

Resolution #13 (Proposal 37)

Subject: Mutual Respect and Acceptance
From: Community Committee
Topic Area: Community

WHEREAS, The 1995 Southern Province Synod acknowledged “we are not agreed on the question of the morality and acceptability of sexual relations between homosexuals”; and,

WHEREAS, The 1995 Southern Province Synod resolved that “on the question of homosexuality we will strive at all times in our hearts and in our actions to love one another, to respect one another’s understanding and search for truth and God’s will concerning the question of homosexuality...” and further resolved “that we affirm certain basic human rights and civil liberties are due all persons”; and,

WHEREAS, Moravian pastors in their ordination “freely accept the obligations of an ordained minister to study, pray, care for souls, preach, and administer the sacraments in Christ’s church”; and,

WHEREAS, although we do not specifically list homosexuality in our non-discrimination clause, “We realize that all areas of Christian life and conduct cannot be covered in this statement of principles by which we live and bear our witness, and we call attention, therefore, to the Christian’s responsibility to follow Christ as Lord of all areas of life.” (MCCL, V. *Our Witness in the World*, E. Other Areas, par. 34.), meaning that many who believe that sexual orientation should be included in our non-discrimination statements see how that would fit in our current understanding of the MCCL; and,

WHEREAS, we claim “We will not hate, despise, slander, or otherwise injure anyone.” (MCCL, V. *Our Witness in the World*, A. Love Toward All, par. 29.); and,

WHEREAS, the MCSP PEC has acknowledged, “The decisions made by the 2016 Unity Synod do not set aside the resolutions made by the 2002 Unity Synod which said: ‘[Unity Synod] urges the Provinces towards further, in-depth examination of the subject of homosexuality and the church,’” and “This issue does not rise to the doctrinal equivalent of the New Testament confession, “Jesus is Lord,” but it is a biblical, theological and pastoral issues on which the church must dialogue,”; and,

WHEREAS, no legislation passed by the 2018 Southern Province Synod will likely result in the complete agreement of the delegates and other members of the Southern Province, on topics related to homosexuality; therefore be it

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.).

Resolution # 14 (Proposal 28)

Subject: Leadership Roles and Diversity of Views
From: Community
Topic Area: Community

WHEREAS, the 1995 Southern Province Synod, and the 2002 Unity Synod, acknowledged:

“we are not agreed on the question of the morality and acceptability of sexual relations between homosexuals. The interpretation of Scripture, theological sources, scientific, psychological and sociological data is in dispute among Christians who are sincerely and conscientiously concerned with the question of homosexuality.” (1995 Synod); and,

“the church is not of one mind on the issue of homosexuality at this time and honest differences of opinion exist within the Unity based upon our varied understanding of the Scripture.” (2002 Unity Synod in Church Order of the Unitas Fratrum ((COUF)) 2002, #908); and

WHEREAS, the Unity Synod of 2002, and Unity Board meeting of 2010 affirmed;

“This issue does not rise to the doctrinal equivalent of the New Testament confession, “Jesus is Lord,” but is a biblical, theological, and pastoral issue on which the Church must dialogue.” (2002 Unity Synod, 2016 COUF #885); and

“our faith in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior is far greater than this issue,” and “that this issue is not belonging [does not belong] to the essentials of the faith and the church.” (2010 Unity Board); and,

WHEREAS, the *Moravian Covenant for Christian Living* (MCCL) and *Ground of the Unity* call us to unity in our diversity:

“We will be eager to maintain the unity of the Church, realizing that God has called us from many and varied backgrounds, we recognize the possibility of disagreements or differences. Often these differences enrich the Church, but sometimes they divide. We consider it to be our responsibility to demonstrate within the congregational life the unity and togetherness created by God who made us one. How well we accomplish this will be a witness to our community as to the validity of our faith.” (MCCL #14)

We oppose any discrimination in our midst because of ethnic origin, sex or social standing, and we regard it as a commandment of the Lord to bear public witness to this and to demonstrate by word and deed that we are brothers and sisters in Christ.” (*Ground of the Unity*); and

WHEREAS, our 1995 Synod affirmed:

“In our discussions and dialogue with one another on the question of homosexuality we will strive at all times in our hearts and in our actions to love one another, to respect one another’s understanding and search for truth and God’s will concerning the question of homosexuality as befits Christians of good will seeking to bring unity in Christ.” (1995 Synod); and

WHEREAS, during 2015-2017, at the direction of the 2010 and 2014 Synods, a Steering Committee led a conversation process open to all members which included: table conversations among members holding similar views, public forums on various perspectives, table conversations in groups holding diverse views, preparation of video resources for discussion in congregations, and a series of prayer services; and, the Steering Committee has delivered its report to this Synod; therefore, be it

RESOLVED, That, Synod receives the 2014 Resolution 12 Steering Committee Report with thanksgiving, accepts its conclusions and observations, and affirms that, through this conversation process, we have learned and experiences 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

RESOLVED, That, on matters that do not rise to “the doctrinal equivalent of the New Testament confession, ‘Jesus is Lord,’” Synod affirms the role of pastors and Boards of Elders (or Church Boards) in determining the following within the congregation:

- who is or is not admitted into the membership and leadership;¹
- who may or may not participate in rites (confirmation, marriage) and sacraments (baptism, communion);² and
- the purposes for which church buildings [and property] may be used³, and

RESOLVED, That, on matters that do not rise to “the doctrinal equivalent of the New Testament confession, ‘Jesus is Lord,’” Synod affirms the freedom of conscience of pastors to decide whether or not to administer a rite or sacrament in any particular situation; and

RESOLVED, That, Synod affirms the role of the Provincial Elders’ Conference in: overseeing candidacy for ordination (including defining requirements for ordination); approving ordination of Deacons, and consecration of Presbyters; and administering the call process and appointment procedures including calling and superintending the ministers of the Province, and,⁴

RESOLVED, That, Synod affirms the respective roles, discernment and decision-making of the Provincial Elders’ Conference, church boards, and pastors in the call process including the privilege of:

- The Provincial Elders’ Conference to determine which individuals are considered for call,
- Church Boards to decline consideration of individuals, and
- Pastors to decline a call.

RESOLVED, That, Synod affirms there are differences among us in the above matters, and we will be respectful of one another’s viewpoints, and of the roles, discernment and decisions of our pastors and church boards, and of the Provincial Elders’ Conference.

RESOLVED, That, to assist pastors, church boards and congregations in their dialogue, discernment and decision-making to fulfill their roles as described above, the PEC is directed to task an existing group or to form a new group to build on the work of the Resolution 12 Steering Committee, to develop resources and materials, and to provide them to pastors and congregations.

RESOLVED, That, Synod encourages all congregations to make use of these resources and to engage in continued study, prayer, reflection and conversation.

¹ *Synod Approved Recommendations of Rules and Regulations*, Article II Membership, Section 1. Communicant Members; and Article IV Executive Boards, Section 3. The Board of Elders. 2. Duties

² Ibid.

³ *Synod Approved Recommendations of Rules of Regulations*, Article IV, Section 3.2.

⁴ *Constitution*, Section 10. Provincial Elders' Conference, 5. Duties, b., c., d.

Notes:

- *The PEC convened a group of pastors with diverse views on homosexuality and the church, who developed this proposal and reached consensus on it moving forward.*
- *It was provided to active clergy prior to Synod, with an opportunity for them to share their responses using the five-position consensus decision-making model furnished to Synod Committees.*
- *A numerical summary of those responses was shared with the Synod Committee to which this proposal was assigned, for its information.*