

A Memorabilia of 2008

A quick show of hands, please. How many are ready to say good-bye, good riddance to the year 2008? Imagine, Moravians — a whole Province of us — being unanimous about a “nonessential.”

But in truth, a brief survey of the Southern Province reveals a year filled with events and activities, as we carried out the work of the Savior in the world today. Numerous services, meetings, seminars, concerts, gatherings, and retreats dotted the calendar to the point that sometimes we had to choose between one event or another. And all that activity was taking place in just one small Christian denomination.

Not to slight any of them, but three events bear special notice. On April 10-12 the Province held its second modern-day Intersynodal Conference. More than 300 members of 49 churches and 17 Provincial agencies gathered at New Philadelphia for worship (of course), encouragement from Br. Wayne Burkette (reminding us of the “giftedness” of the Moravian Church), and “asset mapping” with numerous ideas for new mission projects as befitting the theme of the conference, “Congregations Moving in Mission.”

Moravian women delegates from around the world gathered in Herrnhut June 19-26 for an intensive consultation with the theme of “Valiant Women in a Violent World.” The power-packed week consisted of visits to cherished historic sites, lively fellowship, and study of women confronting and coping with violence both in biblical times and today.

Then in July the Western Tanzania Province held its first women’s conference, a bold step in a country not noted for equal status of women with men. Twelve women of North America’s Northern and Southern Provinces were guests of the conference, which was held in Tabora, western Tanzania, and reported on forming “bonds of sisterhood that will remain with us through the years.”

Both of these women’s conferences certainly give further emphasis to the calls of Unity and Southern Province Synods for “an environment for the well-being and equal moral and spiritual development of all persons.”

The heartbeat of the Moravian Church has been mission, following the command of our Master to “go ye” (Matt. 28:19), and this year has been no exception. Strike up a conversation with Br. Mark Ebert, volunteer director of the Board of World Mission, and you might — many did — find yourself winging your way to Nicaragua to saw wood and plant trees in the cleanup and recovery from last year’s hurricane Felix. Or driving down to southern Mississippi in continued efforts to repair the tremendous damage done by hurricane Katrina three years ago.

About 80 adults went on 14 different short-term mission teams to 15 countries, and were assisted by our Mission Society of the Moravian Church, South. In addition, the Mission Society supported 140 youth on short-term mission trips as part of the Young Partners in Mission program as well as 13 full-time missionary families who have dedicated their lives to witnessing and church planting worldwide. Truly the Moravian Church’s work stretches worldwide from Costa Rica to Labrador to Sierra Leone to South Africa to India. It even reaches our own “backyard” of mountain North Carolina with Laurel Ridge’s very popular and successful mission camp program.

Activity throughout the Province shows that ministry can be wherever we make it. Downtown Winston-Salem has one such ministry called “Come and Worship,” which is attracting young and not particularly church-affiliated people to participate in non-traditional worship in a coffee shop. Brn. Brad Bennett, Sam Gray, and David Guthrie are leading this exciting experiment.

Expanding on its work, Board of Christian Education enlarged its resource center and created a new children and family life room. The new “Gather Round” Sunday school curriculum was provided to churches. And work continued on creation of *Loving Hearts United*, a new Moravian family spiritual formation resource to be published next year.

While celebrating its 30th anniversary last August, Sunnyside Ministry saw an “exponential growth” in requests for assistance, with food provided to more than 7,500 and clothing to more than 3,400. For the year, more than \$500,000 in financial assistance will be given, and the medical clinic will tend more than 300 children. To

help serve such need Sunnyside Ministry has more than 120 dedicated volunteers. Sad to say, this is one ministry that is taxed to the limit when the economy turns sour. Keep Sunnyside Ministry in your thoughts, prayers, and giving plans of time and talent.

Elsewhere, Board of Evangelism and Home Missions oversaw the Senior Friends chapters of the Province, and a “Moravian Voices of Experience” older adult choir was organized in November. The parish nurse program has expanded over the past two years to 25, and funding is being arranged to hire a congregational nurse coordinator. Weeklong home mission opportunities are being planned for middle and high school students next summer, and we might soon see “mission blitz weekends.” In its capacity of overseeing new and emerging congregations, BEHM is assisting Holly Springs to explore new ways to reach out to its community. Cordero de Dios continued its successful food pantry ministry in the Waughtown area of Winston-Salem, with donations of food and money from many other congregations. And we now have nine Moravian fellowships including the newest, Mountain Laurel in Ashe County, which had its first Christmas service last December.

The Davis Center next to God’s Acre in Salem, housing the Moravian Music Foundation and Moravian Archives, was abuzz with music and history during the year. Amid concerts, lectures, and special events, the Music Foundation took time to launch the “Moravian Star Anthem Series,” its own publications of music from its collections. *Church Rejoice* will have you singing along with lower brass instruments in the latest Music Foundation CD. In addition, the Music Foundation received grants to begin converting its card catalog to the Internet, making its music resources known worldwide. At the Archives, it was a banner year of publications with three e-books debuting on the Archives web site, www.MoravianArchives.org, including the first ever English language translation of John Amos Comenius’s *Unum Necessarium*. In addition, the hard-cover *Faith, Love, Hope* is the first comprehensive history of the Ancient Unity in more than 100 years, and the *Around-the-World Moravian Unity Cookbook* gives us a tasty culinary tour of Moravian Church centers throughout the world.

It was a full year of service and ministry among the Southern Province congregations as well, starting with the first tick of 2008 with a new wrinkle for **Salem Congregation**. The Watchnight service, seeing out the old year and in the new, for the first time since 1800 was held at another member church than **Home Church**. **Trinity** was host with **Fries Memorial** as co-host, and the sanctuary was almost filled. Salem Congregation’s Watchnight this time will be at **Calvary**. Let’s see if we can pack the church again.

Two churches celebrated milestone anniversaries in 2008. **New Hope** in Newton observed its 25th. And celebrating its centennial was **First**, Greensboro. Reporting previous year’s statistics, 12 churches — no, 13 including **Oak Grove** — showed increases in 2007 in all three categories, confirmed communicants, total membership, and average worship attendance: **Prince of Peace**, **Little Church on the Lane**, **Leaksville**, **Kernersville**, **Enterprise**, **Raleigh**, **Advent**, **Cordero de Dios**, **Friedberg**, **Home**, **Union Cross**, **Mount Bethel**, and yes, Oak Grove.

Easter on March 23, 2008, missed the earliest it could be by one day, and though it came very early this year, the weather for it was near perfect, which made for a large attendance of about 8,000 for the Sunrise Service at **Salem**. The next time Easter falls on March 23 will be in the year 2228 when the Moravian Church will be celebrating its 800th anniversary that century.

During the summer teens and young adults had more than the experimental “Come and Worship” coffee-house services. The **Calvary** Café was open the fourth Friday through September for junior and senior highs to enjoy fellowship while listening to local bands. And **Hopewell** opened the Theology Café on Sunday evenings, designed for young adults as an outreach into the community.

“Invite a Friend” Sunday was October 19 throughout the Southern Province, and attendance statistics indicate it was a rousing success. If we make a regular practice of this we really will be our church’s best growth engine.

A number of churches were laying plans for the future with new or expanded facilities. **Clemmons** has quietly accumulated a new building fund of about \$1.7

million. **Olivet** set a goal for 2008 to “continue family life center feasibility study.” **Christ the King** began planning a larger worship room and more classrooms. **Hopewell** was studying a possible new fellowship hall. **Union Cross** began a capital campaign with an eye on three projects: purchase property adjacent to the old fire station, construct a new activities building, and renovation and expansion of fellowship hall.

And then in September the bottom fell out of America’s economy.

We are told it began with “sub-prime” mortgages going bad. That left some banks scrambling for cash. A few failed. Other banks refused to lend. Almost overnight the lending of money froze. It began to thaw only after rushed government bailouts and promises of billion in loans and other support. Among the fallen was Wachovia, a former homegrown banking institution. At one point that fateful September 29 shares of Wachovia stock could be had for 50 cents apiece. There was a certain amount of pride to see in national sports telecasts the name Wachovia, which August Gottlieb Spangenberg had given to the 100,000 acres the Moravian Church bought in North Carolina in 1753. Now that name, which was once sterling in the banking industry, will soon fade into memory.

America’s economic dive has set churches and Provincial agencies scrambling, forgoing expenses that can be put off or done without, trimming all but essentials from next year’s budget. Br. David Guthrie of BEHM aptly put it this way, that like all Provincial agencies BEHM “receives funding through the Provincial share from congregations and through income from investments. With the general downturn in the economy, our Board has worked through the challenges of continuing our ministries as effectively as possible in keeping with available resources.”

It was a presidential election year, and with it came all the hoopla, debate, and candidates’ commercials we have come to expect on such occasions. For the most part the two contenders kept their campaigns on a high level of courtesy. Then America went to the polls in November, and we did something extraordinary. We elected someone of African heritage to the highest office in the land. When the news reached Nairobi, Kenya, they were dancing in the streets. Whether we voted for Barack Obama or not, all America can feel a certain amount of pride in this remarkable event, not yet 150 years after the end of slavery and after the decades of struggle in the 20th century to dismantle segregation.

One more event took place in 2008 that should have profound effect on the Southern Province and its organization. The Provincial Synod of 2006 authorized a Task Force of Provincial Administration/Ministries to study the Province’s makeup and recommend how it can better serve the congregations and the Church as a whole. The task force faithfully set to work, and soon Provincial agencies found themselves answering such fundamental questions as When did you come into existence and why? (The oldest board below PEC is the Financial Board, which first met March 3, 1858, though the Archives has been carefully saving records since the Province began in 1753.)

Then last August 26 the task force presented its findings and recommendation to a special meeting of PEC. Several more meetings followed until PEC approved and endorsed the task force’s recommendation for a “new provincial ministries structure.” A Province-wide program of education for pastors, Provincial staff, and congregations will begin early in the new year. And PEC called for a Special Synod for next September 11-12 to consider adoption and implementation of the task force’s recommendation.

Soon, then, we shall have a peek at the proposed new-look Southern Province.

So 2008 may be a year we are all glad to see go, but it was also a year of great progress, triumph over prejudice, and laying a solid foundation for further work ahead. And we close this Memorabilia with this comforting note from **New Hope** in Newton: “Remember that Jesus is in charge. Then you can go about your business again.”

— Richard W. Starbuck
Moravian Archives
12/22/2008