

herrnhuter

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**Advent 2024: 5 years
Geneva Moravian Fellowship**

Dear readers!

This magazine is intended as a brief introduction to the Geneva Moravian Fellowship as an ecumenical community for Christians in Geneva and also as a review of the first five years.

The Executive Committee of the Moravian Church in Switzerland is pleased to be able to present this magazine to you thanks to the work of the pastor in charge, Dr. Winelle Kirton Roberts. You are always welcome; for now, please enjoy reading,

Volker Schulz, Basel

Brief general information:

The Moravian Church, formally the *Unitas Fratrum* (Latin: «Unity of the Brethren») is one of the oldest Protestant denominations in Christianity. The roots of the Moravian Church are in the Bohemian Reformation of the 15th century, when followers of the reformer Jan Hus, who was executed in 1415, joined together in the East Bohemian town of Kunvald to form a Protestant community, the *Unitas Fratrum*, sixty years before Martin Luther's Reformation. Growing into the popular church in Bohemia in the first century, then persecuted for a long time, this church almost perished.

The name «Moravian» is derived from exiles who fled from Moravia to Saxony in 1722 to escape the Counter-Reformation, where the religious refugees were given a safe asylum on the land of Count Nikolaus Ludwig von Zinzendorf (1700-1760). They established the Christian community of Herrnhut.



Hence, it is known in German as the Herrnhuter Brüdergemeine. This community of life and faith, the Moravian Church, developed in the following years. In addition to the refugees from Bohemia and Moravia, the charisma of the place also attracted numerous members of other Christian denominations (mostly Reformed or Lutheran).

From 1732 onwards, missionaries travelled from Herrnhut all over the world to set signs of Christian charity, especially among the poor. The humble beginnings of work among slaves on sugar cane plantations in the Caribbean developed in the 20th century with the independence of mission areas into a worldwide network of independent provinces of the Moravian Church (*Unitas Fratrum*) on five continents.

Today there are about 1.4 million members of the Moravian Church. 80% of them are at home in the southern hemisphere. This worldwide church is organised on a synodal basis. Every seven years, representatives of the 25 Unity provinces and several Mission provinces meet for a synod to reflect together on the way of the church. The so-called provinces also have a synodal-presbyterial structure.

Moravians continue many of the same practices established in the 18th century, including placing a high value on a personal relationship to Christ, and piety, good works, music, ecumenism, evangelism, including the establishment of missions and in former times Christian pacifism.



The Moravian Church's emblem is the Lamb of God (Agnus Dei) with the flag of victory, surrounded by the Latin inscription «*Vicit agnus noster, eum sequamur*» (Our Lamb has conquered; let us follow Him).

The Moravians in Geneva in former days



It's still a miracle that there is an active fellowship of the Moravians in Geneva. This applies in particular when you look into the early days of the Moravian Church.

The most influential person in the beginnings of the Moravian movement in the 18th century, Count Nicolas Louis of Zinzendorf, came to Geneva in 1741. His stay with a large circle of disciples in Geneva meant not only that the Unitas Fratrum became well-known in the centre of Calvinism and the French-speaking parts of Switzerland, but also the strengthening of those that had banded together building for some years a society. When James Hutton, an English bookseller with a French-Swiss wife, came to Switzerland in 1756 for seven years, he succeeded in developing and expanding the



different societies (in Aarau, Basel, Bern, Genf, Lausanne, Zurich).

While the German-speaking societies continued to stabilize in the following period and still exist today in Basel, Bern and Zurich, the formal shape of societies in French-speaking Switzerland from the early days came to an end over the next few decades. Secessions of reformed congregations in Le Locle, La Chaux-de-Fonds and Peseux formed new societies in the 19th century, which disbanded again after a few decades due to the spiritual changes in the Reformed Church. Only the society in Peseux near Neuchâtel remained in existence until the second half of the 20th century.

A loose circle of friends remained in French-speaking Switzerland with individual members of the Moravian Church.



In 1766 the girls boarding school was built in Montmirail which lasted until 1988. This place, Montmirail, where in the early years they unsuccessfully tried to build a congregation for protestant refugees, became the central place for the Swiss Moravians. Even though a Protestant community Don Camillo now works there, Montmirail remains an important spiritual place for the Moravians.

VS



The (re-)start

When you ask yourself why the Moravians are working in Geneva in these days the answer is simple. First of all, by God's grace. Because he gave me the impulse to look for opportunities.



I am Winelle Kirton-Roberts, a native of Barbados and an ordained Moravian Pastor. Since 1993, I have worked in the Eastern West Indies Province as a Pastor, Superintendent and as a member of the Provincial Board (i.e. Church leadership). In August 2019, along with my daughter Tsalom, I relocated to Geneva, Switzerland, to rejoin my husband, Mikie Roberts, working there as a Programme Executive with the World Council of Churches (WCC).

At the time, I applied for many positions but without success. At a dinner one evening a colleague suggested that I should consider starting a Moravian work in Geneva. She said that it would be refreshing. It sounded like an impossible idea. But, after my husband and I prayed about it, we decided that we will give it a try.

I reached out to Bishop Volker Schulz and shared the idea with him. He agreed that it is a good idea to give it a try and pledged to give us as much support as he could have. I then met with the Provincial Board of the European Continental Province (ECP), in Herrnhut, Germany, and informed the Provincial Board of the EWIP. I

received the support of both Boards and I was then seconded to the ECP.

We set the date to begin the service for 1 December 2019. But the question was: Who will come? I made connections with persons with Moravian roots living in Geneva like Dieter and Heidi Gembicki, who were quite encouraging. I met with the Ambassador of Barbados who sent out an invitation to the Barbados diaspora. My husband spoke with some of his colleagues.

So the Geneva Moravian Fellowship (GMF) held its first service on the first Sunday in Advent, 1 December 2019, at the then Starling (now Hilton) Hotel. On this first meeting by God's grace, 17 people attended; it was an ecumenical and international group worshipping together under the theme 'God is with us.'



"COME AND WORSHIP!"

JOIN THE
MORAVIANS IN GENEVA
FOR OUR FIRST ADVENT SERVICE
SUNDAY DECEMBER 1, 2019
AT 3:00PM

Location:
STARLING HOTEL & CONFERENCE CENTER GENEVA
BEIJING ROOM
ROUTE FRANCOISE PEYROT,
3412 LE-GRAND-SACONNEX

Rev. Winelle Kirton-Roberts, PhD.
FOR FURTHER INFORMATION
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We were excited. Some were already active in Churches, and some said that they will return.

Soon, a more fitting place to worship was found. In January 2020, the GMF began to meet in the Open House at the Ecumenical centre. Bishop Volker came to visit the GMF in March and gave the first Communion to those who attended.



A barrier: the lockdown and its positive outcome

After that promising beginning, like all others, we had a lockdown, as the Covid 19 pandemic unfolded. But the pandemic helped us to connect more. We introduced more virtual services and Bible studies. This platform opened the doors to our ever-growing Global online connections ; it gave us a wider global community who have continued to join us.

After the lockdown, it took some time before persons were comfortable to come to Church in person.



A place is found

In July the GMF was blessed with the privilege to worship in the Temple du Petit-Saconnex. We were extended a cordial welcome there. It is an ideal location, and an opportunity to continue to foster strong ecumenical ties. This includes an annual bilingual Joint service and Holy Communion.

An simple structure is built

By the beginning of 2021, a Steering Committee, chaired by the Pastor, was established to offer guidance and provide support. The committee conceived the Vision and Mission Statements (printed below). It also set up several goals:

- To disciple believers through teaching the good news of Jesus Christ
- To support local and worldwide missions
- To become a spiritual home for the international community
- To establish a Moravian Society in Geneva
- To establish a dynamic music ministry

These goals were initially established and provide a motivation for the work. However, as the committee evaluates its work at the end of the year, specific goals are created.

Vision statement

A vibrant global Christian fellowship proclaiming God's Word, connecting diverse peoples, nurturing spiritual depth and supporting missions.

Mission statement

To be a Haven of Hope, a spiritual community of grace.

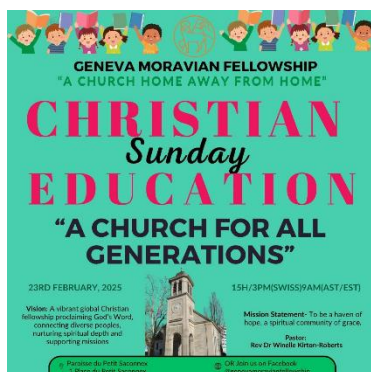
Different steps forward

In 2022, the GMF having received the endorsement by the Moravian Church in Switzerland to have two representatives at the biannual Assembly's meeting. The GMF participates in the regular activities in Switzerland and in the European Continental Province, including the annual Fête de Montmirail. As the pastoral needs have grown, we now have rented an office space here at the Church. Every Tuesday we offer pastoral counselling as a ministry to the community.

By 2023 with the pandemic behind us, we strengthened our connection with the international communities, especially the Permanent Missions and Embassies of the Caribbean region. This has facilitated national celebrations being hosted by the GMF.

In general, services are held twice a month on Sunday afternoon, 15 h. Over the years our numbers have steadily increased from an average of about 12 in 2021 to now we have an average of 35 in 2024. The nationalities of the persons who have worshipped more than once, has surpassed the number of 50. In the beginning of 2025 we have recent Sundays with more than 50 people attending.

This year also we launched a Sunday School which has 11 children from 6 families! We are excited about this opportunity.



There is a vibrant global online Bible study that is held on Wednesdays. It has a weekly attendance of 30. Our years have been dotted with many outdoor events including youth, men and women activities.



ECUMENICAL INSTITUTE
at CHÂTEAU DE BOSSEY

A very special connection

It was also in 2021 that the Dean of the Ecumenical Institute at Bossey visited the GMF and began to build a close connection between the ecumenical students and the Church. Since then, we have had a diverse group of ecumenical students who have actively participating in our services. Some have also attended the annual Fête de Montmirail, the central event of the Moravians in Switzerland at the first weekend in September.

So an important part of our ministry is this link to the Ecumenical Students at Bossey. Over the years, we have had participants from more than 30 countries in the world and from Protestant, Roman Catholic and Orthodox churches. They were from Asia: China, India, Indonesia, Myanmar, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, South Korea and Turkey; from Europe: Germany, Great Britain, Georgia, Greece, Romania, Sweden and Switzerland, and from Africa: Burundi, Cameroon, Ghana Kenya, Lesotho, Malawi, Nigeria and Rwanda. Also some have come from the Caribbean and United States.



The students have played music, read the scriptures, preached. Every year we have nine lessons and carols where they read in their own languages. We now send Daily Watchwords to Rwanda and Cameroon!

This year I was asked to join a pastoral team with two other pastors to accompany the ecumenical students. Once a month I will go and make myself available to them in case they need prayer or counselling.

Many of the students keep in touch with us after they have returned to their places.

Anniversary celebrations: joy about five years

It was with great excitement that we welcomed the 5th anniversary celebrations in 2024. There were three main events to mark the moment.

Sunday 1 December was the Anniversary service. The preacher was Rev. Prof. Dr. Jerry Pillay, General Secretary of WCC. The Geneva Gospel Choir sang three selections. It was a great service with a powerful and pointed message that set the tone for the week and provided a mandate for the Fellowship. There were greetings from Guyana and Jamaica missions. The reception in the hall was well received with delectable finger foods prepared by Vicki Blackman. The toasting to the anniversary and the cutting of the cake was a time of affirmation.

Wednesday 4 December 2024 was the Global Online Service. This was hosted using the Eastern West Indies Province zoom platform. The preacher was Bishop Michael Johnson of John Huss Moravian Church in New York. He gave an inspiring and encouraging message. The service included video clips of early attendees to the fellowship, past ecumenical students, global attendees and representatives from our two main outreach mission ministries: Albania and Myanmar. The attendance was more than 140.

Friday 6 December was the Anniversary Banquet at the Hilton Geneva Hotel and conference centre. What a phenomenal and elegant conclusion to the celebrations. The keynote presentation was given by Sis Roberta Hoey, Chairperson of the Moravian Unity Board. Greetings were also shared by Rev. Raimund Hertzsch, Chairman of the European Continental Province and Rev. Frieder Vollprecht, Pastor of Basel and Bern Moravian societies in Switzerland. The missions of Suriname, Barbados and OECS conveyed greetings. A moving presentation of the spiritual impact of the GMF was done by Peter Welch. There was also a well-received praise dance by the GMF praise dances. It was a most memorable evening.

The following are portions of the sermons and speeches in these days of anniversary celebration.

Anniversary sermons and keynote



Sermon «For a time, such as this»

Rev Prof Dr Jerry Pillay, General Secretary, WCC

At December 1, 2024

Scripture Readings: Esther 4:12- 15 Mark 4:35-41

I take this opportunity to congratulate you on your 5th anniversary since the establishment of this congregation. May God continue to bless and prosper your work here in this part of the vineyard and within the Moravian Church. As one who usually finds it difficult to sleep on airplanes because I am so tall, I occasionally enjoy the luxury to travel in business class, it is only in there that I can get some sleep. I let go of all the cares and pressures and demands as I stretch out on my back, and drift off for a bit into a blissful, careless oblivion until I am disturbed by turbulence or the call to fasten your seatbelts. So, I am glad to see that Jesus, at least by Mark's account in the gospel today, approves of naps and is even a bit testy when he is interrupted! Still, I hope not to induce one in you as we reflect on our readings today.

Mark tells us Jesus is sleeping in the boat when there is a raging storm and waves breaking over the boat. Interestingly, Jesus is not disturbed by the storm but by his disciples with the accusation, «Teacher, don't you care if we drown?» Today the

world around us is raging in multiple storms: poverty, hunger, racism, violence, wars, a climate catastrophe, migration and the list goes on. We sometimes wonder why Jesus is asleep amidst these storms. Can't you get up and do something and do it quick?

We are destroying the world, people and planet are at risk. Floods, fires and disasters are destroying lives and environment. Political leaders seem to support war and violence. Church leaders are confused about whom they should follow, and we wonder how it will all end.

Jesus stands in the middle of our storms, and he says: follow me and I will see you through. Our storms in life whether spiritual, material, physical, emotional and psychological all find their peace, hope and calm in Christ. Christ is our spiritual compass when we are lost, confused and thrown into a state of panic and desperation as the disciples were at that moment. We are told that Jesus got up and rebuked the wind and it was completely calm.

There are some important lessons to learn from our readings today. 1. Jesus is in the boat: Have faith. When we are facing trials, tribulations and persecutions it is easy to think God is not with us. We are alone. When we are going through bouts of darkness, depression and despair it is natural to feel abandoned and forsaken by God. It is easy to accuse God of not caring, lacking compassion and being absent when we need him most. As a pastor I have heard people say this many times in their personal struggles through divorce, death, financial crises, sickness and suffering. As General Secretary of the World Council of Churches, I hear critical questions and reflections about injustices, sufferings and pain in the world, and the question: where is God amid all these? Where is God when thousands of people are killed in Palestine, Ukraine, Sudan and other parts of the world? Where is God when thousands of people go to bed hungry every night? Where is God when thousands of people are denied access to humanitarian aid? Where is God when hundreds of migrants drown or die while fleeing their countries? Where is God when human rights and dignity are denied, deprived and violated? Where is God when indigenous people are denied of their rights, land and history? Where is God when old people are forgotten, and young people

not given space to express themselves? Where is God?

Although not explicit in the text, I think Esther must have asked the same question as she faced the destruction of her Jewish people. The Jews here are about to be wiped out and destroyed. Well, this is the biblical Israel, the modern Israel is doing the opposite trying to destroy other nations. Esther is called to live out her faith as she is requested by Mordecai to plead on behalf of the Israelites to be spared. Esther, herself a Jew, hid her nationality from the king and became the Queen. Now all will be revealed and death to her was inevitable. Mordecai tells her that God placed her in that royal position for a time such as this. Now she must use her royal position to plead with the king to save her people.

Esther might have been going through a faith crisis as she wondered what she must do. Should I or should I not? What if it backfires? What if it cost me my life or future? Esther struggled with these questions. We all do. But we must learn to listen to and for the voice of God.

It seems like Jesus is sleeping when the world around us is in turbulence. Maybe the church is asleep, but Jesus is not. Mark tells us that Jesus is in the boat. He is with us in rough and tough times. We are not alone, never alone. He is always with us even when it does not feel that way sometimes. Once I visited one of the ministers in my church who was hospitalised suffering with depression and burn out. I said John, where are you spiritually now, in faith and hope? He responded, «Jerry, I know Jesus is here in this room, he is seated on that chair, but I need to feel Him in me, I'm not there yet.» I guess, we all feel that way sometimes. The disciples felt that in that storm that day. Jesus got up and stilled the storm and he said to the disciples, «Why are you afraid? Do you still have faith?»

These are the questions Jesus poses to us in our storms in life. Do you still have faith? What kind of person can sleep through a storm violent enough to swamp the boat and frighten experienced seamen? Or can command the winds to still and the seas to calm? As Jesus himself tells them, it is a person of faith. We find in Jesus one so close to God, so beloved of God, so trusting of God, as to banish fear and engender courage equal to the

elements. With Jesus, and through him, we too have access to such faith.

It is not primarily a matter of beliefs, precious though they be. Nor is faith a question of affiliation with and allegiance to a church or denomination or confession, however important. Nor is it a matter of keeping the Sabbath or following other religious practices and laws, as Jesus himself argued in this reading from Mark. No, faith is falling in love with God, trusting God and God's compassion with our lives and destiny. Despite suffering, tragedy, and even death, we affirm with gratitude God's gift of life, and we work tirelessly to protect, support, and nurture it.

This steadfast commitment, or self-surrender, to God's love, revealed in Christ, frees us from our wants and fears, our comforts and delusions, and enables us to face reality, heal from trauma, and make ourselves available to others. It sets us on a journey of risk as it did Esther but gives us the assurance that only faith can give that assurance that all will be well. Of course, rough seas will come, winds will howl. As disciples, we huddle in our ships, hoping to make it to shore, with faith not so much in the outcome as in God's accompaniment.

Perhaps that is why the symbol of the ecumenical movement is a ship sailing on the waves, guided only by a mast in the shape of a cross, our sails trusting the winds of God's Spirit.



David trusted the presence of God when he faced his giant, Goliath. He said, «I come in the name of God.» And with his stones and sling he faced and overcame his giant. In this world we face many giants: poverty, sickness, death, hunger, migration, climate change, economic and gender injustices, personal struggles and pain but, and it is a big But, we are not alone. Jesus is in the boat. God is with us. He is with you right now, right in your storm taking you through. He says, «Have faith.»

Do you? Who are we as Christians? Mark is telling us: we are disciples of Christ, eager but lost, unschooled in the ways of God, relying on Jesus to bolster our faith and rescue our imperilled craft

and our journey together. On land or sea, our pilgrimage of faith binds us together in deep communion as disciples of the one Lord. So, what is the task of the church in the midst of the storms?

The answer is: In times such as these have faith. The church is in the world but not of the world. Its task is to proclaim faith. Faith in a God who never abandons his people. Faith in God who left his throne to reside among us and with us in a turbulent world of pain and suffering. In this season of advent that is the message we get; have faith for Emmanuel God incarnate is with us forever. God is in control: Hold on to hope Esther did not know how it would all end for her, but she had a plan to reveal everything to the king and hoped that he would accept her and spare the Jews.

Sometimes hope is all that we must go on with. We cannot clearly see the end, but we hope that it would end well. In a sense Esther becomes the only hope for Israel. She must try and save the people of Israel. It's risky to speak to the king but she is Israel's hope. The Apostle Paul knows all about hope. He wrote to the Corinthians to stop their backsliding into pagan ways, to vindicate his message and ministry, and to prepare them to find salvation in their upcoming afflictions and persecution. Paul recites all the hardships he has endured for their sake and the sake of the kingdom not to brag (though he can do that sometimes), but to bolster his credibility as an apostle, the late-arriving disciple of Jesus. His catalogue of woes is crowned with virtue, saying: As servants of God we have commended ourselves in every way: in great endurance, afflictions, hardships, calamities, beatings, imprisonments, riots, labors, sleepless nights, hunger; in purity, knowledge, patience, kindness, holiness of spirit, genuine love, truthful speech, and the power of God. (2 Cor 6:4-7)

This passage is a good example of the costs of discipleship. Like Paul, we gain real hope when we join the dying and rising Christ, who gave it all away on the cross, achieving vindication on the third day. Love and life will defeat suffering and death and the powers that deal death in the world. Christ's resurrection is ours as well, and his continued presence in the world – in us and our neighbours, in our shared life as a community,

in the Word and the Divine Liturgy — further strengthens our hope and ignites creativity for the redemption of the world. So, our faith is neither arbitrary nor naive. Nor is our hope some simple-minded optimism. Christ's triumph over death and his continued presence among us, bringing God's compassion: that is the basis for a hope we can embrace in ourselves and offer to the world. It changes everything!

In the words of this generation's ecumenical prophet of hope, the late Jürgen Moltmann, «Christian hope draws the promised future of God into the present day and prepares the present 5 day for this future. ...In light of our faith, as Christians we can honestly assess and face the full force of humanity's contemporary challenges yet also experience and instill a realistic hope of transcending them.» We can hold on to hope because we know that amidst all our storms, God is in control, God will calm the storms. For in Christ, God, the Father, holds all things together.

Even when things fall apart, they come together. Somehow Esther knew that, that hope gave her the courage to stand and be counted. To stand in the gap for her people even if it were to cost her own life. Augustine said that hope has twin sisters: anger and courage. Anger against evil and injustices in the world and the courage to do something about it. This is the mission of the church amidst turbulence, violence, wars and sufferings, destruction and death: To proclaim hope.

The Prophet Isaiah did this in chapter 9. He said there will be no more gloom for those in distress. For unto us a child is born, and he will uphold justice and righteousness. He will bring peace. The task of the church is to hold out hope in times such as these. It all does not end in darkness and despair. Christ is our hope. The church is called to proclaim hope. God is calling her to be God's prophetic voice in the world. It may be risky. She may lose her favour and fortune but it's a risk she must take. I see this today, how churches rather remain silent or complicit in her relationship with State. We are not called to be the people's dope to numb them out of reality but to be the sign of hope. To prophetically and boldly say Jesus is Lord and in him is our hope. Christians how are you holding out hope.



Advent is the season of hope: unto you this day is given a child, and he will be your hope. Advent is about waiting, praying, hoping and living in faith and action. It is not sleeping, resignation, or disbelief. It is living hope. Are you living hope? Serve God in love! We express faith and live hope as we proclaim God's love in the world.

Christmas is a season of festivities, parties, celebrations and love. Christmas speaks of God's love for the world. God loves us so much that he sent his only begotten son to save the world. Esther's love for Israel must be shown in times such as this. Perhaps that is why she is where she is. She is called to serve the people of Israel. Called to serve God. We are placed in unique and special places. Can we not see that we are there to serve God? Is God calling us to serve him there? Where is God calling us to show love, care, concern and compassion? God calls us to serve the poor, lost, forsaken, hungry and suffering people in the world.

Sometimes we are in places where we do not want to disturb our comforts and benefits but maybe we are there for such a time as this. A time to use our opportunities to serve God in humility as we serve others. As we demonstrate the love, mercy, kindness and goodness of God to the marginalised, oppressed and forsaken in the world.

But sometimes we are also in places where God does not want us to be. Places that cause us to sin or places where we are sinned against. We

need God's wisdom to know the difference and courage to get out of those situations. I believe that, as faith grounds our hope, so hope fuels our engagement in the world. Thus, we are called to serve God and the world in love and faithfulness. In the words of the WCC assembly theme in 2022, «Christ's love moves the world to reconciliation and unity.» I find compelling the ecumenical notion of transformative discipleship. It echoes Jesus' own practice and Paul's discovered insights. Transformative discipleship notes that the faith-led engagements by which we Christians change the world will also transform us. It impels a kind of ongoing conversion of ourselves and the world. This mutuality creates a spiral of transformation, an alternative, nonviolent future for us and our world. By making ourselves utterly available to address the needs around us, «we shall all be changed» (1 Cor 15:51).

In this way, I believe our communities of faith become bearers of hope and agents of reconciliation. We step up and out to be advocates for justice, makers of peace, counsellors of unity, catalysts for creative engagement at all levels. Following Jesus' example and his mandate, we are healing the wounded, caring for the afflicted and vulnerable, telling the truth about ourselves and our world. This way of life is embodied in the ecumenical Pilgrimage of Justice, Reconciliation, and Unity. Through it, you and all of us in the ecumenical fellowship pledge to pursue justice, reconciliation, and unity in concrete ways.



At the WCC, the Pilgrimage is a guiding light to all our work, an umbrella over all our programmatic efforts. Whether in ecumenical theology, international affairs, global health, or communications, we see the whole global ecumenical movement journeying toward justice, peace, and reconciliation.

Practically, that means pursuing human dignity, human rights, peace among peoples, and the health of the planet through deep engagement in

concrete activities and consequential partnerships. As Christians, and as Christian churches, our discipleship finds concrete expression in enhancing the human good. Likewise, for the larger society, including those not affiliated with the churches or those of other traditions, and all people of good will, our message is simple: Do not lose heart! Commit to life! In this way, we Christians can become the creative people that will not allow society to give up on hope or give up on itself, abandoning future generations and the planet.

As Paul himself said, «A little yeast leavens the whole batch of dough» (Gal 5:9). Jesus asked, «Where is your faith?» Do you still believe? Faith is action. It is joining with God to make a better world for all people and creation. The storms are raging but Christ our spiritual compass holds all things together. Esther discovered that God's got her back. She was saved. Her people were saved and evil and danger dispelled. God's got your back, too! And so, I urge you, my fellow disciples of the Lord, keep the faith, nurture hope, and serve in love. We, as Christians and Christian communities, need not fear the future but must embrace it. We are communities of hope and reconciliation because we know that the God of Life is continually sustaining, renewing, and transforming ourselves and all creation. Each moment presents us with redemptive possibilities for resurrection to new life and God's New Creation in Christ. We are a movement of hope in life. We are people of faith even in the middle of life's storms. We are people serving others in God's love. Does this describe you? For a time, such as this in which we face many global and local challenges, and as you celebrate your 5th anniversary as a church in Geneva, let us be reminded that God is calling the church to Proclaim Faith, hold out Hope and serve in Love. God is calling you and me to do this. The question is: will we listen to God? May in this advent time we wait and work for God's glory and the good of God's world. Esther listened to God and made a difference. May we listen to God and make a difference in our home, church and world.

Rev. Prof Dr Jerry Pillay

Sermon What a time – what a God!

Rt. Rev. Dr. Michael Johnson, John Hus Moravian Church New York, Bishop of the Moravian Church (North American Province)



December 4, 2024, Global Online Service

«Who knows? Perhaps you have come to royal dignity for just such a time as this. »

Esther 4:14

In saying thanks to Dr. Kirton-Roberts and the Fellowship for the invitation to share in your 5th Anniversary Service, I simultaneously bring greetings from my wife Carole, my extended family and the John Hus family in Brooklyn, NY along with that of the Bishops of the Northern Province and wider Moravian Unity.

We are grateful to God for your global and ecumenical ministry in these formative years and echo the words of Philippians 1:6: 'Being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus.'

I grew up near Christiana, Manchester, Jamaica, West Indies. During those early years the most significant incidents were 2 bank robberies in consecutive days. To a sleepy rural town that felt like the sky was falling.

Life then was easy going, crime was not a major issue and the ministry and focus of the church was largely the care of souls.

Moving to Kingston for training and again for pastoral leadership, the issues of crime, political violence, a failing health system, intolerably flawed judicial system, homelessness, hopelessness, foodlessness and general poverty were significant issues and opportunities for the church's engagement in a holistic ministry that values the social needs just as much as the soul.

Moving to the USA brought into the mix overt racism, sexism, matters of human sexuality, dehumanization, victimization, economic marginalization and manipulation.

We opted to elect for president a TV celebrity and business tycoon who seemed heavily invested in making the world a most unstable and unpredictable place.

And as if that was enough, there came the COVID pandemic as governments scrambled to respond with urgency in a highly uncertain environment. What seemed initially to be China's problem, soon became the world's. With borders closed, airports shut down, internal travel restrictions, curfews, food and all types of other shortages, compulsory mask wearing, and a scramble to create a fast tracked vaccine, it was a tough time.

I recall the sense of incredulity when our PEC President, issued a provincial edict closing all churches and allied institutions which felt so weird and unimaginable, especially as we were approaching Easter.



The Black Lives Matter protests in relation to the video recorded George Floyd's murder at the hands of the Police and other protest added to the drama.

At the global level there was growing nationalism, isolationism, anti-immigrant fervor, intentional misinformation and disinformation through social media, and the rise of white supremacy and a vicious uptick in scams and hacking.

And as if those were not enough, two significant proxy wars broke out and then came November 5 in the USA, as Americans voted for a new President and congress.

Already there are significant concerns about the geo-political landscape with its movement away

from traditional global alliances and treaties. What a time.

Even though the church is enmeshed in the challenges of the time it is still expected to be a source of consolation, accommodation and spiritual direction.

What a time - but I also say : What a God!

This perspective finds alignment with the theme of your celebration: «For such a time as this» based on Esther 4:14.

We are reminded by extension and application that the church must always be a force of relevance and hope no matter the time and place in which it finds itself.

People of faith and the church in general must conduct ourselves in ways that demonstrate a fervent understanding that there is no situation we can encounter for which our God does not have a working solution.

The Book of Esther is such a rich biblical resource that speaks to this very scenario relating to the providence of God especially relating to God's chosen people Israel, at a time of great fear and trepidation.

It weaves a fascinating narrative of a king, caught up in self-importance, lavish partying, and in a state of inebriation summoned his wife to inappropriately display herself in a public setting which she refused to do.

It includes Mordecai, a Jew who ended up in the royal palace but never forgot who he was. It tells of Haman who was intoxicated with power and weaved a web of legal snares aimed at retention of his power and complete annihilation of an entire people.

It spoke of a Jewish young woman, Esther who unwittingly benefitted from the outcome of the defiant queen Vashti's action and rose to be her replacement.

The narrative tells of a time to be silent when the secret of their race and religion was to be suppressed but it also tells of a time when boldness was required and a strong belief that God retains the capacity to provide a way out of the dire situation.

Mordecai became distraught when he heard of the plan to kill all Jews. But it is always good to

know that our present circumstance is only representative of a moment in time, and does not speak exclusively for God's plans for our lives.

He remained focused and was intrigued when Esther told of her intent of approaching the king uninvited.

Mordecai warned about assuming that her residence in the royal palace was an automatic life saver and suggested that it could be for just a predicament like this that she ascended to her current position.

With these chilling yet defiant words «If I die, I die.» she made her decision and called for a fast in which she would participate. She knew some things can only come about by prayer and fasting.

Having not made any previous request of the king she turned up uninvited and it worked in her favor because Xerxes was excited to see her and promised up to a half of the kingdom.

At this point she made her request that the King would spare both her and all her people. Yes, she revealed her identity when it mattered.

In the end Mordecai was also honored and promoted while Haman's end was horrible because that which he intended for the demise of the people he hated, became the very instrument of his own death.

The book of Esther shows the choice we make between seeing the hand of God in our circumstances in life, and seeing things as mere coincidence. God is the supreme ruler and God's plans will not be moved by the action of evil people.

So what a time - What a God!

We will never know everything about God because there will always be some element of mystery. In any case we need not know everything but of this we can be assured: God is able to do immeasurably more than we can ask or imagine.

Don Moen puts it this way: God will make a way when there seems to be no way, he works in ways we cannot see, he will make a way for me.

The church needs to find its voice and its feet, it needs to take the risks that are necessary to provide hope and encouragement for God's people.



At a time when nationalism and isolationism are feeding a growing anti-immigrant sentiment across the world, we need to be the home of the homeless, the hope of the hopeless and the voice of the voiceless.

To remain inactive is to invite the peril to our own doorsteps. I am reminded of a 1946 post-war confessional by a former Germany Navy Officer in response to the question: How could this be? It was addressing the rise of Nazism in Germany. The confessional was transformed by the German Lutheran pastor Martin Niemöller: «First they came for the Communists, and I didn't speak up, because I wasn't a Communist. Then they came for the Jews, and I didn't speak up, because I wasn't a Jew. Then they came for the Catholics, and I didn't speak up, because I was a Protestant. Then they came for me, and by that time there was no one left to speak up for me.»

The changing times might cause despair and fear. But fear is antithetical to faith and despair is the enemy of hope.

It is precisely at the times when we are completely bamboozled by how the world is spinning, that we should remember that God still moves in mysterious way his wonders to perform.

We need to believe that, prove that, live that and teach that.

God led you to the founding of this church for a reason and for a time like this. Starting and maintaining a new ministry is never easy but God is faithful and if you remain faithful I invite you to stand firm and see the salvation of our God.

Happy 5th anniversary.

What a time but what a God - Our God! Amen.

Michael Johnson, New York

Anniversary Keynote



Roberta Hoey, Chairperson of the Moravian Unity Board, London

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

It is a pleasure to join you this evening as we celebrate the fifth anniversary of this special Fellowship here in Geneva. I bring the greetings of my brothers and sisters, both in the British Province and the wider Unity.

The story of the Moravian Church has always been one of movement and mission. From its beginnings, Moravians have carried their faith with them wherever life has taken them. Whether in search of refuge, in response to a call, or through the realities of work and family, Moravians have planted the seeds of the Church in every place they have called home.

It was no different when Sister and Brother Roberts relocated from Antigua to Geneva. They brought not only their faith but also their love and commitment to the Church. I wish to commend their courage and dedication in answering God's call to establish a new Fellowship in a city with a rich history of ecumenical and global engagement. Tonight, we are in a position to celebrate the fruits of that labour.

The Geneva Moravian Fellowship stands as a modern testament to an enduring tradition. From Zinzendorf's visit to Geneva in 1757, through the faithful German and French diaspora, to the creation of this Fellowship in 2019, Moravians have consistently sought to embody the Gospel in diverse contexts. Geneva, a city known for its internationalism and commitment to dialogue, provides a fitting home for such a work. The initiative to establish the Geneva Moravian

Fellowship in 2019 reflects the heart of the Moravian movement: a Church that seeks to respond to God's call in the moment, in the place, and in the season it finds itself, committed to fostering Christian Unity.

As we celebrate this milestone, I am mindful of the broader context of the Moravian Unity. We held our Board meeting this year, where leaders from our 25 Unity Provinces and 8 Mission Provinces gathered under the theme:

«The Moravian Unity, Steadfast in Growth: Upholding Identity, Embracing New and Established Work Amidst Persecution and Changing Landscapes.»

The meeting highlighted the growth of the Moravian Church, with new mission areas emerging despite challenges such as political and religious constraints, economic hardships, and restrictions on religious freedom in some regions. We also looked back in order to see our way forward.

We have had to face the realities of where we failed to challenge unjust structures in societies and the legacy of colonialism and enslavement. This evening, here in Geneva, I am reminded of our responsibilities to continue to journey together. Your theme, «For such a time as this», is profoundly apt.

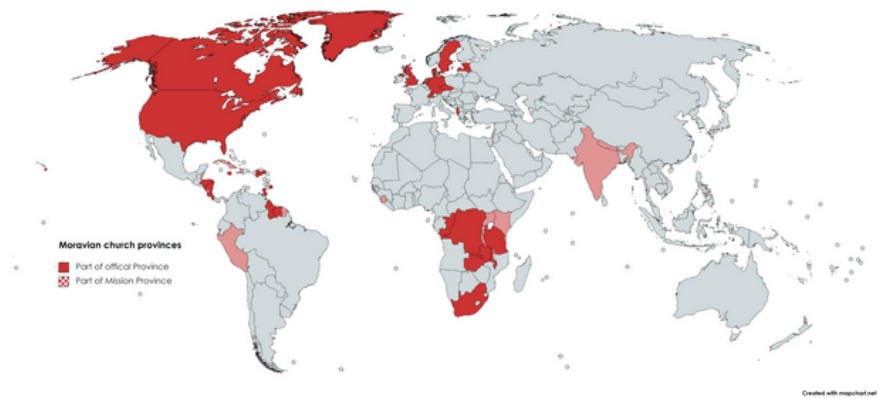
I wonder what role this Fellowship will play moving forward. In this heartland of collaboration and potential, the Church has an opportunity to stand on the side of the downtrodden and marginalised, to amplify hidden voices, and to work towards healing and restoration.

The words in Esther remind us that God positions individuals and communities in specific times and places for His divine purposes. Esther's courage to act, knowing the weight of her moment, challenges each of us to discern how we might serve in our own time and context.

This Fellowship was established not by accident, but by design. For such a time as this, in a world often marked by fractures and disconnection, you have been called to be a space of unity, belonging, and faith.

Geneva's global character offers unique opportunities for ministry. In a city where nationalities and languages converge, the

Fellowship has embraced the richness of cross-cultural collaboration. From Greenland to Tanzania, Suriname to Labrador, Moravians have always sought to build bridges across cultures, recognising that the Gospel transcends every human boundary.



But collaboration requires more than sharing space. It requires humility, respect, and a willingness to both listen and lean into each other's experiences.

As we celebrate five years of the Geneva Moravian Fellowship, we are also called to look forward. Like Esther, you are uniquely placed to respond to the needs of your time and context. Geneva, with its influence on global dialogue and decision-making, offers a platform for the Fellowship's voice to resonate far beyond its walls.

I hope the heart of this Fellowship continues to be strengthened and remains committed to authenticity. This is a place where relationships and concerns for the world are grounded in genuine care and mutual respect. In a world increasingly shaped by isolation and performance, this is a rare and precious gift.

Tonight, we give thanks for the courage and vision of those who brought this Fellowship into being, for the faithfulness of its members, and for the hope it offers for the years to come.

«For such a time as this», may you continue to be a light in Geneva and beyond, trusting in the One who has called you and equipped you for His mission. Whatever lies ahead, the same God who has guided you thus far will surely lead you into the future.

Thank you, and may God richly bless the Geneva Moravian Fellowship!

Roberta Hoey, London

Greetings from the Province

Rev. Raimund Hertzsch, Member of the Provincial Board, European Continental Province (responsible for Switzerland)

Warm greetings and all best wishes from my colleagues in the Provincial Board of the European Continental Province of the Moravian Church and the Board of the Moravian Mission Society in Germany!

We want to express our gratitude and appreciation for all your dedicated work and for the wonderful achievements over the past five years of your service! This is a day of joy. We are thankful to God that he inspired you 5 years ago to start this fellowship and we are thankful for his guidance until now.

Jeremiah 32,17 is our Moravian Watchword for this day: «Lord God! It is you who made the heavens and the earth by your great power and by your outstretched arm! Nothing is too hard for you.» Very encouraging words and perfect for an occasion like this. It's a watchword to remember for difficult times: God, who was able to create the whole world, will find ways to continue to build up his church and to help us through our challenges. Because nothing is too hard for him.

...The concept of the Geneva Moravian Fellowship as an international and ecumenical community is a very special one. It is an important example also for the congregational development of other Moravian places, especially in the cities. And it is inspiring also for other regions of the worldwide Moravian Unity.

Thank to God and to all of you!

Raimund Hertzsch, Bad Boll (Germany)

ECCLESIASTICAL GREETING

Peter Welch, First Communicant member, GMF

As I have been asked to give a moment of reflection about experience over the last 5 years, I pause to recall the reflections of my own Mother Dame Maisie Barker Welch, a 97-year-old Moravian, when I considered the gargantuan task of summarising my own experiences as a member of the Steering committee of the Geneva Moravian Fellowship. She always said that when you have something complex and large to do, go into one of the rooms of the endeavour you are undertaking and go into a corner somewhere and start.

Note I could have chosen many rooms to start. Fellowship activity, support of our global Christian neighbours in need, disaster relief support activity, joint communion with local Christian Groups, trips to Basel, cults and services, spiritual collaborations with groups, individuals, embassies and international organisations in Geneva, inter alia. So here is my perspective.

I started from 2019 onwards collecting church data for my own personal enlightenment and my own attempt to remove the thorns in my own flesh. I recall starting a 5-year journey of personal upheaval and introspection by attending the Geneva Moravian Fellowship Bible Studies led by Winelle Kirton Roberts in addition of course to being the first Moravian confirmand of the fellowship. Rev Kirton Roberts has done a colossal work reviewing and teaching Genesis to Revelations. I believe that Esther would be proud of her.



We started out by studying the biblical principles of stewardship related to Time, Talent and Treasure. The focus of the study was our relationship with God along the path of our own personal spiritual journey. We attempted to answer the question, “What are we doing with the Talents that God gave us”?

As I remained Spell bound, we continued this introspection and study of the etymology of the bible for the next 5 years, whilst we embarked simultaneously on a season of doing God’s Work through the Steering Committee of the Geneva Moravian Fellowship. I do not think many of us were ready for, or even realise that we have been in intense spiritual contact with Jesus on a continuous basis for the past five years through these studies and through service to our brothers and Sisters worldwide as well as collaborations with other entities – as you know, these Bible Studies. They have been recorded and documented by Pastor Roberts in a 2022 booklet, which I exhort you to procure. These are also provided via various internet links.

Let me summarise some of the content of these Bible Studies:

- Time, Talent and Treasure
- Prayer (Private) and its importance. Honouring God’s Name, Confession
- The Family. God’s Plan for the family. Special Biblical Families. Individual Behaviour.
- Jesus, the Bridge over Troubled Waters. The New Covenant, Faith and the practice of Faith
- Life as a gift from God, Suicide, Abortion, Creation
- The Apocalyptic book of Daniel
- Godly Principles of Financial Stewardship
- A Study of the letters of Peter and John
- Health, Stigma and Blame, Prayer, Caring for Yourself and Loved Ones,
- Living as though there is no God (Malachi)

Pastor Kirton Roberts has touched on every aspect of human life and endeavour. We saw and learned that every human life and endeavour is written about, in the word of the bible. By

extension since we, the members of the Geneva Moravian Fellowship took the journey with her, we have also covered all aspects of human endeavour. Of these, however the greatest still remains love. No matter what the individual, conflict or feeling one cannot deny that there is a feeling of love within the Geneva Moravian Fellowship. One might say that Reverend Kirton Roberts did not cover love In the bible study explicitly, however she covered Jesus, so that's taken care of.

You asked me what my experience is? Well, I would say, love. Is the experiment working? Well, Yes. Are we doing what Jesus wants us to do? Well, we can do more, however yes. During the last 5 years have we stayed on track? Yes.

The proof of the above is the following. As you know our church is hosted in a Swiss church in a Swiss community. You know they say you cannot export internationally if you don't know how to service locally. Well, the other day the retired pastor of the Church at Petit Sacconnex here in Geneva which hosts us, expressed thanks at our presence in the church and in the community, and said that there was a good feeling in the church and in the community.

«For I am confident of this very thing, that the one who started a good work in you will bring it to completion until the day of Christ Jesus.»

Therefore, ladies and gentlemen, I would like you to join with me to commend the Geneva Moravian Fellowship in providing hope, faith and service to a world desperately in need, and to say: Happy Fifth Anniversary!



So, ladies and gentlemen, brothers and sisters, I will leave you with the quote from Philippians 1:

Extracts from the greetings of the diplomatic community

BARBADOS

Hon Matthew Wilson, Ambassador, Barbados Permanent Mission

It is a real honor and pleasure to be here with you tonight as we celebrate five years of the Geneva Moravian Fellowship. And what a wonderful evening this has been so far. ...

I have to be honest with you all, and Reverend Winelle knows this. I am not the most avid church goer. But when i go. I go to the Geneva Moravian Fellowship.

Why? Because it feels warm. It feels welcoming. It feels non-judgmental. It feels relatable. It feels inclusive. It feels thought provoking. It feels joyous. And if there is one thing i can say for the fellowship you never leave spiritually hungry. Frankly you never leave hungry at all for every time i have been, there has been an incredible spread of food after the service. Which is so Caribbean at heart.

Winelle and the church has helped to bring a sense of community to the Caribbean people here. Whether it is through the fellowship including us in specific prayer events for our countries, hosting independence church services always with a special island touch and a thoughtful sermon; and especially through Winelle and Mikie's consistent support for all we do here as Caribbean representatives. In essence they show up! And that is not something we take for granted. ...

You often tell me ,Ambassador I always pray for you and for your success in leading the Mission' That means a lot. Truly. I feel the comfort and I know that is felt by many others too who you also keep in your prayers.

So on behalf of the Permanent Mission of Barbados I wish you continued service, and continued success. May you continue to be the

open and welcoming place that you have been for the past five years and we ask the universe to continue to bless your team here at the Geneva Moravian Fellowship.

SURINAME

Janice Alladin, Minister Counselor, Suriname Permanent Mission

Representing H.E. Ambassador Aroen Jadoenathmisier, who unfortunately could not be present tonight, I wish to express my sincere appreciation, for being part of the 5th Anniversary celebrations of the Geneva Moravian fellowship.

Allow me this opportunity to congratulate Reverend Winelle Kirton - Roberts, Reverend Mikie Roberts and all members of the Moravian Community, the leadership of the Moravian Unity, European Continental Province and Moravian Church in Switzerland for their contribution and sacrifices in creating a comforting religious environment far away from Home.

Upholding important religious traditions, providing guidance and comfort are part of shared objectives in which unity is one of the main driven aspects of building communities, resilience and inclusivity. Proudly referring to my country's diversity in ethnic, cultural and religious backgrounds, including a very large Moravian community, who peacefully and respectfully live amongst each other.

This sets not only an example of unity in diversity but also reflects a strong willingness, despite the different faiths, in creating sustainable communities. I am proud to share, as a Muslima, that I grew up in a large community of Moravian, Catholic and Hindu believers, and being part of that multi-cultural community.

As we live in such difficult times, we must also take the opportunity to reflect on the challenges and trends that are impacting our world. A stronger need for unity must be adhered for sustainable peace.



Geneva Moravian Fellowship

The Geneva Moravian fellowship is part of the worldwide Moravian Church, Unitas Fratrum, which was founded on March 1, 1457, in present day Czech Republic. Following a spiritual renewal in Herrnhut Germany in 1722, the movement spread to parts of Europe, including Switzerland, and across the globe. It was in 1757 that Count Zinzendorf, the leader of the renewed Moravian Church, visited Geneva. The Geneva Moravian fellowship is an English-speaking Protestant ministry that was started on December 1, 2019. At present, it comprises global and ecumenical community.

Services normally are held at: Paroisse du Petit-Saconnex, Place du Petit-Saconnex 1, 1209 Genève

For more information, livestream of workshop see the Facebook Site, look at the website www.herrnhuter.ch or contact

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