

## **Resolution #34 - Conferential Government Definition**

**Subject: Conferential Government Definition**

**From: Provincial Development Ministry Group**

**WHEREAS**, it has often been asserted that the Moravian Church works under a 'conferential government';

**WHEREAS**, there is no standard definition of 'conferential government' in official Moravian documents;

**WHEREAS**, the lack of definition on 'conferential government' can confuse laity and clergy alike; and

**WHEREAS**, in recent years there has been conflict over the nature of Moravian polity and government; therefore be it

**RESOLVED, That** PEC draft a statement defining conferential government to be submitted to the Southern Province at the next synod and if adopted submitted to the Unity Board for approval; and

**RESOLVED, That** the following discussion points be offered to the PEC as a resource for formulating such a statement:

Conferential government means that

- ?? " the provincial administration works with congregational leaders and in accordance with the will of Christ as understood by Synod;
- ?? " the decision-making process in the Province should be transparent and subject to review by congregational leaders, except in the case of personnel decisions that mandate confidentiality;
- ?? " PEC works in consultation with congregational boards and pastors rather than ruling arbitrarily;
- ?? " clergy in the Moravian Church serve under the supervision of the Province rather than as independent agents;
- ?? " decisions in the Moravian Church are made after careful discussion with all parties affected and with a concern for the health of the Province as a whole.
- ?? " And since we are in a continual search for sound doctrine and the will of God, that provision be made for pastors and congregations to initiate the conferential process when the perception is that Synod's understanding of God's will is incomplete.

## **Background Material on Moravian Ecclesiology**

Confederal government has been a key aspect of the Moravian Church (Unitas Fratrum) since its founding. The Moravian Church has always been governed by a conference of church leaders rather than a single head. Christ, rather than a mere mortal, is Chief Elder of the Unitas Fratrum, but the Unitas Fratrum has always appointed individuals to govern the church in accordance with the will of Christ. The Moravian Church's system of government is neither congregationalist, nor presbyterian, nor episcopalian, but a unique combination of the three. Unity Synod functions as the executive body of the Unitas Fratrum, and provinces are governed by Provincial Elders Conferences (PEC) rather than provincial presidents or bishops.

PEC is elected by provincial synod and meets regularly until the next synod to make decisions relative to the life of the Province. The president of the PEC of the Southern Province is elected by synod and functions as the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of the province although that title is not used. PEC and the president are bound by the *Book of Order* of the province, which is an expression of the will of synod. The *Book of Order* can only be amended by action of synod. PEC has no authority to act contrary to the *Book of Order* or to ignore provisions of the *Book of Order*, but it does have the authority to call a special Synod if a circumstance arises that calls for a decision that may seem contrary to the *Book of Order*. Unity Synod has the duty to guarantee that a provincial *Book of Order* is in conformity with the *Church Order of the Unitas Fratrum* and the *Ground of the Unity*.

It is the task of the PEC to make sure that all congregations are guided by the *Book of Order* and that every congregation is a living witness to the gospel as presented in the *Covenant for Christian Living* and the *Ground of the Unity*. To that end, PEC supervises the preparation and ordination of Moravian ministers, conducts regular reviews of pastors and congregations, and works actively with congregational boards when problems occur or a change of pastoral leadership is required. In short, PEC works in conference with local boards and pastors rather than arbitrarily.

Any decision of PEC may be reviewed by a synod. At each synod the PEC and the other boards and agencies of the Province report on their work since the previous synod. This report will include evidence of compliance with a synod's mandates; concrete data regarding finances and services rendered to the province; frank discussion of short-comings; and plans for future ministries. The President of PEC and heads of the reporting agencies are expected to answer questions by synod about their work.