

Open letter to all congregations of the British and the European Continental Provinces of the Moravian Church on the occasion of the 75th Anniversary of the End of World War II in Europe

Lord, let your mercy come to me, that I may live. Psalm 119, 77
Watchword on May 8, 2020

Dear Sisters and Brothers in different European countries!

The Second World War, the worst human catastrophe of the 20th century, came to an end in Europe 75 years ago. Triggered by the evil Nazi movement in Germany, this war cost the lives of millions, brought endless destruction, refugee misery, and shattered the way people lived together; in addition, there was the genocide of millions of Jews and other minorities in Europe in the concentration camps. We know that, apart from a few members, the Moravian Church in Germany did not resist what was happening clearly enough. All of this gives us reason to commemorate, to grieve, to perceive and admit guilt and to deal with still vivid memories and traumas.

We, as Bishops of the British and European Continental Provinces of the Moravian Church, write to you to remind you of what has happened, to be thankful for the liberation, and to look ahead, having confidence in the forgiveness God grants us. Remembering means: not forgetting and learning for today and for the future so that such catastrophes will not happen again.

We are grateful that although the bonds between our Provinces of the Moravian Church were shaken, they were not broken, over all these terrible events. Sisters and brothers of the Czech Province in particular suffered a lot. The occupation of their country was the beginning of the evil that started from Germany. We are impressed by the writing of Br C.H. Shawe, who was a bishop in the British Province. In May 1945, just before the end of the war, he wrote not only about the upcoming victory, but also about the future task of reconciliation.

Already in 1946, on the initiative of Br Shawe, a first Unity Conference was held in Montmirail, Switzerland, at which suffering and grief were named, and guilt and omissions were acknowledged. This cleared the way for steps towards a new reconciled community in our worldwide church. Soon there were again trips and meetings of individual sisters and brothers, meetings of different groups in our church and more events with the young generation, who felt the responsibility but did not experience the stressful events of the war. Sadly, this was not possible for all the Moravian Churches as what became known as the Iron Curtain closed over large parts of Europe. Our brothers and sisters along with all the citizens of these countries including East Germany, Czechoslovakia, Latvia, Estonia and Albania suffered many years under communist oppression and this separation has left lasting scars and the need for further understanding and reconciliation. We recognise that there is still reconciling work to be done here.

We are grateful that - after all that has happened - the Provinces of the Moravian Church in Europe and America were able to reach out to each other. It must remain our commitment to work for the good of sisters and brothers in other Provinces.

In 1995, 50 years after the end of the war, Sisters and Brothers from many European countries met in Neuwied, Germany. Many people have fond memories of this time when people could speak freely about the past. It had taken time for some people to talk about the past which we all experienced in different ways. This prayer was said: "Lord, your grace is immeasurable and your love greater than human guilt. That is why you are the reason for our hope. You give us a new beginning, even if we have fallen so deeply, because who is in Christ is a new creature. ... So, we thank you for the gift of your reconciliation in our Moravian Church."

In Europe, the nations have moved towards each other and found good forms of cooperation, even if they are far from finding agreement on all political and economic issues. It makes us think that in recent times the unity in Europe has suffered from "Brexit". However, we hope and ask our congregations to do everything to ensure that the unity of our church and its members continues to grow.

In Europe and around the whole world, we are facing new challenges that have been on the horizon for a long time, but we are only now realizing their enormous dimensions. The flow of refugees around the world is increasing. Armed conflicts, but also the very serious damage to the environment are the reasons for this. Both are caused by global injustice and greed. We hear God's call to do everything possible that contributes towards the healing of all of creation. This includes caring for those in need, but also a resolute commitment against the causes of all kinds of miseries.

75 years after the end of the Second World War, it is clear that we as Christians have common tasks in the different countries of Europe. Brother Shawe wrote back in 1945: "We have to forego luxury so that other nations do not starve." These words still apply after 75 years as they did then. God has entrusted us his earth so that we can work together to keep it habitable.

This year the threatening pandemic has shown us how vulnerable life is in spite of all prosperity. The necessary restrictions on our usual freedom are painful and severely disturb our community life. Many people become lonely and sick, fears awaken, and sometimes we don't even know because we don't meet people. But we also have to think of those who are hit much harder by this time because the health system in their countries is not so well developed. People in refugee camps around the world will be the hardest hit of all.

It now helps us to find new forms of communication and to use them responsibly. We can discover anew that Daily Watchwords, singing and praying with each other and for each other, even in small groups at home, creates a connection with God and with people, even if we can't see each other. We would like to thank everyone who, in this difficult time, is working in various ways for cohesion in their communities and keeping alive worldwide contact in the Moravian Unity.

God's blessings be with you all.

We greet you with a verse from the oldest known song of the Moravian Church dating from the late 15th century in what is now known as Czechia, number 302 in our hymn book.

And in your love may we abide,
Estranged from none by wrath or pride,
Among ourselves at unity
And with all else in charity.

Bishops from
the British Province:

 Sarah Groves

 John McOwat

 Joachim Kreusel

Bishops from
the European Continental Province:

 Humbert Hessen (Netherlands)

 Theodor Clemens (Germany)

 Friedrich Waas (Germany)

 Volker Schulz (Switzerland)