



Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

God's work. Our hands.

March 25, 2015

“For he [Christ] is our peace; in his flesh he has made both groups into one and has broken down the dividing wall, that is, the hostility between us.” - Ephesians 2:14

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

We need to talk. Ferguson, Missouri; Norman, Oklahoma; Madison, Wisconsin; Staten Island, New York; and Charlottesville, Virginia: recent events in these and other places prove we are not living in a post-racial society. I know it's difficult to talk about race because too many Americans do not want to believe racism still exists in our country. Yet, as always, Christ promises to be alongside us, even in the most difficult of times, working for our reconciliation. Because of God's promise, we can and must have a deep, honest and even painful conversation about racism.

This month our country commemorated the 50th anniversary of the Selma to Montgomery March and its significance in the passage of the 1965 Voting Rights Act. Lutherans were in Selma to join more than 70,000 people to remember and honor the courage of the veterans of the civil rights movement. Selma symbolized the very best of the human spirit to work cooperatively for change at any cost. Conversely, it also demonstrated the lowest levels of hatred, violence and resistance to change.

Overt forms of racism are no longer legally sanctioned, but the legacy of racism, sadly, endures. Institutional policies and practices still privilege some while limiting access and opportunities to others. Today, the Voting Rights Act has been weakened by the removal of federal oversight of local voting laws and millions of poor and people of color fill the cells of our criminal justice system.

We have said, “Racism – a mix of power, privilege, and prejudice – is sin, a violation of God's intention for humanity.” (*Freed in Christ: Race, Ethnicity, and Culture*, 1993) Ongoing racial justice conversations are occurring and work is happening. But in cases where these are not, we shouldn't wait until another racial event is widely reported before we talk. Here are a number of ways:

- Listen to and learn from the experiences of people of color in your communities.
- Contact the Ethnic Specific and Multicultural Ministries and the Racial Justice Ministries at the churchwide organization. Connect with your synod anti-racism team.
- Be in conversation with your synod bishop and staff. Many of our synods are equipped to help connect you with local resources on anti-racism education and racial justice ministries.
- Learn more about our ongoing racial justice work. This church has helpful guidance in our criminal justice social statement and in the race, ethnicity, and culture social statement.*
- Advocate for local, state and federal legislation and regulations that guarantee to all citizens the right to vote. Join the ELCA e-Advocacy Network at www.elca.org/advocacy.

As a church called to witness to the Gospel of Jesus Christ, we must continue to listen deeply, to speak out about racial equity and inclusion, to respect and uplift the dignity and humanity of every person and to join with others in organizing for change. In baptism we have become part of the body of Christ and in Christ there is no barrier between us. I pray that our Lord will use us and this moment to make this baptismal promise a reality in our lives and in this church.

God's blessings,

Elizabeth A. Eaton
Presiding Bishop

* Additional resources of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

- Social Statement on “[The Church and Criminal Justice: Hearing the Cries](#)”, 2013 ([Spanish](#))
- Social Statement on “[Freed in Christ: Race, Ethnicity, and Culture](#)”, 1993 ([Spanish](#))
- Listing of [ELCA Racial Justice Resources](#)
- [Assessment Report of Synod Anti Racism Teams](#) (provided through a grant from the Conference of Bishops’ Ministry Among People in Poverty Committee)
- One Body Many Members: [Part 1](#), One Body, Similar Members – Leadership
- One Body Many Members: [Part 2](#), Meeting Our Neighbors for the First Time – Meeting Our Neighbors
- One Body Many Members: [Part 3](#), One Body, Many Members – Challenges of Diversity
- [Talking Together as Christians about Tough Social Issues](#)
- [Talking Together as Christians Cross-culturally: A Field Guide](#)
- [Understanding One Another: A Congregational Resource](#)

[ELCA.org](#) web pages:

[Racial Justice Ministries](#)

- [Downloadable ELCA Resources on Racial Justice](#)

[Ethnic Specific and Multicultural Ministries](#)

- [Downloadable ELCA Resources on Ethnic Specific & Multicultural Ministries](#)

[ELCA Advocacy Ministries](#)

- [Downloadable ELCA Resources on Advocacy](#)

Churchwide assembly actions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

- + Guarantee of Voting Rights to All Citizens (CA13.06.27)
- + American Indian and Alaska Native Peoples (CA13.06.29)
- + International Year for People of African Descent (CA11.03.12)
- + Project Connect and the Vision of Fullness of Leadership for the ELCA (CA09.03.10)
- + Anti-Racism Work (CA05.07.39j)
- + Dismantling Institutional Racism of this church (CA03.07.65; CA03.07.66)
- + Working Against Racism (CA03.06.22)
- + Birmingham Pledge (CA01.02.07)
- + “Partner in mission and dialogue” with Churches Uniting in Christ (CA01.04.16)
- + Racial Hate Crimes (CA01.07.58)
- + Burning of African-American Churches (CA97.6.52)
- + Representational Principles and Urban Initiative (CA95.6.58)
- + Plan to Listen and Act (CA93.8.104)
- + 1992: Year of Remembrance, Repentance, and Renewal (CA91.5.28)
- + Racism is a sin (CA89.2.6)