

...BRIDGES... Number 6, 2009: "Moravian Love Feast"

by Joyce Michael for the ECCB's American Working Group & PC(USA)'s Czech Mission Network

Rather than leaving you with my words in this, my final BRIDGES, it seems fitting that I share a condensed and slightly-edited version of the audio-visual meditation that Dr. Charles Haeussner presented at the Moravian Love Feast that took place at Fox Chapel Presbyterian Church after he, his wife, Carol, and two close friends visited Prague in 2007. The length of this presentation means that this BRIDGES will consist of two pages, rather than one, but maybe you will permit me this excess just once. I trust that this presentation will inspire you to continue to find your own creative and lively ways of cultivating connections – of building bridges – between your church and the ECCB's faithful folks. If so, it will have fulfilled the purpose that I initially envisioned when I first began to write BRIDGES in late 2003.

Slide #1 (opening)

On this, the last Sunday of the year, we have come to celebrate our Christian heritage and the birth of Christ by sharing this Moravian Love Feast. During this time, we will demonstrate our love for God by expressing our love for one another as we share a simple meal together much as the early Christians did.

Slide #2 (Moravian Star)

As you look at the beautiful Moravian Star that hangs above the stage, marvel at its construction. How does one make such an intricate star? Traditionally, Moravian stars have many points—at least 26 or even more – which represent the star of Bethlehem that shone down upon the Christ Child's manger.

Slide #3 (Moravian Bows)

Moravian stars can also be made into decorative bows for packages by taking several strips of ribbon or narrow paper, folding them in half, and weaving them together. By adding additional strips and a few tucks and bends, the star is woven together, and a thing of beauty is created. This star is also a symbol of faith, insofar as the strips of paper represent various pieces of our Christian history, which are connected by God's word and are woven tightly together by the love of the people who share our faith. But some of you may be wondering: "Why a *Moravian* Love Feast?" To answer that question, we must look back and remember that our reformed heritage actually started in Moravia.

Slide #4 (Map of Moravia)

Here's a bit of history. Moravia is an area in central Europe that is located in the eastern part of the Czech Republic. It was in Moravia

and Bohemia, which forms the western part of the Czech lands, that the Protestant Reformation first began. Long before John Calvin, John Knox, and more than a hundred years before Martin Luther, Jan Hus began to call for reform.

Slide #5 (Jan Hus)

Hus was a priest and a professor at Charles University in Prague. In the late 1300s, he became concerned about matters of church discipline and practice. For instance, during the Lord's Supper, the bread was distributed to all Christians in good standing who wished to receive it, but the chalice was reserved solely for the priests. Hus denounced this restriction as being contrary to the Holy Scripture and the tradition of the early Church.

Slide #6 (Bethlehem Chapel)

Jan Hus preached at Bethlehem Chapel, where he declared that that communion should be served in "both kinds," i.e., using both the bread and the wine. Thus, the chalice became the symbol of his followers. This emphasis won Hus no favor with the Pope, and he was eventually banished from Prague.

Slide #7 (St. Martin in the Wall)

Communion in both kinds was first served by Hus' follower, Jakoubek ze Střiby, at the Church of St. Martin-in-the-Wall in 1414.

Slide #8 (Burned at the stake)

In 1415, Jan Hus was condemned by the Council of Constance and was burned at the stake. A pacifistic wing of his followers formed a Christian community known as the **Unity of the Brethren**, which settled in a remote Moravian village. After Catholic forces defeated Protestant troops at the Battle of

White Mountain in 1620, the Unity were persecuted relentlessly. In fact, during the ensuing Counter-reformation, Protestants living in Bohemia and Moravia either had to convert to Catholicism, flee their homeland, or practice their faith clandestinely.

Slide #9 (Prague Castle)

Jan Hus and his followers were a small group of reformers who dared to challenge the tremendous power of the empire and the Catholic Church. Compare the modest building where Hus preached with the might and grandeur of Prague Castle and St. Vitus Cathedral. Then, consider the manner in which the great faith and conviction of these early reformers influenced the German, Swiss, and Scottish reformers who followed them.

Slide #10 (Count Zinzendorf)

Eventually, a group of exiled Protestants from Moravia made their way to Germany and were given sanctuary on the estate of Count Nicholas Ludwig von Zinzendorf, a Lutheran nobleman. Soon, more Moravian Protestants came to this haven and formed a community called Herrnhut or the Lord's House.

Slide #11 (Herrnhut)

These Moravians envisioned taking the gospel to the far reaches of the earth, and in 1732, when their first emissaries were sent to the West Indies, the modern missionary movement began. Eventually, the Moravians sent missionaries out to every corner of the globe, including to in North American. Today, the Moravian Church has over 788,000 members, more than half of whom live in Africa.

This is our heritage, and these are our role models to remember and emulate. The Moravian Love Feast began in 1727 when Count Zinzendorf sent food to a group of Moravian Christians, so they could continue to talk about their spiritual blessings following communion. This act reminded Zinzendorf of the sharing of food and goods among the early Christians that is recorded in the second chapter of Acts. These Love Feasts became a custom in Moravian life and were introduced wherever new settlements and churches were founded. Soon other Protestant churches also adopted this custom of sharing and serving.

Slides #12, 13, 14, and 15

Weaving this history into our present and future is what this worship service is all about. Christ himself said that the greatest commandment is this: “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind....” And a second is like it: **‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’** (Matt 22:37-39)

In John 13, Jesus tells us: “I give you a new commandment, that you **love one another**. Just as I have loved you, you also should **love one another**. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you **love one another**.”

Likewise, I John says, “We love because God first loved us.... **Those who love God must love their brothers and sisters also.**”

And in Mark, Christ instructs us, “...whoever wishes to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wishes to be first among you must be slave of all. For **the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve.**” Thus, we must also serve our brothers and sisters in love. Loving one another means serving one another's needs.

Slide #16 (FCPC and the globe)

The Moravian Love Feast reminds us that our neighbors are everywhere throughout the world. Just as the Moravians developed a mission program, we are also called to go into the world proclaiming the love of Christ and serving in his name. *(At this point, Dr. Haussner showed several slides, which depicted Fox Chapel's mission involvements in the Czech Republic and Iraq.)*

Slide #28 (Moravian Love Feast)

The intention of the love feast should become an everyday reality. Although this practice started with Count Zinzendorf and the Moravian Brethren, it is known in all Christian circles today. The Moravian Love Feast teaches us about our past; inspires us in the present; and challenges us to serve others in the future. May each of us seek to fulfill Christ's command to love one another as we implement this Love Feast by making our love visible throughout the world. AMEN!