



A Message from the Provincial Board of the European Continental Province of the Moravian Church

In the European Continental Moravian Church, with congregations in Germany, the Netherlands, and other European countries, we are commemorating the end of slavery in Suriname 150 years ago. Our church is closely connected to this country—which was a Dutch colony from 1667 to 1975—and to its history:

- Beginning in 1735, many men and women from our congregations set out for Suriname, primarily to proclaim the message of God's love in Jesus Christ to the Africans who had been enslaved there. This missionary work gave rise to a Protestant national church, which became independent in 1963 as the Evangelical Brethren Church in Suriname.
- Today, the majority of the members of the European Mainland Moravian Church have their roots in Suriname and the Herrnhut Moravian Church there.

Therefore, 150 years after the end of slavery in Suriname, we feel obligated to examine the history of slavery and the role that the mission played in that country, and to take a stand on these issues. We do this with the awareness that, within our church, we are responsible for one another and accountable to one another.

As the church leadership of the European Continental Province of the worldwide Moravian Church, we bear responsibility for our church in its present form and, at the same time, follow in the footsteps of the governing bodies of past centuries.

Therefore, we declare:

1. The missionary work of the Moravian Church deserves credit for proclaiming the Gospel of Jesus Christ to men and women who had been enslaved, while also providing them with education and improvements to their healthcare. In doing so, the missionaries respected the enslaved men and women as human beings with their own inherent dignity. Above all, they felt a commitment to each individual.
2. However, the missionary work did not contribute to changing or abolishing the inhumane system of slavery. The Moravian Church itself owned slaves in Suriname. It was neither willing nor able to challenge fundamentally the institution of slavery. Even after this system was abolished in neighboring colonies after 1830 and the end of slavery was approaching for Suriname as well, leaders of the Moravian Church maintained this stance.
3. The history of slavery in Suriname continues to shape our mutual perceptions and our self-image to this day: in the way we treat one another, images of superiority and inferiority are far from having disappeared from our consciousness. This is also the case within the Moravian Church: it was taken for granted that European tradition, culture, and theology were the standards for church life. Until now, there has largely been a lack of insight and willingness to come to terms with this burdensome past together with those affected, and to name and acknowledge failure, guilt, and suffering.
4. Over the past 150 years, we have come to understand that any economic system that deprives people of their freedom, dignity, and rights - as slavery did - is a crime against humanity and incompatible with the biblical image of humanity as made in God's likeness. For this reason, we deplore the shameful manner in which our church's mission in Suriname uncritically participated in slavery and failed to oppose clearly and unequivocally the inhuman system of exploitation built upon it. As the Moravian Church in Germany and the Netherlands, we stand ashamed before this aspect of our history and ask the descendants of our sisters and brothers who were enslaved for forgiveness and a fresh start.
5. We advocate for the Moravian Church to become a community of free sisters and brothers. That is why we invite all of you to walk this path together. In our view, the following steps are necessary on this path:
 - The history of the mission must be reexamined—including its problematic aspects.
 - We must examine the extent to which theological traditions and cultural patterns of thought led our church to align uncritically itself with economic and political interests. In this way, we can help ensure that such and other undesirable developments are recognized in time and averted, both today and in the future.

- The structures within our church - its congregations, committees, and ministries - must be reviewed to determine whether they allow for and strengthen the equal participation of all members, regardless of ethnic background or cultural roots.
 - We want to facilitate and encourage direct dialogue between the descendants of our brothers and sisters who were enslaved and the descendants of the missionaries. These conversations, both within congregations and at the inter-congregational level, are intended to help us understand the past and accept one another today as brothers and sisters, so that together we may bear witness to the forgiving love of Jesus Christ.
6. Because of our history and our current situation, we are particularly connected to the Moravian Church in Suriname. We reaffirm this connection, intend to nurture it, and strive to breathe continually new life into it.
 7. We view our cultural and theological diversity as a strength that enables us to remain vigilant against discrimination and racism among us and in our communities. We call on our congregations and members to oppose all forms of racism and discrimination.

We ask our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ to heal the wounds of the past through the power of his forgiving love, to accompany us on our shared journey into the future, and to empower us for freedom through his Holy Spirit.

Bad Boll, Herrnhut, and Zeist, June 2013