

Moravian Moment #59
Unitas Fratrum, a Church that will never die

The Moravian Church on March 1, 2008, celebrates 551 years of Christian witness worldwide. In describing the Moravian Church one can testify like St. Paul: *we are hard pressed on every side, yet not crushed; we are perplexed, but not despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed. Always carrying about in the body, the dying of the Lord Jesus, that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our body.*

The “Unity of the Brethren”, is a Protestant religious group inspired by Hussite [spiritual](#) ideals in [Bohemia](#) in the mid-15th century, on March 1, 1457 to be exact. They followed a simple, humble life of nonviolence, using the [Bible](#) as their sole rule of faith. They denied transubstantiation but received the Eucharist and deemed religious hymns of great importance. In 1501 they printed the first Protestant hymnbook, and in 1579–93 they published a Czech translation of the Bible (the [Kralice](#), or Kralitz, Bible), the outstanding quality of which made it a landmark in Czech literature. Their [Confessio Bohemica](#), reflecting Lutheran and Calvinist influences, effected a union with Lutheran Hussites in 1575 that received Holy Roman imperial sanction in 1609. By that time the Unitas Fratrum constituted half of the Protestants in Bohemia and more than that in [Moravia](#). About the mid-16th century, Unitas emigrants moved into [Poland](#) and survived there for some two centuries.

Having joined the Czech estates in their fight with the Roman emperor Ferdinand I (Thirty Years' War), the Unitas Fratrum forces' defeat in 1620 at the [Battle of the White Mountain](#) was a prelude to their suppression. In 1627 an imperial edict outlawed all Protestants in Bohemia. The Unitas Fratrum was destroyed, with all its churches, its Bible, and its hymn books, and its members were forcibly “catholicized” or exiled. The Unitas Fratrum because of persecution became an underground movement. They were determined to serve their God in freedom, no matter what. Remnants of the group, however, eventually found refuge in Saxony and under the name of Herrnhuters had great religious influence through their missionary activities. Both the [Moravian Church](#) and the Evangelical Czech Brethren Church in the Czech Republic trace their origin to the Unitas Fratrum.

Today, we commemorate the 551st anniversary of the founding of the Unitas Fratrum (Unity of the Brethren) or the Moravian Church. This is a Church that has gone through the storms, the flood, the fire, but a Church which is resilient, because it knows the God it serves. It is a Church that will never die. Is there a witness for Jesus and the Moravian Church? Our Provincial theme 2008, “Blessed to Bless”, compels us to continue to witness for the Master in good times and bad.

02 March, 2008