

My Intentions Re the Synod Resolution of 2018, Especially Same Sex Marriage

No issue has been more hotly contested than increased acceptance of homosexuality in society and in church. The 2015 decision of the Supreme Court Decision legalizing same sex marriage in all 50 States brought the issue front and center. For Moravians of the Southern Province, the issue was once more thrust into prominence by the actions of our 2018 Quadrennial Synod. The following is an excerpt prepared by the PEC summarizing actions taken by the synod:

The Synod received the report of the 2014 Resolution 12 Steering Committee, accepted its conclusions and observations...Synod affirmed: the role of pastors and Boards of Elders (or Church Boards) in determining within the congregation “who is or is not admitted into membership or leadership, who may or may not participate in rites (confirmation, marriage) and sacraments (baptism, communion) and the purposes for which church buildings [and properties] may be used.” Synod affirmed the “freedom of conscience of pastors to decide whether or not to administer a rite or sacrament in any particular situation.” Synod affirmed the role of the PEC in matters related to candidacy for ordination, approving ordinations of deacons and consecration of presbyters, administering the call process and calling and superintending the ministers of the province. Synod affirmed the respective roles, discernment and decision making of the following in the call process: the PEC, church boards, and pastors. Synod affirmed “there are differences among us in [these] matters, and we will be respectful of one another’s viewpoints, and of the roles, discernment and decision of our pastors, church boards and of the PEC.” Synod directed PEC to develop resources and materials to assist pastors, church boards, and congregations in their dialogue, discernment and decision-making; and encouraged all congregations to make use of these resources.

The immediate effect of the resolution is to make every church within the province “congregational” rather than “confidential” when making decisions about how the individual congregation will welcome homosexual persons. In this one matter, Moravian churches are now more like a congregational church (such as an independent baptist church) than like a traditional,

conferential Moravian Church which lives out its congregational life in conformity with directives from the Province and the Provincial Synod.

The upside of the synod action is that it allows individual churches to act in accordance with the desires and needs of their own membership, and it allows individuals to choose among them. The downside of the synod action is that some congregations will wish to push the envelope and become more congregational in other matters, maybe even financial and governmental matters.

Where does that leave us at New Philadelphia? I know from countless conversations that opinions among our membership vary greatly. Many are disappointed one way or another. Though I cannot predict the future, it is my fervent hope and prayer that all our members will continue to pull together as a congregation united by a common commitment to Jesus Christ. To that end, I am going to do as I always have done, which is to offer as much grace and love to the homosexual persons that are a part of our church family and community as I possibly can, given my responsibilities as pastor of a church where people hold differing opinions. I would mention five things I will absolutely do:

1. I will continue to believe and preach that God loves each of us, regardless of the sexual orientation we were born with. God has not abandoned any of us.
2. I will continue to welcome people to the Holy Communion, without quizzing them about their sexuality or condemning them for it. Over the last twenty-seven years I have welcomed many members, relatives and friends of the church whom I have known to be homosexual in this fashion, and not one member of this congregation has ever objected.
3. I will continue to perform marriages only between a man and a woman. I do this at least in part because I am respectful of those Moravians like my own parents for whom same sex marriage remains a step too far. I simply cannot and will not burn those bridges. For the present at least, I am a pastor, not a prophet. Others will choose what they regard as a more prophetic path.

4. I will continue to tell gay men and women, and their parents and friends, that I believe it is better for them to live in a committed relationship whatever form it takes than to live a life of promiscuity. I would say the same to heterosexuals, as would most of you. By the way, I came by this policy of “committed relationships” in the 1970’s while a student at an Evangelical Methodist Seminary. My professor of New Testament, a staunch evangelical, advocated this position while also holding to the Methodist doctrine of “Scriptural Holiness,” and saw no contradiction at all. In those days homosexuality had not become the hot button topic it is today, and people still had the responsibility and duty to read and interpret scripture, with the help of the Holy Spirit, for themselves.

5. I will continue to fellowship with those who differ with me, right or left, and I will make it my goal to maintain our Moravian Unity even in the face of diversity and disagreement. The recent resolution calls for us to be “respectful of one another’s viewpoints.” In 1996 the Southern Province of the Moravian Church managed to do this when we voted that we would “agree to disagree,” on matters touching homosexuality in church and society. More importantly, in 2002 the Unity Synod of the Moravian Church ruled that homosexuality was:

“...a Biblical, theological, and pastoral issue, that does not rise to the level of the Lordship of Christ.”

For me, this statement by the 2002 Unity Synod is of profound importance, sufficient to every challenge. It means that, as Moravians, we can disagree on issues surrounding homosexuality, and still agree that all parties in the discussion are Christians, making the confession, “Jesus is Lord!”

Let me see if I can fill out the language of this resolution.

First, Homosexuality is a Biblical issue. The Bible is filled with sex, and the sexual practices of the ages. Some are familiar to us; some are strange. The Old Testament condemns male homosexual activity. Of course the Old Testament also permits men to have multiple wives, and take concubines. The Patriarchs of Israel, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob all shared their beds with two or more women. King David, who was said to be a man after God’s own heart, had eight wives. King Solomon had 700 wives and 300

concubines. Even discounting the numbers that may have been inflated to serve Solomon's kingly ego, he must have had the longest honey-do list of anyone in the Bible. This is very different from the teaching of Jesus regarding marriage. Obviously the Bible does not have a single sexual ethic.

So, too, it is interesting to note that the Old Testament does not condemn female homosexual activity, perhaps because it describes a totally male dominated society. The Old Testament does condemn male homosexual acts, and there are several instances in which it does so because one male or group of males would use it to establish dominance over others. For instance, in the Old Testament story of Sodom and Gomorrah God destroys the cities because their citizens are "very wicked, great sinners before the Lord." The first time we learn any specifics about Sodom's sinfulness is when the messengers of the Lord visit the city, and the men of the city want to rape them. Lot offers his virgin daughters as substitutes---without asking their permission; but it becomes unnecessary, for the messengers of God strike the men of the city blind. Then Lot and his kin escape the cities before God destroys them. In context, the sin of Sodom is not just gay sex, but gang rape, a desire for dominance, and a drastic breach of ancient Near Eastern rules for hospitality, the violation of which seems to have been punishable by death. There is a parallel story of a failure of hospitality in Judges 19-21, which involves an actual case of heterosexual rape by a gang of thugs. Therein all of Israel unites to punish the offending city. As an aside, I find it interesting that, in speaking of Sodom and Gomorrah, later Biblical writers sometimes refer to the singular "sin" of the cities (sodomy), and sometimes refer to the plural "sins" of the cities, (sodomy, gang rape, failure of hospitality, etc.). It is a mistake to think God destroyed the cities *only* because some of the people there were homosexual.

The Holiness Code of Leviticus forbids male homosexual activity, and establishes a harsh penalty. It calls for the death of men who lie with other men the way that men ordinarily lie with women. There is a similar penalty for adultery, and several other sexual offenses such as incest. The Holiness Code calls a man who lies with other men the way that men ordinarily lie with women "an abomination." Of course, it also calls the wearing of mixed or blended fabrics, or eating certain shell fish an abomination, too.

In the New Testament Jesus is silent on the subject of homosexuality, whatever one makes of that, and this silence is fiercely debated, pro and con. However, in Romans 1, St. Paul speaks forcefully against both male and

female homosexual acts. Admittedly, he does so, almost as an aside, as a part of providing evidence that men are without excuse for failing to recognize God's invisible nature, namely, his eternal power and deity, in the things that have been made.

This is the only place in the Bible that female homosexual acts is condemned. That said, Paul never declares homosexual congress to be a super sin as some would maintain. In point of fact, in Romans 1, St. Paul places homosexual congress alongside of:

... strife, deceit, gossiping, haughtiness, boastfulness, disobedience to parents, foolishness, faithlessness, heartlessness, and ruthlessness.

I suspect that some people—including many with no religious conviction, double-down on homosexuality as an excuse for some failing in their own lives. It is only human that we try to feel better about ourselves by pointing to someone else we regard as somehow beneath us. We sometimes forget that when we point out the failings of another, we have three fingers and a thumb pointing back at ourselves!

In the New Testament, in defiance of Mosaic Law, Jesus spares the woman taken in adultery a death by stoning, and St. Paul ignores the laws calling for death for sexual offenders, offering grace instead. In 1st Corinthians 6:9-11 he writes:

9 Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived; neither the immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor *sexual pervers*, **10** nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor robbers will inherit the kingdom of God. **11** And such were some of you. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and in the Spirit of our God.

This is a key passage for people on both sides of this argument. Many scholars point out that the *phrase* that is herein translated by the RSV as “sexual pervers” describes a kind of male homosexual congress that is particularly obnoxious, including adult males using adolescence boys for sexual pleasure. That said, other scholars will point out that some members of the church in Corinth had been delivered from *all* these things, “having been washed, sanctified, and justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ

and in the Spirit of our God.” There are, of course, other passages of note in Scripture, and much that could be said about them, but these are the major passages, and this short survey is complete enough for our needs.

Second, according to Unity Synod, homosexuality is a theological issue. Specifically, it is a hermeneutical issue. Hermeneutics is a fifty-cent word. Simply put the study of hermeneutics identifies the various ways that we read and interpret scripture. Though this is oversimplification, there are two *broad* ways that people who believe in the Bible and submit to its authority interpret the Scripture.

First, there is the method that I will call “Protestant Scholasticism.” Protestant Scholasticism teaches that the Bible is the divinely inspired Word of God, and, that, in the original manuscripts (which are lost beyond recovery), it contains no errors of any kind. Though people who adhere to this view admit that the Bible has many different human authors, they believe that God so guided those authors that every verse of scripture is inerrant, and thus can and must be interpreted by and in harmony with every other verse of scripture. The danger of this method is that the systematic theology of the interpreter often takes precedent over Scripture itself. In its most rigorous form, this method of interpretation confines truth to the Scripture alone. Every other form of knowledge, whether scientific, or social, is often viewed as either a half-truth or a lie. The people who interpret Scripture in this fashion are like Harry Emerson Fosdick’s grandmother. When Fosdick started to seminary his grandmother told him if he gave up on the idea that the whale swallowed Jonah, he had to give up on the whole Bible. I know from our conversations that the late Bishop Iobst would have taken exception to that. When I went to seminary my grandmother told me that if I gave up on the idea that God created the world in six literal days, then I had to give up on the whole Bible. Imagine my surprise when I discovered during my studies that the sun and the moon were not created until the 4th day. How then did God mark the first three literal days? I have many friends who interpret scripture as Scholastics, but I abandoned this hermeneutic long before I started seminary. The idea that even one error in scripture invalidates the whole has driven many people out of the faith, and barred the door to countless others. I think it is a shame that the media often seems to report that Protestant Scholasticism is the *only* form of Biblical Christianity. That is simply not true.

There is a second way of interpreting scripture that is best represented by the Renewed Moravian Church; and, later, by the Biblical Theology Movement. People who belong to the Biblical Theology Movement accept that the scriptures are the divinely inspired record of God's revelation of Himself on the plane of human history. They believe that the Bible is a sufficient guide to salvation and life; but also believe that, except with regards prophetic revelation, God limited the Biblical authors of scripture to the knowledge of their day, and that the Bible is thus conditioned by the time in which it was written. Jesus seems to affirm this view of limited knowledge even with regard to prophetic revelation. When speaking of the Coming of the Son of Man he said, "Of that day and hour, no one knows, not the angels in heaven, or the Son, but the Father only." (Mark 13:32). For those who belong to the Biblical Theology Movement, context is everything, and a text without a context is a pretext. The Biblical Theology Movement demotes systematic theology, and insists that we let each Biblical author speak in his own voice. So, too, the Biblical Theology movement does not confine truth to the Bible. It believes that "all scripture is inspired by God, and profitable, for teaching, for correction, for reproof, and for training in righteousness." (2nd Timothy 3:16) Yet, it also insists that God has revealed himself in the Natural world, too. This is the word of the Bible itself! Thus the Psalmist declares, "the heavens are telling the glory of God, and the firmament proclaims his handiwork." (Psalm 19:1) And St. Paul writes, "that ever since the creation of the world, God's invisible nature, namely his eternal power and deity, have been clearly perceived in the things that have been made." (Romans 1:20) Likewise, in Colossians 1, the apostle tells us that God is "the creator of all things visible, and invisible," meaning things we know about, and things we are yet to know about.

Biblical Theology teaches that truth is not confined to the Bible. How can it be if God fills the world? Thus those who belong to the Biblical Theology Movement insist that the Special Revelation of Scripture—especially the Exodus in the Old Testament and the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ in the New Testament, informs the General Revelation in Nature—which is comprised of everything in the creation; and that the General Revelation in Nature, informs the Special Revelation of Scripture. One preacher described this process as reading with the Bible in one hand and the Daily Newspaper in the other, trying to make sense of both.

The Biblical Theology Movement understands that both the Special Revelation of the Bible and Natural Revelation of the world around us is *progressive*.

Special Revelation is progressive. In scripture, we are not surprised that Moses knew more about the Law than Abraham, that St. Paul knew more about the resurrection of Jesus than Moses, and that the Hebrew prophets were serving not themselves, but us, in predicting the suffering and death of Jesus. (1st Peter 1:12) Jesus seems to affirm the progressive nature of revelation when he says that not only will the Holy Spirit call his words to remembrance (John 14:26), but also that the Spirit of Truth will lead his disciples into all truth (John 16:13). This means that the Spirit of Truth is still at work, today, helping us to see truth. We see evidences of this progressive revelation in the Bible itself. For instance, in Mark, Jesus forbids divorce and remarriage for any cause. In Matthew, where the words of Jesus were written down at least a decade after Mark, Jesus specifically permits divorce and remarriage in the case of adultery. I remember when a Moravian pastor could only remarry “the innocent party of a divorce action based on infidelity.” Today, few would believe there are any innocent parties in a marriage, much less in a divorce. In 1st Corinthians, St. Paul permits divorce (and possibly remarriage) in the case of desertion. Though I am in my marriage for a lifetime, I believe I have had the Spirit of God when I have counseled men and women to leave a relationship in which they were repeatedly abused. I am not trying to be too specific here. I am grateful that the Pope has recently spoken out quite graciously on the issues of divorce and remarriage in the Catholic Church.

Revelation in Nature is progressively apprehended and understood, too. King David knew “the heavens are telling the glory of God,” but we know that even more convincingly than he did. David looked up at the night sky from a hillside with his naked eye and saw tens of thousands of stars; we look through our powerful telescopes borne into deep space by satellites and see billions of stars.

I will never forget a conversation I had with the late Mike Bailey about the creation stories of Genesis. Mike was a devout Christian, and physicist by trade. He was having a hard time relating the Genesis stories to what he knew to be the scientific explanation of creation. He asked me what I thought. I said, “Mike, consider this. Suppose you were writing to another

physicist, could you assume a certain level of knowledge and use a certain vocabulary?”

He said, “Yes, of course.”

I said, “Well, suppose you were writing to the 12 year old son of that physicist. Could you make the same assumptions and use the same vocabulary?”

He said, “Of course not!”

I said, “Well, let me ask one more question. If you were writing a letter to be read by both the physicist and his twelve year old son, to what level would you write?”

Mike said, “I would write to the level of the son, knowing that the father would be able to understand it, too.”

I said, “Well that is exactly what God did in Genesis 1-3. He wrote a letter to humankind in its adolescence, knowing that humankind in its maturity would still be able to understand it.”

All revelation is progressive, and progressively understood. Thus, people who accept homosexual marriage and orientation read the Special Revelation of the Bible alongside the General Revelation of Science , and believe that homosexuality is not a choice that an individual makes, but a condition with which they are born. They argue that when St. Paul wrote Romans 1, his views were conditioned by the time in which he lived, and that he knew nothing of homosexual *orientation*, and that the homosexual acts the Bible condemns is the kind of homosexual acts that are practiced between two heterosexuals, such as it is practiced in prisons, and in the dorm rooms of boarding schools, and by the Mau-Mau warriors during the uprisings in Kenya. The Mau-Mau used mutual sodomy to bind their warriors together physically and psychologically.

Though I will not be performing homosexual marriages, I cannot break fellowship with those Christians who differ from me on the matter of homosexual marriage even if I wanted to, because I am unwilling to give up the hermeneutic that allows them to reach their position while still submitting their views to the authority of the Bible. How can I give up my

hard won hermeneutic? On the one hand, I believe that the Special Revelation in the Bible teaches me truth about God that I cannot discover through the lens of a microscope or a telescope. I can only learn of Jesus Christ by reading and hearing the Bible in the context of the church. On the other hand, though “all scripture is inspired by God and is profitable for teaching, for reproof and for training in righteousness,” there is no mention that it is also profitable as a scientific textbook. Yet even here the Bible does not leave us comfortless. The Bible introduces science in Genesis 2:19 when God allows the first human being to assist him in naming the animals. The first duty of science is to name and classify things as they are.

We would be lost without faith, and we would be immeasurably impoverished without science. Science has made our lives more comfortable. Science has blessed us with an increasingly sophisticated view of the Cosmos. Science has mapped the human genome, paving the way for medical discoveries that will serve our children and grandchildren. Science has blessed us with vaccines for polio, shingles, diphtheria, pneumonia, and the flu, among other things. Scientists did not invent these wonderful things: God made them possible, and scientists discovered them. In the same way, science will someday, discover a cure for cancer, diabetes, heart disease, etc.; but only because God has already made such a discovery possible. Turn your back on science if you want to; I cannot.

Nor will I turn my back on the Bible. My critical study of the Bible has not threatened my faith, but strengthened it. Understood properly science and the Bible are not incompatible. Despite dire warnings by the fearful, the Bible has withstood the advances of science with regard to the Copernican Revolution, Darwin’s theory of Evolution, and Einstein’s theory of Relativity. In the same way, if we learn beyond a shadow of a doubt, as some believe we already have, that homosexuals were “born that way ” the Bible will still be the same unique, authoritative, hope-filled, God inspired record of God’s revelation in human history that it always has been. Protestant Scholastics may have to give it up, but those Moravians and the countless others like them that belong to the Biblical Theology Movement will not.

I trust the Bible, I believe the Bible that we have is the Bible God intends us to have, and I say that knowing, with regard to the New Testament alone, we have thousands of manuscripts that contain more variations than there are words in the text. Even these differences add to our understanding of the

scripture, and the texts themselves; and not one of those variations has proven a threat to the essentials of Christian orthodoxy. By the by, it was one of my favorite professors at Princeton Theological Seminary, the late Bruce Metzger, who was certainly one of the leading New Testament theologians and textual critics of the 20th Century, who first pointed this out to me. Likewise, though I do not believe God intended the Bible to be *inerrant* in matters of science, like the prophet Isaiah, I do believe that “it will accomplish all that God purposes for it to do,” up to, and including the Salvation the Bible offers us in Jesus Christ. As the prophet has written:

For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven, and return not thither but water the earth, making it bring forth and sprout, giving seed to the sower and bread to the eater, **11** so shall my word be that goes forth from my mouth; it shall not return to me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose, and prosper in the thing for which I sent it. Isaiah 55:10

Along these same lines, many of those who belong to the Biblical Theology Movement have come to the conclusion that, when reading the Bible, it is good to keep in mind the word of Jesus that all the law and the prophets are based on the two great commandments, to love God with all the heart, mind, soul and strength, and to love one’s neighbor as one’s self. (Matthew 22:36-40) There are specific commandments which seem irrelevant to an age different from that in which they were instituted, such as the commandment for parents to deliver disobedient children up to the elders to be stoned to death (Deuteronomy 20:19-21); or the commandment for slaves to obey their masters (Colossians 3:22), which was a temporary concession based on the apostle’s conviction that Christ was coming back soon and that the form of this world was passing away. Those who doubt that God ever changes a commandment should read and compare Deuteronomy 23:1 and Isaiah 56:4. By contrast the two great commandments present principals that are untouched by time, place and circumstance. God is LOVE (1st John 4:16), and the two commandments of love are the foundation of all God’s law. This is forever. As the apostle says in 1st Corinthians 13, “Faith, hope, love abide, these three, but the greatest of these is love.” Love is the greatest because it alone must endure into eternity. “For who hopes for what he sees?” (Romans 8:24) And “Faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the evidence of things unseen.” (Hebrews 11:1) There are some things in scripture that are pre-Christ, and some things in scripture that are sub-Christ, but all things in Scripture and life must ultimately serve him.

Finally, the Unity Synod said that homosexuality is a pastoral issue. Let me quickly state a number of things that I have come to believe as a pastor:

1. I have come to the conclusion that no one chooses his or her sexuality. I certainly did not choose my sexuality. Most people would say the same.

2. I have come to the conclusion that gay people in the church need all the support they can get. I have seen too many horrible things to say otherwise. I know of a boy who told his parents he was gay, and was turned out of his house by his father the week he graduated from high school. I know of several young men who were rejected by their families to spend years ruled by alcohol, and drugs, and promiscuous sex. I know of gay men and women who have taken their own lives out of heartbreak, confusion, and frustration.

3. I have seen the dangers of sexual experimentation. I know of instances in which fathers pushed their sons into heterosexual sex with prostitutes for fear they were homosexual. I know of teenagers who experimented with both heterosexual and homosexual sex acts just so they could settle things in their minds regarding their sexual orientation. I would say to any child who is in doubts about his or her sexuality, "Do not experiment!" If you have doubts, talk to your parents. They will listen. If they will not listen; talk a pastor, he or she will talk to them with you.

4. I know of people so bent on changing the sexual orientation of others that they have forced them into Reparative Therapy. It is interesting that the [Exodus Organization](#), which was the leading evangelical advocate of Reparative Therapy, has recently folded its tents and apologized for any hurt they may have caused. They now regard the attempt to change one's sexual orientation as presumptuous.

5. I know of homosexuals who were so bent on changing their sexual orientation that they have married a heterosexual partner, only to make that partner's life much more difficult when they asked for a divorce on the grounds of their sexual identity, leaving the surprised spouse to raise their children alone. I have known other homosexuals who married, then allowed their heterosexual partners to live in a sexually unfulfilled marriage, while

fulfilling their own sexual needs outside marriage. Neither scenario is fair to the person, the partner or the children.

6. I have come to the conclusion that if God put gay people in this world, and I believe he did, gay men and women must bring some gift to humanity that we need. Some have suggested that celibacy is that gift, as there are certainly places where celibacy would be a blessing. Others would challenge that, and say there must be more. I think they bring many gifts. One theologian has written that the whole issue of *homosexual orientation* has forced us to examine our Biblical hermeneutic as never before. It may prove a major challenge to Protestant Scholasticism; it will be much less of a challenge to Moravians and the Biblical Theology Movement. It may be the issue that God uses to force the church into more a more adult mode of thinking critically about a multitude of other issues in the world. Remember, when God called Abraham to leave his country, kindred and father's house, he went out "in faith" not knowing where he was going. We are all in the position of Abraham.

7. I did not say this in my original address to the congregation, but have added it at the suggestion of one of our members. The church's lack of compassion toward gays has been repeatedly cited in various polls as a primary reason that many young people will not even consider the claims of Christ, and church membership. The Public Religion Research Institute reports:

A majority of Americans (in the poll), 58 percent, also said that religious groups are "alienating young adults by being too judgmental on gay and lesbian issues." Among Millennials, that percentage jumped to 70. Whether we accept this or not, it certainly needs to be considered.

In conclusion, I would mention the issue of *weighing* the good. On the one hand, there are those who weigh *sexual morality* against *issues of justice for homosexual persons*, and say that sexual morality must be given the most weight. You all know examples of this. On the other hand, there are those who weigh *issues of justice for homosexual persons* against *sexual morality*, and say that issues of justice, including the right to love and marriage, must be given the most weight. The South African Province of the Moravian Church in a good example. Biblically, they are very conservative; but they were among the first Christians in Africa to champion Gay rights, perhaps

because they themselves had suffered so long under the injustices of racism. I belong to a third group. This third group believes that, despite our differences, the Unity of the Church, must always given priority, over differences that do not rise to the level of the Lordship of Jesus Christ. When I judge either side of this issue, I try to remember that Jesus said that the judgment we give would be the judgment we get. (Matthew 7:2) Moreover, I am thankful that, like St. Paul, it is not my duty to judge the servants of another, because it is before their own Master that they must stand or fall. (Romans 14:4) Finally, I would mention that I write not so much as an individual, but as an individual who is a member of the Moravian Church. I believe that in Matthew 16:19 Jesus gave the church great authority to make decisions for itself in when he spoke to Peter the confessor saying, “I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.”

This paper is obviously a work in progress, that is conducted as a part of an ongoing dialog. The Unity Synod of 2002 ruled that homosexuality was “a Biblical, theological, and pastoral issue that does not rise to the level of the Lordship of Jesus Christ.” Though I fear we may regret allowing the specter of “congregationalism” into the Moravian Church, the Southern Province Synod of 2018 has allowed individual congregations freedom to chart their own course in this matter. I fear there will be winners and losers. Those congregations that could suffer most are those like our own where opinions vary greatly. I hope and pray we choose simply to continue as we are and go forward together in a spirit of Christian love. It is my prayer that we will all remember that there are many points of question regarding the Christian faith, and that our response to homosexuality is one. However, there is one point of decision, and that point of decision remains Jesus Christ. Let us also respect all who have made the decision to follow him. In this regard I am happy to say with Paul, “Who am I to judge the servant of another?”

Respectfully Submitted,

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