

Thoughts on Jamaica

At the onset of my trip to Jamaica I was wondering exactly what this conference was all about. I hadn't received much information about the topics, the countries participating, or even if we had any mission activities planned. I went knowing very little and have come back with so much. When I arrived at the airport I met up with a group of young people that were going to be attending the same conference. The other North American and I had been in contact before the conference but only by email so this was a first meeting for us all. As we stood waiting to be picked up at the airport none of us had any idea about the subject of this conference other than the theme. "Youth fulfilling their purpose through Christ. Revitalizing the Church through revitalizing the youth." In the hours that followed we were taken to New Hope Moravian Church in Kingston. There we waited on all of the delegates to arrive, the conversations as we were all waiting centered around what our churches were like, why we had come, and what our hopes for the conference were. As we talked there was a lot of head nodding and agreement amongst us. Soon we all realized that the problems that we had once thought only faced our churches and our provinces are world wide problems. Things like poor youth participation, lack of communication, understanding and respect between the elders in the church and the youth, and the church's reluctance to address social issues and education. It was obvious to all of us that it did not matter what the conference was like, the "real" advancement would happen through our individual and group efforts to work in the church to remedy our individual problems. The community that began in Jamaica is a support group for all youth in the church. We can all be a motivational force in our church to share what we had learned with our provinces and begin a process of renewal. Most all we should remember that we are not alone in these struggles.

From the beginning of the conference we had formed a community that was committed to working towards the goals of helping our church. We all realized that the Moravian Church and the Christian church is no longer growing. We all had ideas as to the reason for such a change and were constantly talking about ways in which we, or our generation could work to change that and bring about a positive renewal in the church. We had presentations on globalization, Youth and the Church, Reproductive health and healthy lifestyle, along with cultural presentations and sharing. We were constantly learning about our countries, cultures, and different Moravian churches and traditions. The sessions produced some discussions but most of the discussions were held amongst the groups outside of the large group sessions. We all knew the problems with a more and more connected global network and the reality of the world's influence on the youth. Now we began to talk about ways to develop solutions or at least strategies to help each individual place cope with these changes in their own cultural environments and worldviews. The easiest part of the conference was identifying the problems but what we needed and are still working on, are strategies to improve the situations that we face as a church.

The first step into developing these strategies was to share information between our churches and provinces to see how others were dealing with similar problems. We had a questionnaire about our provinces and each province made a presentation about the youth. It was educational to see what things that people have done to encourage participation within the church and to connect all the members to a common goal that

includes the youth as a vital part of church life. It is easy to forget that other churches do things in different ways and get the same message across. We can't get caught up in what has always been. If it is no longer working it is not what we as a church need to be doing. This same sharing needs to happen within the provinces to be an effective tool. There are activities and ideas that would be useful to share within the province to help all the churches improve their youth programs and therefore improve their church community. There are many reasons that globalization is detrimental to our societies and countries, but it does aid in communication of ideas, strategies, and culture. Think of all the things that we could never have known about one another until the creation of the Internet or worldwide television. Sure we see a lot of things that we would rather not know. But with knowledge of others we can be empowered to share God's gift with people of all races, creeds, and cultures. The same thing applies to our province, what kinds of things can we share and learn from one another?

Communication is not enough, however, to renew the church. We need action. As a body we felt that the church in general has lost its vision for mission. I remember being at Senior High camp and talking to Bob Rierson about the ministry. There was a time when many pastors served in the mission field before returning to their home provinces to serve. It stuck with me that things had changed so much that I rarely even hear about mission work through the Moravian Church. The spirit that led that movement does not seem to be as present in my generation. The delegates asked why these things had changed. The change must be a reflection of something more, a deeper change in our hearts as Christians. Are we too comfortable? Do we choose to ignore the plights of others because we feel like there is nothing that we can do? Have we forgotten the power of prayer? How can we find that passion for mission again? What can young people do to bring awareness to our need for mission, for church service and for unity in the church? This conference was only the beginning of my generation's realization that we all have a lot of work to do. I can say that on coming home my heart was filled with hope that something might come out of my personal effort to do what I am able to do. We as a church, as a youth and most of all as Christians cannot pass off the responsibility to renew our church and to spread the gospel; we must take on that responsibility ourselves. I know that I am guilty of seeing a job that needed to be done and leaving it undone because "someone else" would do it." We are called to service for the Lord. What if Christ had walked past those in need because someone else was on the way? We can only depend on God to work through us to achieve God's vision if we allow him to come into our hearts. As long as we keep Christ in our focus then we will be doing what he wills for his world.

This conference brought to light many issues that we are confronted with but do not want to face. What is *God's* vision for the Moravian Church and what are we being called to do within the context of that vision? We ask for your prayers as we continue onward developing another conference and a youth board to encourage and motivate the youth in the Moravian church to be active and productive members in the body of Christ.

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