

Unity Statutes of 1464

Moravian Archives

457 S. Church Street

Winston-Salem, North Carolina 27101

www.MoravianArchives.org

Unity Statutes of 1464

Historical Introduction

Unity Statutes of 1464 is the oldest surviving statement of faith and order of the Ancient Unitas Fratrum, also known as the Unity, the oldest organized church of Protestant Christianity. The Unity had not yet established a formal priesthood; that came in 1467. But already the *Statutes* clearly outlined the Brethren's life in Christ through faith, love, hope. In addition they stress a Christian life as the fruits of faith.

This copy of the *Statutes of 1464* is adapted from Bishop Edmund de Schweinitz's *History of the Church Known as the Unitas Fratrum*, (2nd (reprint) ed., Bethlehem, Pa.: Moravian Publication Concern, 1901), 122-26. Schweinitz gives this account of the *Statutes*: Lissa Folios, 5, no. 17. A German translation is given in Reichel's *Geschichte*, Appendix I, also in Cröger, 1:66-71; Benham in his *Notes on the Origin and Episcopate of the Bohemian Brethren*, Chapt. 5, 38, furnishes an English translation, which Schweinitz adopted.

C. Daniel Crews, Archivist
Moravian Church in America, Southern Province
Winston-Salem, North Carolina
May 2008

Unity Statutes of 1464

STATUTES

AGREED UPON BY THE BRETHREN

IN THE MOUNTAINS OF RYCHNOV (REICHENAU), 1464.

DELIVERED TO THE ELDERS.

We are, above all, agreed on the following points:

To continue, through grace, sound in the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ; to be established in the righteousness which is of God, to maintain the bond of love among each other, and to have our hope in the living God. We will show this both in word and deed, assist each other in the spirit of love, live honestly, study to be humble, quiet, meek, sober, and patient, and thus testify to others that we have in truth a sound faith, genuine love, and a sure and certain hope.

We are moreover agreed, all and each to show willing obedience in all things, as the inspired Scriptures of our Lord exhort us to do; each is to accept in the spirit of mutual good will, instruction, warning, exhortation, and reproof from his brother, and withal he will maintain the covenant into which we have entered with God and His Holy Spirit, through our Lord Jesus Christ.

We are unanimously agreed, mutually to strengthen each other, according to our several abilities in the truth, which by the grace of God we confess, and to undertake and execute with cheerfulness whatever may be deemed useful to our edification and spiritual welfare.

We will, above all, observe Christian obedience, acknowledge our faults and shortcomings, humble ourselves, and be subject one to another; we will have the fear of God before our eyes when we are exhorted and reproofed, try to amend our ways and confess our sins before God and man. If anyone should be unwilling to abide by the rules and prove unfaithful to the covenant made with God, and faithful Christian brethren, we must declare, though with deep regret, that we cannot assure such a one of his salvation; but on the other hand, it may

possibly become necessary to exclude him from our church-fellowship. And if anyone is excluded from our communion on account of some grievous transgression or glaring error in doctrine, we cannot re-admit him until he has entirely cleared himself, and given manifest proofs of a changed conduct.

We further agree, that each one abide faithful in his calling, and have a good conscience in all things, according to the apostolic exhortations. The priests and teachers should, in particular, set a good example to others, and in word and deed demean themselves so that they may escape all blame and just reproof. Those who, of their own accord, have renounced their claims upon their personal estates for the good of the Church, should faithfully adhere to their engagement, and not urge any private or personal claims upon their estates, monies, or other property, but follow the example of the primitive Christians, willingly submitting to have all things common, as it is written: "They had all things common, and parted to all men as every man had need" [Acts 2:44-45]. This is a very praiseworthy and reasonable thing, especially from those who become the messengers of the churches, in order that they may learn while discharging the duties of their office to be content with a moderate diet and decent clothing, leaving all the rest to the Lord who cares for them. They ought, therefore, to abstain from all extravagance, and be content with the support which the stewards of the common fund are able to allow them.

Moreover, it is necessary that the priests and teachers should be freed from all care regarding their temporal support, to enable them to devote their whole attention to the spiritual duties of their office. They must patiently bear whatever Divine providence may appoint for them — distress, hunger, cold, persecution, imprisonment, and even death itself, after the example of the early Christians, who were wholly devoted to God — they must surrender themselves entirely to His government, which they must patiently follow, and leave the world.

Whoever possesses this world's goods should remember the poor, and freely communicate [share or impart] according to the word of God; work with his own hands, and do what is just and right. They ought only to trade with heavenly goods and treasures, preach the word of God, teach their dear neighbors and pray for them, that the Lord may grant them grace to grow and increase more and more in their spiritual lives.

Priests and teachers may, however, engage in domestic labors in their leisure hours. Whatever they can spare from their own necessary expenses they should spend in remembering the poor; but if they suffer want they are to be supported, with the consent of their brethren, from the general fund; yet care should always be taken to avoid giving offense, or causing disharmony and contention.

The same rule obtains among brethren and sisters who are engaged in handicraft business, or hire themselves out for labor in order to secure a decent support and maintenance. Whoever goes on errands, or is employed to do a

certain work, shall be paid a fair remuneration for his labor, unless he can and will do it gratuitously for the benefit of the congregation.

Orphans and minors must show at all times due obedience to the superintendents and elders of the congregation who have charge of them, and do nothing without their counsel or advice and consent.

Servants are bound to obey their masters in all things, for they are their nursing-fathers, counselors and supporters, who care for them both in health and sickness.

The sisters who are in service stand in the same relation, and are under the same obligations to their mistresses. Indeed all are expected to demean themselves as it becometh Christians, in order to walk blamelessly before God, and to be useful and pleasant to their brethren and sisters, whose well-meant counsels and directions they ought faithfully to follow, preserving a good conscience and purity of heart, walking in simplicity of mind, and always remembering that the eye of God penetrates their inmost thoughts. If they are thus walking in truth they may rejoice in sure and certain hope of salvation.

Every master and mistress of a house must treat their servants with kindness, encourage them in everything that is pleasing to God, set them a good example in word and deed, and bear rule over them in the spirit of meekness, peace, and gentleness, coupled with a prudent exercise of forbearance such as becometh a Christian master.

We further agreed on certain points respecting our domestic relations to each other, certain rules were laid down in harmony with the word of God, regulating the mutual relationships between man and wife, and further as to how a husband is to behave toward his wife with all modesty, how to bring up his children well, how to superintend his servants and whole household, how to act toward his neighbor, and likewise how to regulate his conduct toward his superiors, magistrates, &c., that in all things the true spirit of the Divine law be obeyed.

Our people are to be supported to the best of our ability. Toward strangers and travelers we will exercise kind hospitality, more especially if the object of their journey be the furtherance of the Gospel. Whenever we see any of our brethren suffer want or otherwise in affliction, we will follow the example of the apostles and our early fathers in the faith, and communicate [share or impart] according to his need from the store which the Lord in His mercy has vouchsafed to us. For if all faithful Christians were united in love, and each one did study to bear the other's burden, the commandment of Christ would be fulfilled. Sympathizing love is the fullness of the Christian faith, promoting edification and spiritual life, and is the firmest and most enduring bond of human happiness. He that loveth not has denied the faith, and is worse than an infidel, and the Spirit of the Lord condemns him.

It was further agreed: We will receive with brotherly kindness a penitent soul and everyone who turns away from the world unto God, and assist them,

that they may come to the knowledge of the truth. Whoever he be he shall find everywhere a kind and hospitable reception. We will faithfully converse with him, give him advice and instruction, exhortations, and every needful warning, that he may be corrected and edified, and may grow in spirituality.

Concerning our external comforts, it was agreed: We will not needlessly change our place of residence, except it can be shown that we can be of greater and more extensive usefulness to the Church of God in the new place.

Neither will we change our servants needlessly, unless a master is convinced that a change would be beneficial for the spiritual well-being of his household, in which case he himself should suggest the means of facilitating it.

If any are persecuted and driven into exile on account of their faith, or if their property and possessions are taken away from them or burnt, we consider it our duty to receive and care for such.

The orphan, the widow, and the destitute, are to be regarded with peculiar compassion by the Brethren, and to be received in the name of Christ; the necessary support being provided for them in the spirit of charity.

The Brethren will inquire after all devoted and faithful servants of God who may be in want and distress, and assist them to the best of their ability.

Whenever any sum is paid from the general fund of the congregations of the Brethren for charitable purposes, the treasurer is to keep a faithful and correct account of it, and procure a receipt for it from the party to whom it is paid. Hereby every suspicion, every false report and hurtful understanding are prevented, and love and harmony preserved in the congregations.

In general [i.e., throughout or at all times], the Brethren should seek their resting-place in the Lord, and guard against the dazzling and vaunting seductions of the world. The tempting exterior of worldly-mindedness, the subtlety and secret malice of its prevailing wicked spirit, which continually endeavors to overcome Christian simplicity of heart by its flattering delusions, are very dangerous rocks for a faithful soul. The spirit of this world pursues only selfish objects, and promising to its dupe temporary advantages, which often are not attainable, it can do no more after all than deceive; from which spirit may God in mercy preserve us.

All this is contained in the Holy Scriptures, and therefore we are bound faithfully to adhere to it.

Regarding our earthly appointed rulers, we consider ourselves bound to show them due obedience, to follow their wise counsels, to be subject to them with all humility, to manifest loyalty in all things, and faithfulness toward them, and to pray unto God for them.

In the congregations we will preserve peace with all, cultivate brotherly harmony, and do all in our power to further the common well-being, and to maintain firmly the bond of brotherhood in and with and through our God. Thus our conscience will be preserved in the peace of God, and the blessings of the grace of God will at all times abound among us.