

# A MORAVIAN MODEL OF MINISTRY

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



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For  
The Unity of the Moravian Church

By  
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## Introduction

At the Moravian World Missionary Conference in Herrnhut in 2001 dr. Thompson, member of the Theological Commission of the Unity Synod and Moravian tutor at the United Theological College of the West Indies asked me to translate a piece I had written in Dutch on the Moravian Model of Ministry.

The said piece had been written by me in response to the perennial question ‘What is the essence, the identity, of the Moravian Church?’ I encountered these questions in my work as pastor and youth worker and had bumped into them in various locations in the worldwide work of the moravian church.

Being impressed by other models of ministry in the past and present, such as the work of Willowcreek and especially Rick Warren’s ‘Purpose Driven Church’ (and the ‘Purpose Driven Youth Ministry’) I set out to try and describe a Moravian Model of Ministry. Aware that this would not be ‘the’ definite statement on our church nor probably the defining statement, but rather an instrument to help in our work as church.

The initial one-page summary passed through the hands of workers in the Moravian Church in North-Holland, its board of elders and the youth council of the Moravian Church in Amsterdam & Flevoland where it met with support. Then during a Moravian course I had Rev. H.-B. Motel, former chairman of the Unity Board, Dr. Paul Peucker, archivist for the Unity Archives and dr. Helmut Bintz, foremost moravian church historian on Comenius and Zinzendorf look at the paper. In a cursory glance they nodded their approval. At the Moravian Mission Conference in Herrnhut I shared the same summary with delegates from around the world and in my talk group in Herrnhut. There br. Thompson asked for a translation.

## 16. Discussion questions and further research:

1. Is the principal separation into *essential*, *important* and *ancillary* useful and rightful in this moravian model of ministry?
2. Does this model help understand your past as a Moravian church and does it hold if held in the historical light of your church?
3. Does the model help you in analysing your current church situation and functioning as a church?
4. How is your relation with Christ and how could you improve on it through prayer and the Word of God?
5. Are the services in the church helpful in developing the relationship with Christ and do you feel there is renewal of your services through the relation with Christ?
6. Is the bond between members one of ‘brothers and sisters’ and is it fed through the relation with Christ and does it help this relation?
7. Are you serving in your society (in the integrity of the gospel)?
8. Are individuals honored and motivated in personal growth?
9. Are there enough groups so that every member is in at least one?
10. Do you participate in ecumenical circles teaching and learning?
11. Is mission still evident and vibrant or are there second thoughts?
12. Do families have the support they need in all things in familylife?
13. Is there enough (or too much) infrastructure so that all can be reached?
14. Are finances helping or limiting the ministry?
15. Is the organisation helpful?
16. Are the leaders serving and leading?

## 15. Interaction of the parts and its application:

The essential dimension feeds the entirety of the model. Where the spiritual zeal lacks only God's gracious uplifting in answer to our humble pleadings can revive our spirit. Rather, only God's Spirit can revive us. Spiritual zeal can not be gleaned from organisational restructuring. For the rest every part of the model influences each other.

The basic movement in my understanding is the essential bringing forth the eight important dimensions of church life. The eight important dimensions calling forth the ancillary aspects. These in place help the important dimensions and these functioning well will sustain and build the relationship with God in Christ.

Now I would like to add just one other ring to the model, that of human knowledge. All our knowledge and abilities should rest in an outer ring. Every part of this should be tested in its usefulness in the ministry. To me this also includes (scientific) theology understood as the reflection on spiritual life. All our sciences are included. This also means for instance that one trained in management (or any other discipline) should test his or her knowledge and skills before applying this in the church.

The application of the model of ministry can be manifold, using the model will show ever newer ways of its application.

The simplest way is: (1) describing one's status, (2) defining one's aspirations — felt as the direction in which the Lord is leading, (3) preparing aspirations for implication, as everything needed (knowledge, skills and materials) is gained to move, (4) implementing according to the steps (actions, plans) devised in 3 — always being dependent and open to the (corrective) leading of the Spirit of Christ, (5) observing the way things go, (6) evaluating one's work, and (7) resting, rejoicing and rejuvenating before the Lord. Then the cycle of the phases 1-7 can be repeated.

The cycle can be done by a church as a whole, a group in the church or even an individual.

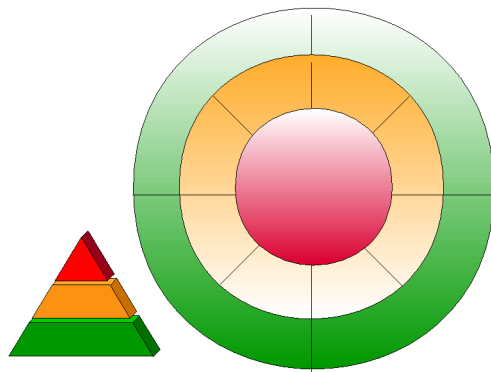
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## 1. A Moravian Model of Ministry.

The Moravian Model of Ministry consists of three parts: the essential, the important aspects and the ancillary aspects. The *essential* is the personal relation (bond) with God in Christ Jesus. The eight *important* aspects are: the liturgy, the bond with the fellow members as brothers and sisters, the bond with society, the bond with oneself, the bond with specific members (groups) in the church, the bond with other christians (oecumene), the bond with non-Christians in mission, and the bond with one's household. The four *ancillary* aspects are: the infrastructure (esp. buildings), the finances, the organisation and the leadership.

This reflects the old moravian distinction between essentials, important things and the ancillary aspects. It also corresponds to the moravian adage: *In essentials: unity, in non-essentials: liberty, and in all things: love.*



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## 14. Ancillary aspect four: the leadership.

Modern insight in leadership places a great stress on the leader as the single most important individual influencing an organisation, this in spite of the growing idea of being and leading as a team. Biblically there are numerous passages we could point to, but specific in moravian leadership is its stress on the leader as serving and being a servant. As Jesus pointed out to the disciples: This, however, is not the way it is among you. If one of you wants to be great, he must be the servant of the rest...' (Mark 10:43)

Great names in Moravian history are usually those of leaders pre-Moravian as Jan Hus, own leaders as Augusta, Comenius, Zinzendorf, Spangenberg, (part-Moravians as Schleiermacher, moravian influenced as Wesley, Carey). The principal movement of the church has been to recognise lay leadership as fundamental for the church, though in all practicality this has not always held. There is however a fact little known and that is that in the Moravian archives are the life testimonies of many thousands (if I am correct 30.000) of Moravians, testifying of the path of their lives and what God has done. This testifies to the fact that not just the lives of leaders were important: the writing of God in the lives of men and women is. One thing has not always been well taken care of. In its missionary inception the ideal was to transfer leadership to local brethren quite soon, yet this was slow to happen.

Now the worldwide leadership of the Moravian church is in the hands of leaders who are democratically chosen. We could say chosen elders lead the congregations, chosen provincial elders the province and chosen unity elders the worldwide church. Next to that professional leadership, especially trained ministers, is in place. At provincial level we see however that professional leadership by trained ministers often takes precedence over other types of leadership in the church. One issue needs to be faced if I am right. Due to its stress on the leader as serving visionary leadership is not well appreciated and leadership training is not formalized. One learns as one goes, to serve, but also to lead?

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### 13. Ancillary aspect three: the organisation.

Every group of people develops a certain organisation, be it formalised or in an informal way. Thus with the church. But as Christ is our reference we must follow Him in this also. An existence for the sake of the organisation must be avoided at all time. The organisation is a serving part of the church, serving to help the church to fulfill its mission. Biblically we can point to Acts, for instance 14:23 'In each church they appointed elders, and with prayers and fasting they commended them to the Lord, in whom they had put their trust.'

Historically the Moravian Church has been well-organised. What is less known is that during its renewal period change in the organisation was a constant factor. Zinzendorf and his companions established different offices with different names all the time. Most well-known, and typically Moravian, is the headship of Christ in the Moravian organisation. As the work of the church grew the leader of the Moravian church at that time, Leonard Dober, gave back his status of chief elder of the worldwide Moravian church. The work was becoming too much for him. So it came about that at the Synod in London in 1741 the Moravian church decided that it would have no chief elder except Christ himself, the head of the church.

The Moravian church is a well-organized church. The members are in congregations led by chosen elders and ministers appointed by the provincial board. The congregations also choose their synod representatives for their church province. This synod chooses the organisational leaders of the Province, the provincial board and they choose the pastoral leaders, bishops. The various church provinces meet at the Unity Synod where the Unity board is chosen and the Unity Church order is set. At provincial level this is supplemented by its own complimentary and particular church order rulings. Next to this there are missionary organisation, women, youth, music and other organisations helping the church in its various tasks and sub-tasks. Noteworthy is the Moravian Church Foundation, the business organisation of the worldwide church.

### 2. The essential: the personal relation (bond) with God in Christ Jesus.

The central part of our being and its very existence is the personal relation, of a congregation or an individual, with God in Christ Jesus. This relation is wholesome, should be wholehearted and should encompass our whole being. It includes salvation and discipleship, it includes belief and action, it includes everything that God has meant for us. It consists of faith, hope and love. This essential relation is especially fed through prayer, the reading of the Word of God and the following of Christ. The relation with God is the focus, prayer and the Word feed it. Biblically we can use the idea of the vine and the branches and what Jesus said there: Remain in me, and I will remain in you.[]

Historically we could point to the great Moravian awakening described by Zinzendorf as 'a sense of the nearness of Christ' bestowed in a single moment, upon all the members that were present'.[] Or as a church historian wrote: 'Everyone desired above everything else that the Holy Spirit might have full control. Self-love and self-will as well as all disobedience disappeared and an overwhelming flood of grace swept us all out into the great ocean of Divine Love.'[]

As the Dutch professor Lutjeharms put it: 'The Moravian Church has impressed the need of this personal relationship [with Christ] on all its members and friends. This has always been the power and the warmth of the preaching in the church and on the mission field'.[] In the Moravian church our prayer watch became famous and is still an inspiration to many. The Bible also got its Moravian daily expression: the Daily Watchwords. Words to keep at hand during our daily watching and waking.

### **3. Important aspect one: the bond with God and the fellow members through the liturgy.**

The pulse of every church can be seen in its liturgy. The meeting of man and God in the corporate prayer, Bible reading, preaching and teaching, singing and making music, sharing and hearing. The church service can be seen as the pulse of a church, people missing there are missing in the life of a church. Yet the service is not the essence of a church though it flows forth from its essence. Biblically we could point to the disciples meeting daily at the Temple and in houses.[]

Historically we can again refer to the great awakening. This happened at a communion service, was prepared for in prayer services, and expressed itself in a spontaneous love-feast (food being fetched for those assembled). The awakening itself also generated a hunger to meet together and hear the word of God so that three services had to be held daily.[]

The Moravian church has taken its services seriously and has developed a wide variety of services. The preaching service, a litany service, the singing service, the love feast, familiar services as baptism, confirmation, wedding and burial services. Its own specific form of communion, the Hosanna service, the Easter-cycle of services, most notably the Good Friday and Easter morning (sunrise) service. Its Christmas services are also well-known and appreciated. Specific services and feasts for specific groups in the church (traditionally: the children, the unmarried women, the unmarried men, the married couples, the widows and widowers). Aspects of services: acceptance into the church, a verse of blessing at birth and on birthdays. Also the special covenant service with the workers of the church.

### **12. Ancillary aspect two: the finances.**

Though the love of money is seen as the root of all evil by the apostle Paul the use of it is seen as the root of all church work by many. As such money is not positive or negative it is merely a means of transportation of value (for instance from work to food and goods). The problem arises where man makes money his god and leading agent in his or her life. There Jesus points us to the kingdom of God. This must be central to our personal life mission: righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost.[] Then money is subject to God's principles and be it that God wants us to use a portion of our resources for his kingdom (expressed in his church) such as a tenth or the whole of our resources, we will readily allow God to have his way knowing that we should be unconcerned as the birds and flowers.

In the history of the church it has amazed church historians how the Moravian church could have an impact beyond its own financial means which were sometimes quite small. Many friends of the Moravian church gave for the ministry of the church far and near. There were moved in no small means by the spirit of brethren and sisters giving their all for Christ. In the Netherlands the missionary centre of the Moravian church lay in Zeist where a famous former royal residence was. A Mennonite friend of the Moravian church bought this in order to accommodate the early Moravians in Holland when they were forced to move from IJsselstein.

Finances seem to dictate much of our undertakings ('count your costs before building') and when taken into spiritual consideration ('the Lord gives and takes away') can be useful, but it should not be the sole, even solitary, motivator for our vision. As many have seen finances following vision.

## 11. Ancillary aspect one: the infrastructure (esp. Buildings).

The infrastructure of a church and its community are helpful elements in building church life and expressing the role of a church in society. Buildings, (virtual) roads and other such infrastructure has been important in maintaining and building communities. Yet they sprung up around the community and as expressions of it. When necessary or appropriate it was abandoned. Biblically we could point to Hebrews 13:14: 'for here we do not have an enduring city, but we are looking for the city that is to come.'

Historically we can point at the building activities in various communities around the world. We could especially point out to the building of the ship 'Irene' build for the Moravian Church by Nicholas Garrison (1701-1781). He not only build the ship but used it for many voyages to bring the Moravians around the world. [] As an illustration of the setting of such infrastructure we may point to the building of the Brethren's house in Zeist. The congregation was assembled in the Castle and held a service especially for the building of the house. Then as the congregation remained a few brethren went and put the first spade into the ground and having come back they dismissed the congregation. Every member then went to the building site and prayed that the Lord would quietly bless the building. The brethren who would live there would live and work there, this being the economical basis for the spiritual work, as many prepared 'to do something in the service of the Lord'. Many went to mission fields and others travelled through the Netherlands and led Revival services.

The Moravian Church has built churches, stores, schools, hospitals, houses, had roads paved, built ships and has used this all to the glory of God and welfare of fellowmen. This has cost an enormous amount of money and resources but with the help of many members and friends and wise stewardship much has been achieved. At other times buildings and such have been sold. The infrastructure as ancillary to the mission.

## 4. Important aspect two: the bond with the fellow members as brothers and sisters.

The relation with God in Christ produces special relations with those who also have this: they are brothers and sisters (in Christ). Not friends chosen, but family given. This calls for the expression of this bond through fellowship and sharing. Calling each other 'brother' and 'sister' being the verbalization of a spiritual realization. Biblically we can point to the verse: if we love one another, God lives in us and his love is made complete in us.[]

Historically we can point to the close living communities of both the Old and the Renewed Moravian church. Some have analysed this as being cloister-like communities. In the Renewed Moravian church there was a definite division of the church along the line of brethren and sisters. This included grouping of the church along such lines. There were the children, the young unmarried sisters, the young unmarried brethren, the married couples, the widowed sisters and the widowed brethren. Each group had its own living quarters in various settlements, with its own specific leader. The church was seen as one big family and the church hall was seen as the 'living room' of the congregation. There the seating would be brethren on one side and sisters on the other (as in the graveyards).

Currently the idea of brethren and sisters, the idea of church as a family is one the one side ingrained in our Moravian societies, such as calling each other 'brother and sister' but the deep and practical living arrangements are not so much practised. One of the successful missionary groups of the last 25 years, Youth with a Mission, adopted the living together as one of her fruitful strategies in developing mission work. They do not call each other 'brother and sister' as the work is interdenominational. Off course many churches see this 'brother and sister' relationship of the members but the Moravian church specifically tried to live this out in her everyday church-life.

## 5. Important aspect three: the bond with society.

Every church is part of a society in which it lives. It is influenced by it and it influences it. Thus cultural variations in church life will be seen around the world and should be critically tested by each church with the help of churches from other cultures. Thus striving to give the Word of God the last word in our church life and hopefully in the society in which we live. Biblically we can point to the words of Jesus in Matthew 5:13: 'You are the salt of the earth.'

Historically we can point to the massive work the Tchech theologian and pedagogue Jan Amos Comenius tried to implement. Keeping Christ at the center of all his work he tried to embed politics, pedagogics and church life in Christ. His vision of a worldwide legal council, a concil of education and a church council was centered on the idea of Christ being all in all. In its mission work the Moravian church took this centrality of Christ to the peoples of the world and from there tried to infuse societies with Christian education and church life, though Christian politics was harder and a bit more tricky, though never far away from the christian mission. The idea being that a life centered in Christ would also yield a society more centered in Christ, including in politics and societal relationships.

The Moravian church strove to walk a christian line in society in politics, pedagogics, business and health care. The most known and advocated are the pedagogics and the health care. Though recently some community development was being added to the list. There is a cry here and there for the church to be more involved in politics. The idea of the salt should however not be limited to these areas or society. The media, race relationships and being a neighbour to non-Christians (the idea of tolerance) are important issues. The encompassing views on society from Muslim societies and groups are a challenge to our christian heritage.

## 10. Important aspect eight: and the bond with one's household.

A person does not grow up alone, but in a family. All things going well this family will be supportive until death. From the cradle to the grave family will be the primary living context. So it is wonderful to hear words like 'as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord'<sup>[1]</sup>.

Historically the early renewed Moravian saw the church as the house of the Lord. The idea of church members as being family, brethren and sisters was in high regard. This did not nullify the family as such, though there was an unsuccessful attempt of raising children collectively. The family as such was rendered valuable and important. In Zinzendorf's case the family was very important. Yet even his family was seen in the perspective of the essential relation with Christ. His marriage and his family he put into the perspective of serving Christ. Though Zinzendorf gave much of his family, estate and finances, for the cause of the Moravian church there was a need for this to be separate from the church. As such great church families can be of a grand influence on the church but care needs to be taken to keep certain distinctions.

Around the world family relations tend to be the singular most strong relation an individual can have. Though there be difference in the extent one relates to the family (for instance: only to the brothers and sisters or also to cousins) family remains important throughout all of humanity. In the western world individualism has however taken its toll on family structure and cohesiveness alienating many (the chosen friends are preferred to the given relations) and an urgent call needs to be made to restore the respect to family. In some cultures loose male-female bonding has created 'fatherless' children, a deep-rooted and touchy issue which still needs addressing in the 'household of God'. On the whole the celebration and support of family needs to be endorsed in and by the church.



## 9. Important aspect seven: the bond with non-Christians in mission.

One of the most notable and central aspects of the church has been its missionary zeal. This has to do with Christ's incarnation (becoming man), thus being God's message to the world, and Christ's command to go forth into the world. Mission is thus not defined by such things as a 'missionary post' but by the Christian faith being missionary in its essence. It wants to spread God's love. And though all the other before mentioned characteristics are thus part of the missionary 'enterprise' (everything is mission) one can see mission being also a separate characteristic in the reaching out to those who in one way or the other do not know or accept the Gospel (Christ came, died and rose again 1 Cor. 15:3-4). Biblically we point to Matthew 28: 19-20: 'Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teach them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.'

Historically we would point out that the start of the Moravian Mission was with the Danish king's servant, a former slave, who told the Moravians of the plight of the enslaved in the West Indies. In response to this message some brethren felt called to go and were sent to St. Thomas. Ready to become slaves, aiming to become fellowmen and being missionaries.

The current missionary enterprise of the Moravian church is still well and alive. A lot of work is being done in the sense of caring for the whole person: schooling, hospitals and so forth. Bringing people to baptism and discipleship in Christ is also being done notably through the Unity's New World Witness Program. Some would argue that the younger provinces could take up more cross-cultural mission and that the European Provinces could take up its internal missionary challenge. There is however a disunity in the missionary spirit as some see the need for others to turn to Christ and some see no such need.

## 6. Important aspect four: the bond with oneself.

In the individualized western societies this is an increasingly important issue. Some churches are even modelling their whole church structure and programming to the individual. On the other hand if there is one organisation that cannot be individualistic it is the church of Jesus Christ as in everything he taught and said he pointed to the neighbour as being equally important in God's eyes. Yet within this emphasis on other people there is a biblical admonition which is very important even as we think of Jesus saying to love your neighbour *as yourself*. Paul admonishes Timothy: Take heed unto thyself. (1 Tim. 4:16)

Historically it is very interesting to note that in the Unity Archives there are about 30.000 'Lebenslaufen', autobiographical stories, written by members of the Moravian Church from around the world. These Lifelines, as I would call them in English, are not merely sketches of what happened in someone's life but above all sketches of how a person experienced God in his or her life. These life stories were used in missionary publication and were of much use in the church. In the European context, even until today, these (updated) lifelines are read at someone's burial. The point of it not being to uplift oneself but the Lord, as one passes away but the Lord remains forever. Narrative theology and witnessing at its best.

In the Moravian tradition there has been a very specific and personal attention to the individual, though rightly always connected to God and others surrounding this individual. The writing of one's lifeline was encouraged, a verse of blessing was sung at birth, a verse of remembrance sung at death. In the Surinamese tradition at crown years in one's life special besing services are held for the one celebrating his or her birthday. In groups there was always the space to share one's personal experiences and the encouragement to personally walk with the Lord. Personal time with the Lord, next to time in the church services and at group meetings were encouraged. In leadership groups one was encouraged to also share about one's personal spiritual and personal development.

## 7. Important aspect five: the bond with specific members (groups) in the church.

One of the characteristics of a church that is moving is the amount of groups that are in the church. Having groups is frequently seen as a key principle for growth. The amount of differentiation needed to reach many people today can often not be done only through church services but must be done through target groups. One of the important aspects of groups is that they aim at a depth of growth in Christian life. Biblically many times the following text is cited in support of groups in the church: 'They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God.' (Acts 2: 46-47)

Historically groups in the Moravian church have been very fundamental in giving each person a sense of belonging and specific and personal attention. It was not the lone missionary who went, it was a smaller or larger group of missionaries who undertook the work. Groups were traditionally divided along lines of age and gender. The children, the unmarried young men, the unmarried young women, the married couples, the widowers and the widows. Each group had a leader. Group meetings were held next to church services and personal time with the Lord. In the group meetings one of the core ideas was 'heart to heart' sharing.

There are many groups. Children's work, boys and girls brigade, teen work, youth work, dance group, theater, young adults meeting, confirmation class, bible study groups, choirs, music groups, art groups, women, elderly, men's fellowship. In the whole work of the church special attention should be given to ethnic groups. A majority ethnic group always assumes implicitly that other ethnic groups adapt to its culture to show the oneness in Christ. Unity is however in Christ and not in ethnic homogeneity. The great question being however to have ethnically separate churches or multi-ethnic churches. One of the special groups in the church is the group of leaders and (co-)workers. Seeing its importance it warrants a discussion on its own.

## 8. Important aspect six: the bond with other Christians (oecumenism).

One of the valuable teachings in the church has been to see unity not as a function of our human organisations but as a function of Christ's calling. The point of unity is not church but Christ.[] Thus we cannot only judge unity on the grounds of a group or church calling itself Christian but also must seek out our personal unity in Christ. Ecumenics should never develop to the point of one church trying to rule over another church but should lead to one church trying to serve another in Christ. Biblically we can point to the high priestly prayer of Christ: 'I pray that they may all be one. Father!' (John 17:20)

Historically the Moravian's stance on unity is nearly as well known as its effort in mission. In the Old Moravian church there were allegiances with the Lutheran and Calvinistic movement. People from all walks of church life were drawn to the church. Even famed Herrnhut was not 'Moravian' as such. The Lutheran Zinzendorf allowed Moravian refugees to settle on his land. This little community drew people from various walks of Christian life. The revival of 1727 melted all together in the heart of God. From there the seed of the Moravian 'ecumenical church' spread throughout Christianity. Even as this young movement tried to integrate lessons learned in Christ's church from Copenhagen to Istanbul, from England to Africa.

It would be superfluous to say that the ecumenical dimension of the work of the Moravian Church remains solid. Our commitment is known and we are open to so-called ecumenical and evangelical sides of the church. There is a challenge however in what may be called the 'new' ecumenicity in which parts of the church are increasingly seeking 'ecumenical' contacts with other religions. The contacts with other religions should be seen in the context of our societal obligations and in our missionary obligations, not at all in ecumenical perspective. The essential, Christ our Lord and Saviour, should remain central.