

# Following Our Shepherd to Full Communion With the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

A REPORT SUBMITTED BY THE MORAVIAN INTERPROVINCIAL TEAM  
OF THE DIALOGUE IN PREPARATION FOR FULL COMMUNION

The purpose of this report is to inform the Moravian Northern and Southern Provincial Synods of the progress of the ELCA-Moravian Dialogue, and to ask the following action:

*Whereas there have historically been important connections between the Moravian and Lutheran traditions; and*

*Whereas the ELCA-Moravian Bilateral Dialogue has been meeting since 1992 and has explored significant theological and historical issues to the satisfaction of both the Lutheran and Moravian teams; and*

*Whereas it is anticipated that the Bilateral will be able to present a final report to the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America and to the Northern and Southern Provinces of the Moravian Church in America after its June 1995 meeting; and*

*Whereas a report on the progress of the Dialogue will be sent to the Unity Synod of 1995; therefore be it*

*Resolved 1) that the \_\_\_\_\_ Provincial Synod of the Moravian Church in America affirm the work of the Dialogue teams in following the leading of our Lord towards the full communion of the Moravian Provinces in America, North and South, and the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, and be it*

*Resolved 2) that we look forward to receiving the final Report of the Dialogue (“Following Our Shepherd to Full Communion”) for the Provincial Synods of 1988.*

In order to take responsibly our Lord’s concern for the unity of his church (his prayer recorded in John 17), with recognition of the ecumenical concerns which are part of our Moravian heritage, it seemed proper to enter into Dialogue with the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America and to “Follow Our Shepherd to Full Communion” ( a title given to our final report). Both in Europe and Africa Moravians and Lutherans are already in full communion. Zinzendorf himself was Lutheran and many Moravian Congregations (even in this country) made use of the Augsburg Confession until the early 19th century. The British Province of the Moravian Church is similarly engaged in a Dialogue with the Anglican Church.

The goal of our Dialogue is to enter into “full communion” with one another, as defined below. *This is a relationship in which each fully recognizes the other but maintains its own independent existence.* Neither partner has any type of organizational merger in mind. For the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, the characteristics of full communion will include at least the following:

1. a common confessing of the Christian faith;
2. a mutual recognition of Baptism and a sharing the Lord's Supper, allowing for 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 the 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."

Lutheran statement on Ecumenism: The Vision of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, II,D.,4., on "Full Communion,"

The question might be asked, "Why put all this effort into formal dialogue when Moravians have long recognized that Lutherans and members of other churches were fellow Christians?" There are really two reasons besides the command of our Lord to work out our unity with other Christians. One is that while Moravians and Lutherans have been cooperating for some time on the personal and local level, Churches are also institutions which need to work out their relationships in formal ways. The other reason is that we have so much to learn from each other by talking together. One has only to read the papers which have been prepared and discussed as part of the Dialogue to realize this. The products of our discussion will be valuable for our Churches for many years to come. These papers are available to anyone upon request.

On March 14, 1991, two Lutherans and two Moravians met during a Faith and Order Commission meeting of the National Council of Churches to plan the Bilateral Dialogue between the Moravian Church, North and South, and the newly formed Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. That we do so was supported by the decisions of our Provincial Elders Conferences and the Interprovincial Faith and Order Commission. The formulated goals were:

1. To be responsible to the ecumenical vision in harmony with the Bible and the historic Moravian and Lutheran positions on ecumenicity, and to affirm the unity of the church which already exists in Christ.
2. To explore further the historical and international connections of the Lutheran and Moravian Churches.
3. To explore moving towards full communion including common recognition of each other's Baptism, Eucharist, and ministry.
4. To test and articulate Moravian and Lutheran theology and theological methodologies.
5. To share with our Churches at all levels the ongoing results of the dialogue and to solicit reactions and counsel.

For financial reasons it was determined to hold the Dialogue in a geographical location which would not necessitate large expenditures. Bethlehem provided that location and the Augsburg Lutheran Church in Winston-Salem provided a grant of \$2,500 to support the Dialogue. Appointed to the Moravian team were:

Otto Dreydoppel, Jr., Instructor in Church History, Moravian Theological Seminary  
Arthur Freeman, Professor of New Testament, Moravian Seminary, and Moravian Bishop  
C. Daniel Crews, Archivist of the Southern Province  
D. Wayne Burkette, then Chaplain of Salem Academy and College

Burkette was unable to continue on the team after the first year because of other responsibilities, and so another was appointed to take his place:

Robert Helm, Prof. of Philosophy, Wake Forrest

The initial Lutheran team consisted of:

Samuel Zeiser, Prince of Peace Lutheran Church, Bangor  
Thelma Megill-Cobbler, Asst. Prof. of Theology, Trinity Lutheran Seminary, Columbus, Ohio  
Walter Wagner, formerly Prof. of Religion, Muhlenberg College, now Pastor of Christ Lutheran Church, Allentown  
Daniel Martensen, staff person from the Office of Ecumenical Affairs of the ELCA, Chicago

Later the Lutheran team was joined by

David Yeago, Asst. Prof. of Systematic Theology, Lutheran Southern Seminary, Columbia, SC

Also serving as consultants to the Lutheran team are James A. Nestingen and Sarah Henrich, both of Luther Northwestern Seminary.

The meetings alternated between Lutheran facilities in Allentown and Moravian Theological Seminary in Bethlehem.

The following papers were presented and discussed, often with written responses from persons of the other tradition. It is to be noted that there are several papers on the encounter between Muhlenberg and Zinzendorf in Philadelphia in 1742 which has colored historical presentations of Moravian-Lutheran relationships in North America.

The **first session**, December 10-12, 1992

- Walter Wagner, "Factors Which Have Shaped Lutheran Theologies and Views of the Christian Life"
- D. Crews, O. Dreydoppel and A. Freeman, "What Has Shaped Moravian Theology and the Moravian View of the Christian Life"
- Samuel Zeiser "A History of Lutheran - Moravian Interaction in America"

The **second session** June 12-14, 1993:

- W. Wagner, "How Our History Has Shaped Our Concept of Our Ministry: A Lutheran Perspective"
- C. Daniel Crews, "How Our History Has Influenced Our Ministry: For the Moravian Church"
- Samuel Zeiser, "The Henry Melchior Muhlenberg Who Met Count Nicholas Ludwig Von Zinzendorf in 1742"
- Otto Dreydoppel, "The Incident At Philadelphia: A Moravian Perspective On The Muhlenberg - Zinzendorf Encounter"

The **third session** December 3-4, 1993.

- Arthur Freeman, "The Moravian Church: Its Faith and Order"
- Thelma Megill-Cobbler, "Recent Readings of the Lutheran Confessions and the Doctrine of Ministry"
- Hartmut Beck, edited by A. Freeman, "Some Comments About Agreements Between Lutherans and Moravians in Europe and Africa"

The **fourth session** June 24-25.

- Arthur Freeman, "The Nature of the Spirit as the Ongoing Grace of God"
- C. Daniel Crews, "Moravian Views of the Holy Spirit"
- David Yeago, "The Holy Spirit, Grace and Growth in Lutheran Theology"

For the **fifth session**, June 9-11, 1995, David Yeago and Daniel Crews will present papers on criteria for the sacraments from the perspective of each tradition.

**The schedule for the Dialogue and action by national church bodies as presently projected is:**

**June 1995** Completion of the Dialogue and the Report on "**Following Our Shepherd to Full Communion**" from the Dialogue teams to the ELCA and the Moravian Provinces, North and South. Receiving of this Report by the Moravian PECs, the Interprovincial Moravian Faith and Order Commission and the Church Council of the ELCA. The Report would also be presented to Unity Moravian Synod which meets in Tanzania in 1995.

**June 1997** Submission of the Report for reception and study at the Church Assembly of the ELCA. The ELCA would then give the Report to the agencies and persons within the ELCA who will study it in preparation for action upon it in 1999. The PECs of the Moravian Church, North and South, would need to decide how the Report would be disseminated in preparation for action on it at the Moravian Provincial Synods of 1998

Local Dialogues between Lutheran and Moravian congregations have already begun in several locations. This would be encouraged at this time in preparation for the formal actions of the national church bodies.

**1998** Action on the Report of the Dialogue to be taken by the Southern and Northern Provincial Synods of the Moravian Church.

**1999** Action on the Report of the Dialogue to be taken by the ELCA national Assembly. This could be delayed until 2000 as the ELCA may change its meeting schedule to every three years in 1997

**2000** Celebration of the full communion of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America and the Moravian Church in America, North and South, and the establishment of a commission for cooperation.

Respectfully submitted,

Arthur Freeman, Convenor of the Moravian Team  
C. Daniel Crews  
Otto Dreydoppel, Jr.  
Robert Helm