

Moravian Moment...#02 ... Unity of the Brethren

In 1457, the Moravians, realizing that Rome would never make peace with them and that they could no longer live under the tyranny of the Roman Catholic Church, decided to form a religious community of their own. So they banded themselves together in a little village called Lititz, with the Bible as their rule of life, and called themselves *Jednota Bratrská*, the Czech for Unity of the Brethren. The name *Unity of the Brethren or Unitas Fratrum* still remains the official name of the Moravian Church, while the name *Moravian is a nickname* given to the Church because of its origin in Moravia. The Moravians were forced to leave the Church of Rome on the grounds of conscience and persecution, but firmly believe that in Christ all Christians should be united in heart and service, and so as a Church, we have never ceased to work and pray for the unity of the Church, the one people of God.

The Roman Catholic Church continued to persecute the Moravians and drove them out of Lititz, putting many more into prison and to death; but others rose up to take their places, and the Church grew despite the persecution.

The German Reformation under Martin Luther caused the Roman Catholic Church to redouble its efforts to stamp out these Moravians who, nearly one hundred years before Luther, had begun the movement for reform that had now grown into the great Protestant Reformation. Thousands had to flee from Moravia and Bohemia to Poland rather than submit and persecution continued until 1657 when the aged Bishop John Amos Comenius, believing that the Moravians were on the verge of being stamped out, commended them to the Church of England, praying that they would love and care for these Moravians who had suffered so much for the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Comenius still clung to the hope that somehow God would revive the Moravian Church and, in this hope, in 1662, he and the only other surviving Moravian Bishop consecrated two new Bishops to lead the Church through this very critical period. At the beginning of the eighteenth century, *the Moravians had been reduced to a mere handful of people who had to hide in the woods to worship, but who held fast to their faith despite every attempt to wipe them out.*

The time for deliverance, however, was near. In the providence of God, early in 1722, two men from the extremes of society were destined to meet; one, a man from Moravia, named Christian David, and the other, a nobleman, Count Nicholas Louis Von Zinzendorf. The Count was a Lutheran who sympathized greatly with persecuted Protestants. Christian David wasted no time in telling him of the persecuted Moravians and their longing for a place of refuge where they could worship God in peace. Zinzendorf kindly consented to grant them refuge on his estate at Berthelsdorf in Saxony, and on May 27th, 1722, the first group of Moravians left their homeland and set off for Saxony. More and more followed as they were able to escape and, during the next five years a stream of refugees from Moravia poured into Herrnhut, (The Lord's Watch) as the new community was now called.