southern Province term.

**Associate in Ministry (AIM):** Associates in ministry are laypeople called and commissioned for service in congregations, agencies, schools and institutions of the ELCA. Their primary areas of service are education, youth, spiritual formation, campus ministry, outdoor ministry, music and the arts, administration, service and general ministry.

**Baptism:** One of two sacraments for Lutherans and Moravians, the other being Holy Communion. Baptism is the entry rite into the community of faith. It is an act instituted by God, performed using water in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, whereby the baptized is united with Christ.

**Bishop – Lutheran:** A bishop is a pastor, an ordained minister of Word and Sacrament in the ELCA, who is elected to a six-year term to provide pastoral care and oversight for the congregations and leaders of an ELCA synod. The bishop is the chief executive officer of the synod, and may be reelected.

**Bishop – Moravian:** Third order of the ministry of Word and Sacrament with privileges of officiating for ordinations and consecrations on the commission by the PEC. A Bishop is a pastor to pastors, intercessor for the church, and leader in matters spiritual and doctrinal.

**Books of Order:** The written constitution of a Moravian Province, with definitions of service for agencies and affiliated institutions along with recommendations for local congregational order. They contain statements of belief commensurate with the Church Order of the Unitas Fratrum (COUF). Each province has its own Book of Order consistent with COUF.

**Catholic:** Derived from a Greek word meaning universal; may therefore be used to apply to all Christians. When it is used this way, it begins with a lower case "c"; when used with a capital "C" this word usually refers to the Roman Catholic Church.

**Church Order of the Unitas Fratrum (COUF):** The fundamental documents, structure and organization of the world-wide Unity, proceedings of the most recent Unity Synod, and Rules of Order for doing business as a Unity Synod.

**Communion, or Holy Communion:** One of two sacraments for Lutherans and Moravians, the other being Baptism. In Holy Communion, also called the Eucharist, Lutherans recall the saving acts of God through Word, bread and wine, and are connected with Christ and with Christians of all times and places. In this sacrament we are fed with the Body and Blood of Christ. Moravians acknowledge the presence of Christ in the

sacrament, confessing the mystery of the Lord's Supper in the faith that the love of Christ knows no limits, acknowledging that no human theory can fully or finally account for it.

**Confession of Faith:** A confession of faith is a brief statement of a group's beliefs. *The ELCA Confession of Faith* confesses the Triune God, Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior, the canonical Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments as the written Word of God, accepts the Apostles', Nicene and Athanasian Creeds as true declarations of the faith of this church and accepts the Augsburg Confession and the other confessional writings in the Book of Concord as valid interpretations of the faith of this church. The Moravian Church also accepts these documents.

**Constitutions, Bylaws, and Continuing Resolutions:** The basic commitments of the ELCA as well as its organizational outline, structural patterns, and rules of governance are expressed by its constitutions, bylaws, and continuing resolutions. These documents govern the life of the ELCA as congregations, synods and churchwide organization.

**Covenant for Christian Living:** A statement of the Moravian Church on its faith and life through which members may become aware of the nature of their Christian commitment. Though this document originated in Germany in 1727, it has various editions throughout the Provinces of the Unity.

**Deacon:** The first order of Moravian ministry of Word and Sacrament with the privilege of officiating at all rites and sacraments except the ordination of deacons and the consecration of presbyters or bishops.

**Denomination:** A religious denomination is a subgroup within a religion that operates under a common name, tradition and identity. The term describes various Christian denominations as Eastern Orthodox and Roman Catholic, as well as the many varieties of Protestantism.

**Diaconal Minister:** A member of the ELCA Diaconal Ministry Community and the underlying ELCA roster of lay men and women in ministries of Word and service. This roster was established in 1993. ELCA diaconal ministers are called and consecrated and they serve in congregations, agencies and institutions of the ELCA. Their focus for ministry is the extension of the church's ministry of witness and care into the world.

**Ecumenical:** A reference to the whole Christian church, including denominations and groups. The beliefs and practices of those who desire and work for worldwide unity and cooperation among all Christian people.

**Evangelical:** The Evangelical Lutheran Church in America understands "evangelical" as emphasizing the gospel or good news of salvation received apart from human works and, based on this, the ELCA values worship forms and confessions of faith of the historic Christian tradition. In the United States, the term "evangelical" is often associated with a religious and cultural movement known as "evangelicalism" that came to prominence in

the 19th century and stresses individual conversion, the authority of the Bible, and moral and social reform.

***Evangelical Lutheran Worship (ELW):*** *Evangelical Lutheran Worship* (2006), is the primary worship resource for use within the ELCA. It was preceded by *Lutheran Book of Worship* (1978).

**Full Communion:** A "full communion" relationship between denominations is an acknowledgement that there is enough agreement on matters of faith and life between denominations to commit to joint ministry, witness, and service. The ELCA has full communion agreements with The Episcopal Church, the Reformed Church in America, Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), the United Church of Christ and the Moravian Church Northern and Southern Provinces.

**Gospel:** Gospel, which is a translation of the Greek word for "good news," tells us of God who created and sustains everything; of Jesus Christ who lived, died and was raised from death to give us life and salvation; and of the Holy Spirit who gives us faith and makes us holy. The four gospels are books in the New Testament that document the life and teachings of Jesus Christ.

**Ground of the Unity:** The basic statement of belief of the Moravian Church.

**Joint Board:** The Elders and Trustees of a Moravian congregation meeting jointly. Primary responsibilities of the Joint Board are to confer with the PEC for the call of a pastor and to approve the annual budget.

**Lay / Laity:** A term that refers to the people of God. This word is typically used to refer to those who are not members of the ordained clergy. The collective community of laypeople is sometimes called the laity.

**Lovefeast:** A worship service common to Moravians that grows out of the agapé practice of the apostolic church. It is primarily a song service in which each person is served simple meal, such as a bun and cup of coffee. Lovefeasts are appropriate for anniversaries, missionary occasions, or other occasions in which there is a desire to stress the headship of Christ and the fellowship of the church.

**Lutheran World Federation (LWF):** The Lutheran World Federation (LWF) is a global communion of Christian churches in the Lutheran tradition. Founded in 1947 in Lund, Sweden, the LWF now has 140 member churches in 78 countries all over the world representing over 68.6 million Christians.

**Missiological:** Dealing with the sending forth of the church to share the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

***Moravian Book of Worship (MBW):*** The primary worship resource for the Moravian Church in America, containing liturgies, canticles and hymns.

**Presbyter:** The second order of Moravian ministry of Word and Sacrament. Consecration as a Presbyter is an act of spiritual encouragement and affirmation by the Church commissioned by the PEC, normally after 3-5 years of service as a Deacon. Only Presbyters are candidates for election as Bishop.

**President of the Provincial Elders' Conference:** A person (either lay or clergy) elected by a Moravian provincial synod to serve as the leading administrative officer of the province during the intersynodal period. The president serves as one of the elected members of the PEC.

**Province:** The worldwide Unity is made up of 19 provinces, each with its own constitution and Book of Order. Provinces are linked together for mutual help and cooperation as the Unity.

**Provincial Elders' Conference (PEC):** A body of synod-elected individuals to direct and lead the Moravian province between the synods according to directions given in the Book of Order of the Province. In some provinces the more common terminology is Provincial Board.

**Provincial Synod:** The legislative body of a Moravian Province meeting at designated intervals.

**Roster:** The official listing of those who have been ordained, consecrated or commissioned and are called to service in the ELCA. Currently, there are more than 17,000 rostered leaders in the ELCA. The ELCA has four rosters: associates in ministry, deaconesses, diaconal ministers and pastors.

**Sacrament:** A sacrament is the physical sign of an unseen promise; a visible means of God's invisible grace. Sacraments convey God's forgiveness, life and salvation through words and physical means. Lutherans and Moravians celebrate the sacraments of Baptism and Holy Communion.

**Synod (ELCA):** A synod coordinates the work of congregations within their territories, meeting each spring to uplift and celebrate ministries and address the issues facing the leaders, congregations, and agencies within the synod. Synods plan for the ELCA's mission (which is one dimension of God's larger mission) in their area. The synods are grouped into nine regions with sixty-five synods throughout the country uniting the work of congregations within their areas, serving as regional support and guiding pastoral and other staff candidates through the call process.

**Synod (Moravian):** The synod is the legislative body for the Moravian Church, held at the district, provincial and Unity levels at designated intervals. It comprises representatives from throughout the province who vote on officers of the church and consider all aspects of the church's ministry, including budget, mission, and doctrine. The Unity Synod convenes once very seven years and is the highest authority of the

worldwide Moravian Church with representatives from each province. The Northern and Southern Provinces of the Moravian Church meet every four years.

**Theology:** A word used to refer to the study of God and God's interaction with the world. Formal study of theology usually includes study of the Bible, doctrine, church history, ethics and worship, and may also include study of the practice of ministry.

**Unitas Fratrum:** Latin for Unity of Brethren, another name for the Moravian Church.

**Unity Board:** Administrative Board of the worldwide Moravian Unity. The Unity Board consists of one member of each provincial board and acts on behalf of the Unity between Unity Synods. An Advisory Committee acts on behalf of the Unity Board between meetings of the Board. The Advisory Committee is comprised of the Unity Board Chair, the Vice Chair, and representatives from each of the two regions not already represented by the Chair and Vice Chair.

**Unity Synod:** Convenes once every seven years as the highest, worldwide authority of the Moravian Church with representatives from each province.