

MORAVIANS DOING EVANGELISM TODAY

Foreword from the Pastor

Sometime ago, I received the following email, and book chapter from Br. Steve Nicholas who visited New Philadelphia last winter. He was among us because he wished to see for himself what we were doing to help produce growth. He has included us in his book on evangelism, and I am sure that you will find what he has to say about us interesting reading. He has given me permission to post it in the context of the chapter.

Email from Br. Steve Nicholas

Dear Brothers and Sister,

I have completed the six weeks of my sabbatical leave and am back at work in the congregation. Last week I wrote a new chapter for “The Moravian Way of Evangelism,” based upon what I observed in the growing churches that I visited. Because your congregation is one of these “growing churches” I am sending the chapter to you for your review. Several days ago a friend to whom I sent the chapter pointed out a factual error in what I had written. It occurred to me that there may be other errors in the chapter, and that those of you whom I visited would be in the best position to catch any additional errors. I am sending the chapter in the body of this e-mail, since I write on a Mac and many times others cannot open my attached files.

So I am sending this to you for two purposes: first, would you be so kind as to check the section on your church to see if it is factually correct? The second purpose is a courtesy to you, since all of you were very kind and helpful when I visited and freely gave me your time and your wisdom. I thought you might enjoy seeing what I had written about your own congregation and also about the other growing churches. The last section, “What can we learn from growing churches?” will probably be an article in the Moravian magazine.

At the present time, I am working on revising the other chapters in the book, taking each Thursday to work on it. I still expect to complete the revision and foreword it to Deanna at the Dept. of Communications in June. We are still hoping to have it printed and ready for sale early in 2004. I praise the Lord for your help and kindness to me, and for the opportunity to have rich fellowship with you when I visited.

Yours in Christ,

Steve Nicholas

The Garden of the Gods is a beautiful, scenic wonder outside of Colorado Springs. The road wanders among giant boulders and sheer rock walls. At a point where the road seems to disappear altogether into a tiny opening in a wall of rock, there is a small sign reading:

Narrows, Yes, You Can A Million Others Have.

Sometimes it is like that when we consider doing evangelism. The opening is so small and the task is so large that it seems impossible. When we feel like this it is reassuring to know that others have successfully done it. This chapter contains stories of several very different Moravian congregations who are succeeding in helping people come to faith in Christ today.

EAST HILLS MORAVIAN CHURCH

The Moravian Church began this new congregation in a growing suburb of Bethlehem in 1957. The congregation soon reached a plateau in membership and worship attendance. When the present pastor arrived, there were 401 members on the books and an average Sunday worship attendance of 155. Seven years later there are 367 members and an average attendance of 206. There is a sense at East Hills that there are high expectations for membership. One of the Elders told me “This is not the kind of church where we carry people on the rolls for years and years. We want being a Christian to be a whole lifestyle....” A long time member describes the difference in the congregation today, “Before, if you felt like coming or not, you did what you felt like. Now, we look for a commitment from our members. You are not coming along for a free ride.” According to another long time member, “The pastor transferred membership into discipleship.” These expectations are communicated from the pastor and the church leadership all the way through the members. Stewardship and tithing is not just mentioned once a year, but is part of a year round teaching emphasis with the congregation. It is exciting to see that worship attendance has increased even though membership has decreased. In the last year the congregation has added thirty new members and released thirty seven. One year ago, they consecrated a new addition which includes a church hall/gymnasium, two classrooms for their nursery school, a huge commercial kitchen, restrooms and two offices. So far the members have promised \$450,000 toward the total cost of \$1,300,000.

Many of the new members come to East Hills because of their childrens’ programs, and they want to stay because it is a healthy and exciting congregation. Former Catholics make up a large percentage of the new members. Sometimes they have a difficult time with their deep emotional ties to their Catholic upbringing. When I asked several of these families what brought them to East Hills, they said things like, “I have been searching for something for years....” “We are encouraged to read the Bible here.” “This is not just a warm and fuzzy church, but it is centered around Christ and the Bible.” “My religion was always segregated, you just went to church and then went home.” “We were non practicing Catholics and we are looking for something more.” “Our son wants us to read Bible stories to him.” “The pastors are real people and approachable.” “The people in the

nursery school were warm and loving.” “I realized it was not about religion, but relationships, with people and with Christ.”

East Hills is very much a community church for the area around Butztown, which is east of Bethlehem. The location adjacent to the elementary school for the community helps. The congregation sponsors a Boy Scout troop with more than sixty scouts. Contact with new people is made through the scouts, through the nursery school, and through their summer Vacation Bible School. One new member told me “Everybody goes there...” When people visit, they see the members of the congregation wearing name tags, and visitors also receive a name tag. There is a warm time of greeting during the worship and everyone signs in on an attendance pad. “From the minute we stepped in the door, it was the warmest, most friendly church,” was a sentiment that I heard again and again. Others told me that it is very easy to get involved at East Hills. The congregation is very egalitarian, there don’t seem to be turf battles and people who hold onto power and resent newcomers. When they are in the Inquirer’s class, new members are advised that it is expected that every new member will participate in at least one of the ministries of the church. There are seven Bible study groups that meet weekly, including one for men at 6:30 a.m. on Wednesday mornings.

East Hills does not have a high powered evangelism program. Their evangelism committee is just getting started. It seems that this healthy and vibrant congregation attracts many people through word of mouth. An excellent illustration is the five families who live on Greencrest Street. One family invited another family who invited their neighbors, until all five were involved at East Hills. One of the Greencrest families shared their story about how their next door neighbors had invited them to the church on several occasions, “but we always had excuses...” Then, there was a crisis in this family and they called their neighbors and inquired if they thought the pastor would talk to them. He visited their home the next evening and counseled them for two hours, closing with an invitation to worship at East Hills the following Sunday. “When we walked in the door we immediately felt welcome and we said ‘Wow!’ ...the people embraced us in our trials and helped us when we had twins. We like the sense of fellowship. The pastor is easy to talk to, has a sense of perspective, and treats you like an equal. When I was part of the church as a child we went right home after the service was over. Here we don’t leave until an hour later. This is an inviting, welcoming congregation. It’s almost like a family, with God’s people and God as the base.” Several members told me that there is no “magic bullet” to their success, but that there is a sense that many parts of their church work together to produce spiritual health. A welcoming congregation, a pastor who communicates an authentic spiritual life and a sense of integrity, a place which finds ways to include children (they have three children’s choirs and three youth groups); all of these parts help make up the whole that is the healthy and vital

PRINCE OF PEACE MORAVIAN CHURCH

Prince of Peace is an International Church where Christians from 21 different countries gather to worship and serve. The church was officially organized in November, 1986 with 115 charter members. Sixteen years later they had 356 communicant members. They

have also been responsible for the birth of New Hope Moravian Church, King of Kings Moravian Church, West Palm Beach Moravian Church and the Surinamese Fellowship which meets in their building on Sunday afternoons. They continue to grow in spite of sending members away to form new congregations. Their average Sunday morning worship attendance has grown from 259 to 307 in the past three years. I believe that the secret to their growth is found in their welcoming spirit. As I talked to new members about their reasons for joining Prince of Peace I heard the same things over and over, “I felt accepted by everyone,” “Everybody is everybody there, there are no cliques,” “The members welcomed me like I was family,” “I am making more and more friends,” “The members hugged me, they kissed me, they called me at my home to say how pleased they were that we came....”

The church is the center of life for many of the members. When I visited, the worship service lasted for two hours and even then they were not anxious to leave. Following worship they stood outside on the church lawn, drank ginger beer and munched on cookies, and chatted for another hour. One member told me that they are all from somewhere else, so the church is really a home for them.

Prince of Peace began in August, 1978, when Santos and Daphne Ordonez invited a few Moravians from Nicaragua to come to their home. The Ordonezes shared their dream of gathering the Moravians living in the Miami area by offering worship in their homes. Three other Moravians from Nicaragua attended the first meeting and promised to help. They worshipped in homes for several years, and then rented Holy Family Episcopal Church for a small fee. They worshipped at 5:00 PM using the Episcopal Church. The Rev. Melvin Klokow from the Moravian Church in Fort Lauderdale provided Holy Communion and eventually became their part time pastor. In 1986 they were organized as a Moravian Church consisting of 115 charter members. They purchased property nearby, erected a modular worship center, and called the Rev. David Guthrie as their first full time pastor.

A group of about seventy members living in the South Miami area organized a Moravian Fellowship group, and in 1991 they were chartered as New Hope Moravian Church. Today, New Hope averages about one hundred worshippers on Sunday morning and also hosts a service in Portuguese on Sunday evenings. The West Palm Beach Moravian Church was organized by members living north of Miami and King of Kings, a Miskito speaking congregation meets in the Prince of Peace sanctuary on Sunday afternoons.

Many members told me that they do not do much in the way of organized evangelism and outreach. My impression from talking to new members was that those who are coming are attracted to Prince of Peace by the sense of acceptance and welcome they feel and by the joyous quality of their worship. Several newer members said that they were on a spiritual search when the Lord led them to Prince of Peace through the invitation of a friend or relative. I met one couple who have just joined the church; they work late on Saturday evening, sometimes until 6:00 AM on Sunday, shower, eat breakfast, and come to worship. When I asked “Why?” they replied that “There is something about the

church. I can understand the message. I feel free, and invited, to participate in the service...and we also enjoy the children's messages...."

In the beginning, the congregation was mostly former Moravians from Nicaragua. Later they were joined by Moravians from Antigua, Jamaica, and all over the Caribbean. In the last two or three years people from the neighborhood are beginning to come. They have an all day Vacation Bible School on four Saturdays in July which includes many children from the neighborhood. Their members told me that no one takes vacation in July so that they will be available to help in VBS. They continue to observe Moravian customs and use the book of worship, but recently they organized a gospel choir and added drums and electric guitars to their traditional organ and piano accompaniment.

Over the years, Prince of Peace has tried many things to meet the spiritual needs of their members and those in the neighborhood. They have an evening service led by different members, a Wednesday Bible Study and prayer meetings, and very active men's, women's and youth Fellowship groups. "I came here because it was close to home, then I stayed because the people were friendly," one member confided. Again and again I heard the same comments because there is a true spirit of welcome in Prince of Peace Moravian Church, where in the words of a new member, "Everybody is every body!"

STURGEON BAY MORAVIAN CHURCH

The first thing that impressed me about this congregation was the extent of its youth ministry. In an average week there are 110 youth involved in some ministry of this church. Many of the teenagers who come are not even members of the church and only two grew up in the congregation. When I asked how most of them came to Sturgeon Bay Moravian Church (SBMC), they said things like, "I was brought by my neighbors," "I was invited to a children's lovefeast when I was in the second grade," "I came to a sleep over when I was in third grade," "I came because my older brother was hanging out at the church," "I was playing tennis and two friends invited me to a youth meeting," "A friend invited me to come and help make Christmas candles," "I came because my older sister came...." When I asked the teenagers why they continued to come to SBMC, they said things such as, "It's a safe place. Everyone is accepted for who we are," "It helps me to be a better person," "Every time I go, it seems like I come closer to Christ," "The sermons aren't boring," "I used to come out of guilt but now it's my choice and I'm happy to come," "It feels like you have family here. You can bring anyone here," "I look at the pastor as a father figure," "I'm not getting Christ thrown in my face. I'm getting a helping hand," "I've always had a relationship with God but now it has changed," "The camp songs are incredibly important," "I would be much worse without a core set of values," "Without this church I don't think I would have a relationship with God," "I was an atheist before I came to this church."

This kind of ministry with youth is all the more amazing when you consider that just a few years ago SBMC had almost no youth ministry. When the present pastor was called as the associate pastor with responsibility for Christian Education and Youth, there were nineteen children in Sunday School and six in the youth fellowship (and five of these

were from another church). Instead of starting at the top, they decided to build a youth program from the ground up. Two mothers began the RAMS (Really Awesome Moravian Students) for older elementary age children. The new pastor helped them plan trips and programs. As those in RAMS grew older, new fellowship groups were added. Today there are three fellowships, Senior High, Middle School and Junior (grades 3-5). At various times during the year the groups go on retreats, have lock-ins at the church, and take trips Christian concerts and Great America amusement park. On the Wednesday evening when I visited, there were about sixty youth congregating in various rooms throughout the Christian Education building. Some were in the church's computer lab working on homework, some were just "chillin'" and watching videos sitting on the overstuffed furniture in the basement, some were having a more formal discussion and study in another room. Because their lives are busy with so many structured activities, the congregation offers young people the opportunity to just come to the church building on Wednesday evenings to hang out. Many of them also serve as counselors at the Moravian Camp, Mt. Morris, nearby in central Wisconsin. Last year sixty youth from SBMC attended Mt. Morris as campers or counselors.

When I talked to the adults about what brought them to this growing congregation, again and again they referred to the core values of the congregation. They told me that this is a congregation which has a sense of who they are and that this is very attractive in a confused society. SBMC does not bend all over the place to be all things to all people. The core values were not imposed from above, but grew out of the experience of the congregation in the past decade. These are their values: 1. We value meaningful worship. We expect the gospel of Jesus Christ to be proclaimed through excellence in our music ministry, quality of liturgy, preaching and celebration of the sacraments. 2. We value being a "safe harbor" for the spiritual pilgrims in our community. We have been and continue to be, a common ground where people from diverse faith traditions can safely be challenged in their discipleship. 3. We value children and youth. We are committed to congregation life that is open and nurturing to young people, as they are invited into relationship with Christ and equipped for a life of faith. 4. We value mission work. Recognizing our common call to ministry, we strive to live our faith sacrificially in our community and in the world in a manner that bears witness to the saving grace of Jesus Christ. 5. We value being Moravian. All of our core values have historical precedent in an ancient tradition of Christian witness that we hold dear and firmly believe remains relevant.

When I asked their new members what they appreciated about SBMC I consistently heard the same things. The worship is alive and the congregational singing is amazing. The music director says that people tell him, "I don't know how you do it, but you make us want to sing!" The sermons are clear, Biblically based and relevant to today's living. The time for children is wonderful. The Sunday that I visited about forty came forward for this time and there were teenagers who came bringing younger children. In addition to the liturgies in the Moravian Book of Worship, the pastors and music director write new liturgies for special occasions. Copies of "Renew," a collection of traditional hymns and contemporary songs, are in the pew racks and used on most Sundays. Three children's choirs in addition to the adult choir and a handbell choir fill the worship with praise and

thanksgiving. The Sunday worship at SBMC is televised on a local cable channel which makes it possible for people in the community to check them out before they take the step of coming for worship. One of their newest members said that after visiting one Sunday she felt “I wish I could be one of these people...” Once a month in worship, members of the congregation give a five minute “witness talk,” sharing how they came to faith and how their faith helps them in daily life. “The lesson you learn from these is that Christ is there at every moment in your life,” said a long time member. SBMC has a full program for adult education which includes Bible studies, book studies (they are reading Phillip Yancey’s “The Jesus I Never Knew”), and classes for parents. One of the new members said, “We do all kinds of things, but we are very grounded in a Christian community.” Another added, “The Moravians have found a nice balance between being forward looking and yet not turning their back on their traditions....”

Both new and older members talked about the leadership of their pastors as being important in the growth of the church. A decade ago they made a conscious decision to add the second pastor in order to staff the church for growth. The pastors have been a real team and modeled Christian relationships for the congregation. Sermons are grounded in scripture but often come from their human experience. Members described the preaching as “thoughtful, theological and very personal.” They said that “The pastors exhibited absolute sincerity in everything they did. We were drawn to their leadership....”

In trying to discover the secret of growth at SBMC, a recent student pastor wrote this summary, “They’ve been open, accepting and non-threatening, they’ve placed an emphasis on youth, their worship services have had strong music and preaching yet have stayed true to Moravian roots, they’ve offered many small group programs for all ages, they’ve been capably led by pastors willing to assume a leadership role and also be involved in the life of the community and they have clearly and simply listed the core values that they wish to be governed by. And in the process of all this, they haven’t forgotten God....”

CHRIST THE KING MORAVIAN CHURCH

The thing that impressed me about Christ the King was that they have 156 members and an average worship attendance of 199. No inactive members here! I was very interested in how such a church came to be. The church got started with a Bible study in a home in Durham in the summer of 1989. The present pastors, a clergy couple, have been with them since the beginning. The original three couples invited friends and also knocked on doors in the neighborhood and they began to grow. In the beginning, the group asked what were the critical things that a family who visited needed to see. They were, a good nursery, an excellent program for children, adult education, a worship service which was relevant to young adults, and a focus on mission in the community and world which would keep them from being selfish. The goal of the fledgling church was to be healthy within and outwardly focused. Their mission statement is “Loving Christ, living the scriptures, employing our gifts, making disciples.”

As I talked with their members I heard again and again that the emphasis at Christ the King is discipleship and missions. They expect a lot of their members, yet these expectations are not communicated with a heavy hand, they seem to be caught by new members from the existing members. Many of their members say things like, "This church is the central focus of my life." It is not just a place where the members come once a week for one hour. Most of their adult membership participate in one of twelve weekly Bible study groups. Most of the groups are geographically based, meeting in nearby Chapel Hill and Raleigh, and some in the church building itself. Most of the groups study a book of the Bible, but some have also studied books such as Philip Yancey's "The Jesus I never knew," and "What's so Amazing about Grace?" Their members say that it is in these small groups that friendships are made and faith is nurtured. They say the small groups are like a family. In the small groups members share their dreams and problems and pray for one another. Many of these groups also keep one empty chair to remind them that there are others outside the group who need to be invited.

Like all of the other growing churches I visited, Christ the King feels like a "healthy" church. "There is very little gossip here." "I've never heard anyone say anything bad about anyone." "I don't worry that people are talking about me..." These are some of the things their members said. Once again, these expectations seem to be communicated subtly by the entire membership. "This is just not the kind of thing we do here..." The combination of joyful members who take their faith seriously, really care for one another, and are concerned about mission in the wider world, is very attractive to outsiders. Most of their new members were invited by someone; they liked the people and decided to stay. One member told me, "We feel if we can get them in the door we can keep them..." My conversations with new members seems to support this observation. One member was riding her bicycle past the church on a Sunday morning when it started to rain. She went into their building to seek shelter, attended their worship service, decided to return, and ended up marrying one of their members. Another used to stop at their parking lot to nurse her baby, decided to visit on Sunday, and also became a member. Another couple saw the sign on their church property and decided to attend worship. Someone else said, "I didn't like the worship service (too contemporary), but I did like the people. So I wanted to return. "What is it about the people? "They were a happy, caring people." "Everyone seemed so nice." "This is a good place for my kids. There are actually people here who care about them." "There are no classes and no distinctions among the members." "There is a center for our faith in Christ, but there is also room for differences."

While some of the most effective evangelism takes place from one person to another, each year they do several things with an evangelistic intent. One is their Vacation Bible School which they call "Summer Faith Adventure." Another is their Christmas Tree lot where they include an invitation to the Christmas Eve services with each tree. A third way is through use of a nicely printed invitation to Christmas Eve which they make for their members to give out. The Christmas Eve bulletin contains a response card which visitors are invited to complete. Many of their newer members are completely new Christians who have never been part of a church and they join through baptism as adults.

There is also a large number of newer members who were part of the church in their childhood but they are now beginning a close personal relationship with Christ as an adult. One of them told me, "I did not know that I could have a personal relationship with Christ until I came to this church. I made a commitment to the Lord and it has been an amazing ride..."

NEW PHILADELPHIA MORAVIAN CHURCH

When visiting this growing congregation, the initial impression one receives is that it is much different than the other growing Moravian churches I visited. New Philadelphia is much larger than most Moravian churches; its average worship attendance of 542 is the largest of any Moravian church in North America. As you enter the sanctuary, you are immediately aware that they still use the red 1969 hymnal instead of the blue 1995 hymnal. The ministers and choir are robed and the congregation is led in singing by a large pipe organ. Yet, in spite of these outward signs of tradition, the congregation exudes the same feeling of celebration, joy and warmth that exists in the other growing churches that I visited. And New Philadelphia has been growing, adding almost two hundred persons from their average worship attendance of 369 five years ago. A friend of the church refers to them as "The best kept secret in Winston Salem..." But it seems to me that since they added a beautiful and very visible new fellowship hall two years ago they are no longer a secret.

"Good celebration and a good sense of community." That was the answer I received when I asked a group of their members what was the secret of their success. "Worship is the centerpiece." That's what another told me. Worship at New Philadelphia was described as "reverent but not stodgy." A new member said that the first Sunday they visited the sense of the presence of God in worship "brought tears to my eyes." It helps that the congregation worships in an attractive facility at a good location with ample parking. The present pastors give credit for their growth to strong lay leadership, but the lay leaders say that a strong pastoral team is a key. Sermons from the two pastors are posted each week on their comprehensive web site. Members described the preaching as "based on a foundation of scripture," "very Christ centered," and "relevant and applicable to our lives." They also say that the pastors are approachable and easy to talk to. Much of the sense of community is nurtured by ten adult Sunday School classes, each of which is like a family. One couple said "We really became a part of the church when we came to Sunday school." Someone else remarked that "When you join a Sunday School class, you join for life..." Members of the classes have frequent social events and parties. A member of the staff said "I could go to a Sunday School party every week." Classes sponsor dinners for the whole church, raise money for service projects, and even have groups of families who go on vacation together.

When I asked what brought their new members and why they stayed, I heard responses such as: "We were invited by friends from the church. When we visited people went out of their way to welcome us;" "We drove by and saw their sign and decided to come to worship. When we came I was amazed at how close to the gospel this old church was;" "We have a child in the preschool program and decided to come to worship;" "I was

vacationing and met a woman who went there and told me about the church.” A family from another state moved into the area and came because they liked what they saw on the church’s web site. Other members also mentioned that their well designed web site attracts visitors. The staff said they have several thousand visits to this site each month. One family who worshipped at New Philadelphia for the first time said that they counted sixteen persons who introduced themselves and greeted them. Another family told about coming to visit and being warmly greeted by a man who looked for them on subsequent visits and “made them feel like they were very special people....” “The people take you under their wing.” “I feel like a whole new person since I am here.” “The people keep us coming.” “We feel like we have come home.” “Christ is at the center of this church.” These are some of the ways that new members describe their feelings about the congregation.

In addition to those who come because of a personal invitation, special events throughout the year also attract visitors. On Memorial Day they have a service honoring veterans. On September 11, 2002, a Moravian pastor who is a captain in the Naval Reserve preached at a remembrance service for 9/11. After their Easter services they serve breakfast for nine hundred members and visitors. The congregation sponsors a nursery school which is attended by 225 children. They also sponsor a very active Boy Scout troop and about half of the scouts come to New Philadelphia church.

The goal of this church is to be “A caring fellowship, worshiping God, and encouraging one another to seek a closer relationship with Jesus Christ, as we follow the lead of the Holy Spirit in service and mission.” The things which I saw and heard as I talked to their members leads me to believe this old and traditional congregation is very much alive and leading people to a closer relationship with Jesus.

Steve Nicholas

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