

Lutheran-Moravian Proposal Study Report

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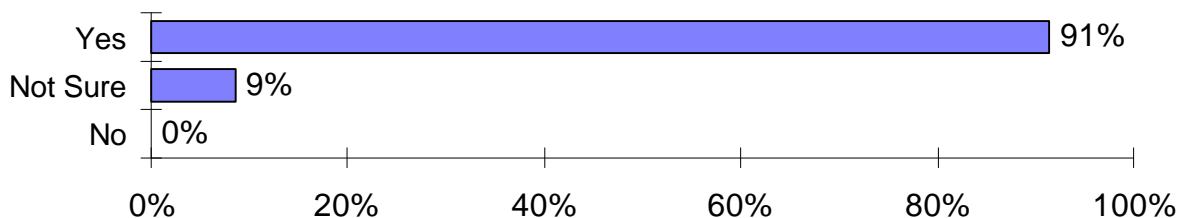
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On June 8, 1998, 30 ELCA congregations were contacted and asked if they would participate in a study of *Following Our Shepherd: Report of the Lutheran Moravian Dialogue with Recommendations for Full Communion in Worship, Fellowship and Mission*. These 30 ELCA congregations were chosen because they were located close to a Moravian congregation and could study the proposal together. Synodical bishops were kept informed of congregations in their synod being invited to participate in the study. Additional resources available included *Questions & Answers related to full communion between the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America and the Moravian Church in America* and *Living into Full Communion: A Congregational Discussion Guide for Following Our Shepherd to Full Communion*. On July 1, a packet of materials needed for the study was sent to the congregations, including the materials mentioned above plus a survey and return envelope. Additionally, materials were advertised in *Seeds for the Parish*, every congregation received a copy of *Following Our Shepherd*, and the materials were available on the ELCA Web site. The deadline for returning the survey was December 1, 1998. On December 31, 1998, a reminder notice was sent encouraging congregations who had not yet responded to return their survey. By February 15, 1999, twenty-three surveys had been received. The survey was designed so that it could be completed by a study group or by an individual. It appeared that, in some instances where study groups completed a "group survey," individual members of study groups completed a survey as well. Because we did not ask for identifying information on the surveys, it is impossible to calculate a response rate for the study congregations. The data and conclusions presented below represent the 23 responses from 13 study groups with a total membership of 113 Lutherans and 109 Moravians plus 10 individual responses (five from a pastor and five from a lay member) were received. The responses provide an understanding of how some ELCA leaders and members, most studying the proposal with Moravians, evaluate the proposal, whether they think the agreement should be entered into by the ELCA, and how the agreement could be implemented if it were approved.

The responses to the question "Do you think the ELCA should enter into the agreement with the Moravian Church in America contained in the report *Following Our Shepherd to Full Communion?*" were very positive. Twenty-one (91%) said "Yes" and two (9%) said "Not Sure." No one said "No." When asked to explain why or why not, the comments were equally positive.

Chart 1. Do You Think the ELCA Should Enter into the Agreement with the Moravian Church in America?



Examples are: “Give me one good reason why not,” “More alike than different,” or “We are in sufficient agreement – one Lord/one faith – go for it!!” Several of the comments expressed appreciation for studying the report with a group of Moravians. “In every way, this was a marvelous experience of the Spirit at work!” Several indicated that they would continue to meet together. A full list of these comments is provided in the Appendix.

The last question was “Please describe ideas you have for how Lutherans and Moravians might ‘move into’ full communion if this agreement is approved.” Some respondents shared lists of what they were already doing. Others shared lists of ways they could work together. Common suggestions included ways they could worship together (i.e., occasional or special shared worship services), ways they could learn from one another (i.e., shared Bible study), ways they could combine efforts (i.e., shared confirmation retreats), ways they could become acquainted with one another (i.e., shared social events), ways they could work together for justice (i.e., joint community service projects). A full list of these suggestions is provided in the Appendix. These suggestions would be a valuable resource to any congregation looking for ways to work more closely with a Moravian congregation.

Overall, these respondents expressed strong support for the ELCA’s entering into the agreement with the Moravian Church in America contained in the report *Following Our Shepherd to Full Communion*. Respondents indicated that they saw few differences between the denominations and felt that the witness to the world of both churches would be strengthened by the agreement. The respondents shared many ideas describing how they are already living out a close relationship with Moravian congregations and members and how this relationship might be “moved into” more fully where congregations have not established a close relationship.

Appendix

A verbatim listing of all written comments and suggestions.

Question 2. Do you think the ELCA should enter into the agreement with the Moravian Church in America contained in the report *Following Our Shepherd to Full Communion*?

Having read “Following Our Shepherd to Full Communion,” which I thought was very well thought out and written, and having just attended (January 16, 1999) a joint workshop with many members and pastors of both churches, I would enthusiastically support the agreement. Both churches need it. It will enhance our mission as we complement one another.

We have discovered in our meetings that this has provided: (a) spiritual growth, (b) witness to the community, (c) we are all part of the body of Christ, (d) faith in action, (e) as a group we feel called by God to do this, (f) our differences are much less than our similarities. Complementaries helped us see how we need each other.

There is some real difference in the full communion that will need more searching of more and discussion of the same to come to full agreement.

Both churches recognize the holy, Catholic and apostolic faith. Both recognize each other’s baptism and Eucharists, and extend sacramental hospitality to one another’s members.

After seven meetings together we were struck by our similarities and “complementaries.” It was general consensus that the real question was why we shouldn’t be in full communion with the Moravians. This experience of study and discussion with the fine folks from **** Moravian Church was an experience that both informed us and left us with a deepened faith. Both groups at our concluding session indicated that they regretted that we would not be continuing to meet on such a regular basis. In every way, this was a marvelous experience of the Spirit at work!

We are in sufficient agreement – one Lord/one faith – go for it!!

The Moravian Church has always been a unifying force within the Church catholic. Lutherans can benefit significantly from emphasis in the Moravian Church on what unifies as opposed to what separates us as Christ’s body, and the ELCA will benefit from the mission consciousness of the Moravian church. The Moravians will benefit from the Lutheran attention to doctrine, and maybe be a mitigating presence when Lutherans argue over doctrinal issues of no real consequence.

(1) Implementation of this agreement will, obviously, occur on the congregational level. A concern rests with congregations being willing and open to allow for interaction and involvement between Lutherans and Moravians at various levels. (2) Have a strong concern that we not lose our theology, identity, or tradition, that we remain true to who we are, especially in relation to the Sacraments. While both Lutherans and Moravians understand Baptism and Communion to be essential for the Church, there is an obvious different understanding of the Real Presence. (3) By entering into this agreement we witness to a post-Christian era world regarding the unity that can exist within the Church while accepting the diversity that exists.

We have much in common and it can only help to spread the Gospel of our Lord and Savior.

(1) Commonality of background, historically and theologically, (2) conservatist Biblically and theologically, (3) can accomplish more together, (4) would strengthen both congregations, (5) would help in the public conception of a unified Church.

I feel the statement “Likewise, for the historical and geographical reasons rather than for theological causes, we have diverged from each other” sums it up.

This group came to the consensus that we are called to unity in Christ. Theologically and psychologically there is a unity in place, and we are looking to put that unity into a practical expression. The body of Christ will be stronger for our witness through full communion.

The Christian churches must unite and be vocal in the fight against the devil. The silent majority must join forces to return the USA/world to morality, honesty, and especially trust in God.

We are more alike than different. This was a good time of discussion and we came to the conclusion that we are from the same root system.

Give me one good reason why not.

More alike than different.

We are all children of God and should act like it.

While there exist differences between the Lutheran and Moravian congregations, I believe those differences to have origin based on tradition, semantics, and possibly aesthetics. We inherit partnership in the same Reformation, share the same doctrine, which is theologically grounded, and this initiative I believe to be mandated by Christ Himself (John 17:21).

Our group believed it made sense to enter into a full-communion relationship with the Moravian church. Based on the report “Following Our Shepherd to full Communion,” the participants felt there were many significant areas of agreement between the churches. Areas of difference were mainly a matter of emphasis while there was basic agreement on what mattered most. Based on the reading, we felt the churches could have been in full communion a long time ago, except for distrust that was based mainly on the personalities of the leaders and also between people that came from different ethnic backgrounds. Our only note of caution: Most of what we knew about history and theology came from the “Following Our Shepherd” document. Participants sensed that the authors of this document were bending over backwards to emphasize the areas of agreement while at the same time minimizing the issues on which there is disagreement. We would have liked to hear the case against full communion so we could make a more informed decision.

We recommend “full communion.” In the course of the weeks together, we grew to realize how very much we have in common – and how helpful shared endeavors would be in the ongoing life

and mission of each church body. We felt that fellowship is a must . . . that we must crawl before we can walk and that announcing full communion without fellowship beforehand may result in defensiveness or apathy among congregational members. The ideal is the completion of “full communion” without intimidation by either church body over the other, or church hierarchy over the congregation. In our group we expanded the study, including two 30-minute videos, one on Luther and one on Hus, from a set called Reformation Overview. That was very helpful. We also felt the study book was not for laypersons and it was underwhelmingly appreciated. Difficult to understand, containing words that couldn’t be looked up in a household dictionary, it gave an impression of pretentiousness to both sides . . . and was thus more offensive than helpful. (See Appendix A attached for a tongue-in-cheek reaction . . . Our report to you “as our study book was written.” Actual text of Appendix A is: *Our dialogical assembly entrusted with both theological and sociological wishes to place on record, formal or official, our reflections as to contributory credit or discredit concerning the intelligibility of the documentary considerations under study by the twenty representatives thereby chosen from our respective communions. Our informal shared consensus without disagreement concluded that the erudite presentations benefit only scholars who write for their own self-aggrandizement and have little relevance to “the people in the pew.” As “the people in the pew” we couldn’t understand the report but we do fully appreciate each other and our conversations about each other and we continue, despite recent setbacks, to support the Green Bay Packers.*) One positive response to the book was that the theologians must have had to nit-pick to find those things that would keep us apart! Worshiping in each other’s church was a good experience (“Lutherans are like Catholics with those robes and stained-glass windows” . . . “Moravians are so plain and unadorned and take pride in it.”) We could see how elements of each could enhance the worship life of the other. The event did generate excitement for the future and the consensus of both congregations was overwhelmingly favorable.

We have so much in common. The differences are negligible.

At our meeting I sensed that the Moravians felt the absorption of the smaller into the larger and so loose their identity. Also, two Lutheran pastors described the Lord’s Supper in a way that bordered on transubstantiation that created a peculiar silence in the room. The “futurists” are telling us the days of centralization have passed and we are moving into an era of tribalism.

Moravian congregation (church) is one block from our church building. We already do lots of things together.

Question 3. Please describe ideas you have for how Lutherans and Moravians might “move into” full communion if this agreement is approved?

Churches located near one another could share a pastor in a situation where neither church could afford a full-time pastor of their own. We could incorporate some of the Moravian hymns into our worship - they can help us to sing and worship.

(1) a joint service project between the two congregations, (2) pulpit exchange, (3) hymn sings

with joint choirs one Sunday at each congregation.

(1) joint worship services, esp. festivals, (2) joint small group Bible studies and other educational opportunities, (3) shared youth activities, (4) cultural sharing, (5) pulpit exchange, (6) joint midweek or Saturday service.

(1) Easter dawn service, (2) Good Friday Tennebrae service, (3) teach Sunday School classes on Lutherans (for Moravians) and Moravians (for Lutherans), (4) joint Epiphany service, (5) Pan Lutheran-Moravian exposure: acquaint more Lutheran congregations with our study and its findings, (6) joint community service, (7) joint Vacation Bible School, (8) combined worship/experience with campus ministry students, (9) written information for others describing our two religious traditions, (10) joint choir event, (11) joint service to celebrate full communion, (12) joint committee (an outgrowth of the dialogue group) to coordinate ongoing relationship, (13) learning materials exchange, (14) Gemeinschaft (see if there is any Lutheran interest), (15) Love feast, (16) joint women's group gathering, (17) joint youth activities (including confirmation activities), (18) exchange newsletters, (19) teach star-making, (20) church magazine exchange, (21) joint activities for Day Spring and Prime Timers.

(1) combined choirs for particular events and choir exchanges, (2) shared social events, (3) covered dish meals and fellowship times, (4) pulpit exchange, (5) intentional use of Lutheran and/or Moravian hymns during worship, (6) remember the congregation in prayer, (7) combined youth group events, (8) sharing newsletters and articles for newsletters, (9) Week of Christian Unity worship services together, (10) participating in special worship services such as Reformation Sunday, (11) helping with VBS at the other congregation, (12) scout troop sharing events.

(1) Sharing of bell choir and vocal choirs, (2) pulpit exchange, (3) community service projects together, (4) combined Catechism retreats and youth fellowships, (5) other fellowship events.

(1) share more worship services together, (2) have Bible studies together, (3) have your groups together, (4) joint Bible school.

(1) exchange information in congregational newsletters, (2) seek opportunities to celebrate pulpit exchange and communion, (3) after passage by assembly, plan an area wide celebration, (4) after passage by assembly, share educational opportunities for lay leaders, (5) share common social ministries: crop walk, food pantry, clergy round table, *** women's center, Bread and Roses (a community dinner)

(1) joint (occasional) worship, (2) joint Bible studies, (3) joint protest against R&X rated movies, move PG to G movies by removing inappropriateness, (4) awareness of other Christian faiths, (5) joint resources and labor forces on community projects.

We already do several things together. All present at this session were in total agreement with this move toward full communion.

By having joint services occasionally.

With extreme caution to avoid any possible interpretations of the motive of this effort to be proselytical, it appears to the writer that this alliance could be an outreach long-range, to the community. Identity: (1) Christ-Centered, (2) interdenominational, (3) an interfaith coalition to instill Christian values in our children, beginning in their homes, with parents as teachers. Parents who feel inadequate to this task can be offered seminars, with guidance materials, at no charge, plus the needed encouragement to perform. This is all very general, but I have ideas about specific elements of this corporate endeavor which could be fine-tuned, abandoned in favor of better action, or expanded on. Attitudes to avoid: “Here am I, Send Aaron.”

In our discussions, we listed areas in which we already participate in ministry with our local Moravian Church. We were amazed to find that the list is quite lengthy. In a sense, we felt that we have been in communion with the local Moravian Church here for quite some time. (Just a few examples from a much longer list: our pastors are on-call for emergencies when the other is on vacation. We have done pulpit exchanges. We run a joint summer Vacation Bible School which alternates its location between the churches. We do joint Thanksgiving, Good Friday, and Lenten services.) We made plans to participate with each other in a few specific projects in the coming year. In the future, we will keep the other church in mind as we provide opportunities. If we have a handful of people who would like to do a Bible study, for example, we will extend an invitation to the membership of the Moravian Church. They may be able to provide enough additional participants to make the effort worthwhile.

Our group brain stormed on ideas and came up with over 30. In regard to our “crawl before we walk” emphasis, the first steps would be symbolic or fellowship-oriented, or simply sharing information. Among these would be advertising events such as bazaars and bake sales, and Bible studies and inviting participation by the other church’s members. Making each other’s libraries available, including videos, maps, etc. would be helpful. Shared charities and social projects, and social events (trips, etc.) And cooperative sports teams in local leagues could be helpful. On a higher level would be a combination worship/picnic in a park or by closing off a street, or exchanging communion vessels as a symbol of “full communion” in each church. Having a course for those interested as mutual education about each other could be done. Exchange of choirs at worship, or music, or shared soloists could enhance worship life. Exchanging ministers, or having a joint communion service, or joint youth events, even confirmation experiences might be helpful. Among other ideas was quilting together, a shared Vacation Bible School, developing a Bumper Sticker for celebrating a new kind of unity, or producing a cookbook with the best recipes of each church included. Joint fund-raisers for a shared objective was also suggested. The ideas flowed. Encouraging “buy-in” by other congregational members seems to be the immediate challenge. Without that - all the rest fades away and “full communion” will be a symbolic and bureaucratic reality only.

Pulpit swaps, joint services, teaching each others Sunday School classes so we can learn more about each other.

“Move into” is probably not a good choice of words to relieve fears of moving too far too fast. It

betrays personal agendas. A better, more helpful, attitude - “How Moravians and Lutherans might let the Holy Spirit lead us into a fuller communion.” Not “move into,” but “let it happen.”

In our area this is pretty much a reality already!