

## MORAVIAN MOMENT #12...

What were the mitigating factors against a self supporting, self governing, indigenous Church?

With the Abolition of slavery on the 1<sup>st</sup> August, 1834, the newly emancipated slaves were expected to fend for themselves in every area of life. The Moravian Missionaries recognized the new found freedom and were willing to allow the indigenous people to take responsibility for the governance of the Church by 1848, even though the Missionaries had not prepared them for such an undertaking. The Province comprised of the following Islands: St. Thomas, St. Croix, St. John, Antigua, Barbados, St. Kitts and Tobago. Later, Trinidad and Guyana became a part of the Province, from which Guyana subsequently withdrew. Was it a recipe for failure or would the emancipated slaves use their God given ability to confound others?

Several factors mitigated against a self governing, self supporting Province at the time:

1. The people had just experienced 14 years of full emancipation and needed to learn the rudiments of leadership and organizational management.
2. Slavery had bitten deep into their lives and external conditions were very unfavourable for the emancipated people.
3. Natural disturbances and the collapse of the sugar trade reduced the majority of the people to abject poverty.
4. There was an insurrection in St. Croix and the social system in the Danish Islands, now U.S Virgin Islands, was unsettled.
5. Tobago, Antigua and St. Kitts were ravaged by hurricanes.
6. The West Indian Bank failed, bringing further misery to all the British Islands and,
7. The Church found itself in a perilous financial condition.

In spite of that, in 1860, the Mission Board considered the Islands as ready for self support and carried out a visitation of the Province with this in mind. Bishop Godfrey A. Cunow, President of the Mission Board and Brother Thomas L. Badham, of the British Mission Board, visited all of the Islands in 1862 and found that all the congregations were willing to do their part by regular contributions, but the tough economic circumstances, prevented them from doing enough to reach the goal of self support. As a result, the attendances at School and Church fell, as the people lacked clothing and money. This was no incentive to encourage persons to enter the full time Ministry of the Church.

Those who committed themselves to the full time Ministry were not in sufficient numbers to warrant the belief that the time was ripe for the Mission Board to withdraw the European staff. The General Synod of 1869 faced this fact and decided to give the Province more constitutional freedom in an effort to develop responsible leaders, by giving the local, indigenous people more responsibility. Did the Church survive?

*1<sup>st</sup> April, 2007*