

## MORAVIAN MOMENT #08...

### What was the role of the Helpers (Elders) in the Mission of the Church?

As we embrace and celebrate on the 1<sup>st</sup> March, 2007 the 550<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the World Wide Moravian Church, we will seek to understand and appreciate the role of the Helpers or Elders in the Mission work. They became very crucial, to the establishment and cementing of the work. The Moravians laid great stress upon the Pastoral care of every member and so the Elders were appointed from the converts to assist with the care of the congregation. It was a strategy by the Moravians to equip and empower local indigenous leaders to take care of the flock. The Helpers or Elders have become a very important institution for the nurturing of our members.

Bishop Maynard in his book, a history of the Moravian Church, EWI Province said that the Moravians employed native Helpers from as early as 1738. Six years after the establishment of the work in ST. Thomas, five negro converts, Bro. Andrew and his Brother John, Bro. Peter and his Brother Christopher, and Sis. Anna Maria, were appointed Helpers, having previously given satisfactory evidence of their faith in Christ, and that they possessed the necessary zeal and gifts for the spiritual instruction of others. The Church's understanding of the value of Helpers and the part which they played is evident from the following statement made in 1834 concerning the need of Helpers: **“that they were an important means of converting the unbelieving, that the white free Missionary needed them, for in a situation such as the plantation system based on slave labour, with people uprooted from their homes and forced to live and to work under the most inhumane conditions, it was difficult for a white free Missionary to reach their minds and hearts and to make them acquainted with the basic principles of Christian conduct”**. *It was further stated that native Helpers and Evangelists had to be raised up on an extensive scale if work of the Church would truly be effective and enduring.*

The special duties of the Helpers were:

- a. To maintain diligent pastoral care over the members of the congregation entrusted to their guidance,
- b. To guard against any disorders that might arise among them,
- c. To assist the members with spiritual advice and experience,
- d. To visit the sick and to ascertain the needs of the poor,
- e. To endeavour to preserve peace and to reconcile differences among members,
- f. To converse freely and confidentially with groups of communicants, baptized adults and catechumens concerning their lives, seeking to lead them onward in the way of faith and holiness.

They did an excellent job in the establishment of the Mission. Of note was a Helper by the name of Rebecca, a mulatto, who had been kidnapped as a child and was brought from Antigua to St. Thomas where she was fortunate to fall into the hands of a benevolent master. She was taught to read the Scriptures and in due time, she committed her life to Jesus. Having been made a Helper, she carried out her duties with zeal and faithfulness, leading many to salvation.

Helpers were and are at the heart of the spiritual life of the Church. They led many persons to salvation in Jesus Christ, to a deeper understanding of the responsibilities of Church membership and Christian discipleship.

4<sup>TH</sup> March, 2007