

**UNDERSTANDING ONE ANOTHER**

**African Methodist Episcopal Church  
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America**

**A CONGREGATIONAL RESOURCE**

Edited by  
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## INTRODUCTION

The African Methodist Episcopal (AME) Church and the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) in an informal way expressed an interest in establishing a bilateral dialogue in the 1980s. Based on an initiative by the ELCA, a preliminary meeting of representatives from each church met in Washington, D.C., in December of 1990 to explore the possibility. The group recommended to the two churches that a dialogue commission of five people from each church be appointed.

Indianapolis was the setting of a more formal planning session of the dialogue, which took place in November of 1991. The commission heard and discussed papers that addressed the question: How Has the American Experience Affected and/or Shaped the Life of My Church?

“Protest and Reform: A Study of Martin Luther and Richard Allen,” “Daniel A. Payne and the AME Church,” and “Daniel A. Payne and the Lutheran Church” were papers that undergird discussion at the first session of the dialogue in September, 1992, in St. Croix, Virgin Islands.

Meeting in Chicago in March, 1993, for its second session, the commission heard papers on “Marginality in the Biblical Witness,” “From the Margin to the Mainstream: The Role of the AME Church in American Political Culture,” and “Aspects of Marginalization Among American Lutherans.”

Session three, in Columbia, S.C., in October, 1993, focused on “Martin Luther and the Birth of Lutheranism,” short catalogues of facts that each church would like to know about the other, and a paper on “Ordination in the AME Church.” The commission decided that the present congregational resource document should be developed as the first result of the dialogue to go into print.

At its fourth session in Washington, D.C., in November 1994, the commission continued its work by discussion “Positive Marks of the AME,” “Positive Marks of the ELCA: and “Episcopate and the Church: Community of Grace.” Work continued on the congregational resource. Too, it was agreed that part of the long range goal of the dialogue was to affirm a common confession of the faith and to make a common commitment to evangelism, witness, and service.

The first round of the dialogue came to a conclusion with a fifth session in Gettysburg, Pa., in March 1996. A small coordinating committee is making plans for a second round of dialogue in the U.S.A.

*Understanding One Another: A congregational Resource* is written in the hope that many congregations of our respective communions will use it to accomplish the goal not just of learning about each other, but more important, manifesting the unity of our Christian community at a time when disunity, fragmentation, and outright conflict so often mark our society and our churches.

Daniel F. Martensen  
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## **HISTORY**

### **African Methodist Episcopal Church**

#### **Dennis C. Dickerson**

The African Methodist Episcopal Church started in 1787 in the Free African Society in Philadelphia. The dedication of Bethel African Methodist Episcopal Church to 1794 and the establishment of the AME denomination in 1816 thrust Richard Allen, the founder and first AME bishop, into an important leadership position among African Americans. Born a slave in Philadelphia in 1760 and sold as a child to Stokeley Sturgis near Dover, Delaware, Allen was converted to Christianity in 1778 when influential Methodist preachers aimed their preaching toward him and other blacks in the Delmarva Peninsula. Upon buying his freedom and becoming a Methodist preacher in 1783, Allen traveled throughout the Middle Atlantic as a staunch Wesleyan adherent. Egregious racism at St. Georges Methodist Episcopal Church in Philadelphia and subsequent attempts by white Wesleyan clergy to assert control over Allen's African Methodist congregation resulted in the founding of the AME connection.

As a denomination created out of the crucible of racial oppression, the AME Church has fashioned a distinctive ministry to the African American population in the Americas and to persons of color in Africa and Europe. Launched as an organized religious body when slavery seemed to become a fixed reality in American society, AME ministers and members inveighed against this odious institution. Richard Allen admonished slaveholders that -if you love your children, if you love your country, if you love the God of love, clear your hands from slaves; burden not your children or your country with them." The 1852 New England Annual Conference noted "that while we inhale the soft and sweet air of liberty, we as Christians cannot forget the forlorn and mournful condition of those of our brethren who are held in chains. "Hence, this body" will ever invoke the power and protection of that God who executeth righteousness for all them that are oppressed.' More concrete attempts to destroy slavery came from the abortive efforts of Denmark Vesey, a local AME preacher in Charleston, whose planned slave insurrection in 1822 would have brought emancipation to thousands in South Carolina. Morris Brown, who allegedly aided Vesey, found refuge in Philadelphia in the home of Richard Allen. When the AME founder died in 1831, Brown succeeded him as the second bishop of the denomination.

Daniel A. Payne, who was elected a bishop in 1852, became a leading proponent for an educated AME clergy. In 1863 he drew denominational support to a daring educational venture in Ohio. Wilberforce University, which the Methodist Episcopal Church started and then abandoned, became an AME institution. Payne served as the first president, raised unprecedented sums, and graduated a significant number of black ministers, educators, and other professionals.

The AME Church spread rapidly during the antebellum period to every section of the United States and into Canada and Haiti. On the slave soil of Delaware, Maryland, Kentucky, Missouri, Louisiana, and the District of Columbia were numerous AME congregations, During the Civil War, AME ministers recruited soldiers into the Union Army and served themselves as military chaplains. Even before the war ended, AME missionaries traveled into the former Confederacy to draw freedmen into the denomination. As membership swelled to 400,000 by 1880, AME leaders, both clergy and lay, sat in Reconstruction legislatures, held seats in Congress, and served in scores of other political offices.

Formal entry into West Africa in 1891 and South Africa in 1896 made the denomination a significant black institution beyond the western hemisphere. Reunification in 1884 with the previously dissident British Methodist Episcopal Church brought the denomination back into Canada, and added the Maritime Provinces, Bermuda, and pans of South America. Missionaries also pushed the boundaries of the AME Church to embrace most areas of the Caribbean, including Important inroads into Cuba.

From me postbellum era to the start of the World War I black migration, the AME Church grew dramatically from 50,000 in 1866 to 494,777 in 1890 and to 548,355 in 1916.

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Growth of the AME Church		
Year	1866-1916	
	Members	Congregations
1866	50,000	1,600
1890	452,725	2,481
1906	494,777	6,647
1916	548,355	6,636

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The labor needs of northern and western mills and factories pulled massive numbers of African Americans out of the agricultural South starting in 1916. In succeeding decades, culminating in the 1960s, the migration transformed the North and spearheaded major changes in the South. Moreover, the role and posture of the federal government toward issues of pivotal importance to African Americans precipitated unprecedented events that improved the political, social, and economic condition of blacks. Consequently, AME leaders focused on structures and issues that would bring about permanent progress. The strides of two ministers in the Pittsburgh Annual Conference were illustrative of the new challenges and involvements that confronted AME clergy. The massive migration that World War I inaugurated brought thousands of African Americans to northern industries. This unparalleled influx of workers required AME clergy to respond to these newcomers in creative ways. Harrison G. Payne pastored Park Place African Methodist Episcopal Church in Homestead, Pennsylvania, during the early 1920s. A large Carnegie steel plant, which was located in the town, drew to Homestead hundreds of

African American migrants during this period. The Park Place congregation grew from 90 members in 1916 to 400 in 1924. To deal with severe housing shortages in the town, Payne in 1923 started a church-sponsored real estate agency to sell or rent homes to newcomers at low monthly rates. Benjamin M. McLinn, pastor of St. Paul African Methodist Episcopal Church in Washington, Pennsylvania, became similarly concerned with African American workers. During World War II the federal Fair Employment Practices Commission attempted to rid defense industries of racial discrimination. Mindful of this employment reality in his own community, McLinn and other black clergy in 1943 invited F.E.P.C. investigation at particular plants where they suspected bias in hiring and promotions.

AME ministers also impacted the modern civil rights struggle. The landmark *Brown vs. Board of Education* case involved Linda Brown, the daughter of the Rev. Oliver Brown, pastor of St. Mark AME Church in Topeka, Kansas. The Browns thought it unfair that young Linda could not attend a public school near her home on account of race.

That case along with others pushed upward through the federal judiciary to the Supreme Court. A case that came out of Clarendon County, South Carolina, involved Rev. Joseph A. Delaine, an AME pastor and school principal, who protested the state's segregated educational system. When the high court ruled in favor of the Browns, the Clarendon County blacks, and the other complainants, legalized public school segregation came to an end.

With over two million members in the Americas, the Caribbean, Europe, and Africa, the AME Church is supervised by twenty bishops. Twelve general officers oversee crucial denominational programs. There are over 6,000 AMP congregations and 8,000 ministers.

## **Evangelical Lutheran Church in America**

### **James L. Schaaf**

The Lutheran church does not see itself as a church that originated at the time of the sixteenth century Reformation, and it does not regard itself as a church that developed in deliberate opposition to the Roman Catholic church. The church that grew out of Luther's Reformation understands itself as a body that stands in continuity with the long line of prophets, apostles, martyrs, and confessors that extends back to the beginning of the Christian church.

Martin Luther (1483-1546), a member of the mendicant order of Augustinian Hermits and a professor of theology at the University of Wittenberg in Saxony, became troubled as he confronted penitents who sought absolution but did not display contrition for their sins. They had frequently purchased indulgence letters, certificates that stated they were entitled to be absolved by any confessor. Although the sale of indulgences was one of the most insidious ways in which the church ever raised money, Luther's objection was not to the financial transaction, but to the pernicious effect it had on the penitential practice of the church, encouraging people to seek forgiveness without repentance.

As a teacher and loyal servant of the church, on October 31, 1517, Luther initiated a protest against the traffic in indulgences by posting an invitation on the door of the Wittenberg Castle Church, which served as the university's bulletin board, to anyone to debate Ninety-five Theses on the Power of Indulgences. Although no other scholar took up the gauntlet, Luther's action in effect did touch off a controversy that was to shake the foundations of the church and lead to the greatest schism the Western Church has ever known.

Within three years Luther had become the best known ecclesiastic in Europe and the most prolific author of the century. With his Ninety-five Theses he had unleashed a pent-up resentment against the power of the Roman papacy. He followed those relatively mild propositions he debated with more serious theological tomes and proposals for reform in church and society. When he was increasingly attacked by defenders of the church's practices and teachings, he appealed more and more to Holy Scripture as the only valid source and norm of theology and practice. Soon the topic of controversy switched to the central issues of how one is justified before God, what contribution a person makes to salvation, the true source of authority in the church, and the proper function of the hierarchy. When pushed by his opponents, Luther went so far as to deny that the papacy had legitimate authority in the church. Rather than serving the faithful, the papacy was keeping them to bondage with its control over preaching and the administration of the sacraments, which were intended to be the means through which divine grace comes.

Faced with this attack on its authority, the papacy called upon Luther to recant or to suffer excommunication. Lacking the temporal power to enforce its decree, the church enlisted the civil government in the person of Emperor Charles V, the most powerful ruler in Europe and Luther's supreme temporal governor, to enforce its condemnation of Luther. Summoned before the emperor in 1521 in the city of Worms, Luther declared that unless convinced by Holy Scripture or by common sense he would not recant. As a result he was declared an outlaw and everyone was enjoined to take him prisoner or inform the emperor where he could be found. For ten months, however, Luther was nowhere to be captured. He had been sequestered at the Wartburg, a remote castle in Thuringia, by order of his sovereign, the Elector of Saxony. He used his enforced "idleness" there to continue his writing, most significantly publishing sermons, which found their way into the pulpits of many preachers throughout Germany, and preparing a translation of the New Testament from the original Greek into German, the first portion of what was to become a widely circulated and treasured Bible in the language of the common people. One can hardly overestimate the importance of Luther's Bible translation, his published sermons on the prescribed lectionary texts, and his vernacular hymns as vehicles for spreading his understanding of the Gospel message.

After the ten-month stay at the Wartburg, when the political situation in Europe made it less likely that the emperor would be able to enforce his edict against Luther, Luther returned to his teaching position in Wittenberg, where he remained for the remaining twenty-four years of his life, lecturing, writing, preaching, and corresponding with ecclesiastical and secular leaders. Wittenberg attracted theology students from all over Europe, and they took the Lutheran understanding of the gospel back to their homelands. Within Luther's lifetime there were

Lutheran preachers active from Finland to Illyria, from England to Denmark, from Flanders to Slovakia. Every country in Western Europe was eventually touched to a greater or lesser extent by the Wittenberg Reformation, and Lutheran churches became firmly established throughout the German states and Scandinavia.

Immigrants to the New World, who began to arrive in number in the seventeenth century, brought with them not only the particular customs and languages of their homelands, but those coming from countries where Lutheranism had taken hold brought their Lutheran understanding of the Christian faith as well. Lutheran congregations began to be established in what is now New York, New Jersey, and Pennsylvania as early as the 1630s, but the first general organization of Lutheran congregations in the New World was not effected until 1748 in Pennsylvania. This "Ministerium of Pennsylvania" became a model for the establishment of many "synods" (the Greek word for "meetings") in subsequent years. Because of the difficulties of transportation and communication, early synods were organized by congregations and pastors in limited geographical places such as Pennsylvania, New York, Virginia, and later, early in the nineteenth century, in North Carolina, Ohio, and Tennessee. Later, as the nineteenth century saw the westward expansion of America, synods were established in most of the new states, notably Missouri, Wisconsin, Iowa, and Texas.

Language differences, as well as geographical isolation, also contributed to the founding of independent synods. Although immigrants from Germany provided the largest growth for American Lutheranism, there were substantial numbers of Lutheran Norwegians, Danes, Swedes, Finns, Slovaks, Icelanders, and other ethnic groups. Naturally, they found it desirable to form linguistically oriented synods and, at first, to isolate themselves from other ethnic groups.

Lutheranism in the United States has also not been spared from theological controversies. Within some synods there were disputes that led to divisions and new configurations of synodical groupings. There have been far more than two hundred autonomous synods in the history of American Lutheranism, some, of course, involving only a few congregations, but others quite large and with nationwide constituencies.

About the beginning of the twentieth century, when communication had improved and the sense of identity with the European homeland had grown weaker, a movement toward Lutheran unity began. This lengthy process has resulted in a gradual consolidation of synods (not unaccompanied by more splintering), so that today ninety-eight per cent of the 8,408,162 baptized Lutherans in the United States (1992 statistics) are members of one of the three largest bodies: the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (5,234,568), the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod (2,617,272), or the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod (421,189).

Lutherans in America, as those throughout the world, although organizationally divided into different synods, all pledge their loyalty to the Lutheran Confessions that originated in the sixteenth century Reformation, primarily the Augsburg Confession and Luther's Small Catechism.

The focal point within the Lutheran confessional writings is Luther's central teaching: justification by grace through faith for Christ's sake, which Luther summarized in 1529 in his Small Catechism:

I believe that by my own reason or strength I cannot believe in Jesus Christ, my Lord, or come to him. But the Holy Spirit has called me through the Gospel, enlightened me with his gifts, and sanctified and preserved me in true faith, just as he calls, gathers, enlightens, and sanctifies the whole Christian church on earth and preserves it in union with Jesus Christ in the one true faith. In this Christian church he daily and abundantly forgives all my sins, and the sins of all believers, and on the last day he will raise me and all the dead and will grant eternal life to me and to all who believe in Christ. This is most certainly true.<sup>1</sup>

## **THEOLOGY**

### **African Methodist Episcopal Church**

#### **Kenneth H. Hill**

##### *Our Beliefs*

In our tradition, there are several documents that help to inform our distinctive understanding of the Christian faith. We rely on *The Book of Doctrine and Discipline of the AME Church*; *The AME Hymnal*; *The AME Book of Worship*; *Episcopal Salutation*; *Historical Statement*; *Articles of Religion*; and *The Life, Experience and Gospel Labors of the Rt. Rev. Richard Allen*.

The AME Church recognizes and observes two holy sacraments: Baptism and Holy Communion. The modes of baptism in African Methodism are pouring, sprinkling, and immersion. Regardless of the mode administered, baptism is a powerful symbol of regeneration and initiation into the community of faith-Christ's church. Holy Communion serves as a memorial of the death and suffering of Christ and celebrates the abundant life we have through him.

##### *Our Name*

"African" means that the church was organized by people of African descent and heritage. It does not mean that the church was founded in Africa or that it is for people of African descent only. It does mean that those Americans who founded it were of African descent, and we proudly recognize this fact.

"Methodist" refers to the church's membership in the family of Methodist churches. Richard Allen, the founder and first active bishop, felt that the form and format of Methodism would best suit the needs of the African community.

"Episcopal" refers to the form of government under which the church operates. The episcopal

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<sup>1</sup>

form of government means that the chief executive and administrative officers of our denomination are our bishops. Their authority is given them by the General Conference, elected representatives of the entire denomination. Their responsibilities are to oversee the spiritual and temporal affairs of the church, including presiding over annual conferences, making pastoral appointments, ordaining deacons and elders, organizing missions, and generally promoting the interest of the denomination.

Church refers to the "Christian Church," which is a community of people who believe in God and who have accepted Jesus Christ as the guiding example of their lives. We also believe in the third person of the Godhead, the Holy Spirit, who enables the believer to become a true and effective servant of God. Jesus Christ is the spiritual head of the Christian Church.

### *Our Creed*

How do we understand what we believe as African Methodists? How do we think about what we believe as African Methodists? How do we theologically reflect on the life of the African Methodist Episcopal Church? How do we think about our doctrine?

Theology is doctrine is the making—doctrine stretched in new directions. Our theology leads in the exploration of various interpretations of tradition and Scripture.

A tradition that does not allow for serious self-criticism and the freedom of exploration hinders the growth of faith.

Before the church can make new confession of doctrine, there must be periods of reflection. James Cone in 1976 brought theological reflection to bear on African Methodist doctrinal standards using the motto, "God Our Father, Christ Our Redeemer, Man Our Brother" as the source and norm for Christian teaching. He focused on reinterpreting and relating our doctrinal heritage found in our motto to contemporary connectional life. Bishop Vinton R. Anderson's recent episcopal address at the 44th Session of the AME General Conference recommends a connectional conference on faith and order to engage the church in theological and doctrinal clarification.

The task of defining the scope of our tradition includes much more than defining or redefining standards of doctrine. The heart of our task is to discover how seriously we take our distinctive doctrinal heritage and how creatively we appropriate the fullness of that heritage in the life and mission of our church today.

### *Our Confessions of Faith*

African Methodist belief is based upon the creed (doctrine) and confession of faith (theology) of those who have gone before us. Our doctrine is the collective understanding of the church expressed in agreed-upon formulations called the Article of Religion. The Articles of Religion

reflect a consensus of the church at a previous time, but they do not remain as vital as they should be in the church's ongoing growth.

But the Articles of Religion are held together with inheritances that add dynastic possibility. The inheritances are Richard Allen's Life, Experience and Gospel Labors and Daniel A. Payne's classic motto, "God our Father, Christ our Redeemer, and Man our Brother."

The doctrinal standards of African Methodism are not located solely in the Articles of Religion. The writings of Richard Allen, Henry McNeil Turner, and Daniel A. Payne have been used by the church as exemplary illustrations of our African Methodist belief. These materials function as articles of faith containing good African Methodist doctrine. These writings provide established standards of doctrine because of their constant usage in the daily practice of our church.

Richard Allen stands as the Inaugurator of our tradition. Allen bequeathed a spirit; he engendered an ethos that has been evident in his progeny. Our tradition is not only doctrinal formulations but dialogical encounters. The relation of our founder to our tradition is dialogical. It is an ongoing conversation, argument, and interplay of our church with its received history and its struggle with that inheritance.

Richard Allen is our point of reference with whom succeeding generations are interactive. The Life, Experience and Gospel Labors of Richard Allen have had an uninterrupted history of being received as an established source of doctrinal standards. The Life, Experience and Gospel Labors as doctrinal standard has authority by constant usage in instruction in the life of the church and as a "historical Statement" in the Book of Doctrine and Discipline.

Daniel A. Payne emerges as a nineteenth century architect of the doctrinal tradition. The General Conference of 1856 ordered Bishop Payne to create an Episcopal seal and upon the border of the seal is the motto, "God Our Father, Christ Our Redeemer, Man Our Brother."

For Payne the primary doctrinal concern was the promotion and preservation of the tradition. Payne sought out the tradition of African Methodism and left a written record for succeeding generations. Payne's classic motto has authority by its inclusion in the "Episcopal Salutation" of the Book of Doctrine and Discipline and as the official motto of the AME Church.

Bishop Henry McNeil Turner published *Methodist Polity* in 1885. Turner's writing on polity, adopted at the General Conference of 1888, shapes our understanding of how we are governed. In this authoritative volume, Turner writes comprehensively about Methodist polity.

Turner, honoring John Wesley's question-and-answer style, introduces the polity and doctrine of African Methodism. "This self-definition proved to be concise and sufficient. So for the rest of the nineteenth and twentieth century the church has reprinted this document.

Turner's book legitimizes the church as an institution, particularly its polity and doctrine. *Methodist Polity* has doctrinal authority because of this constant usage as a major resource in

doctrinal instruction, especially in ministerial preparation.

Tuner's thinking and writing on polity and doctrine underscore his contribution to our doctrinal history. In summary, all of these documents claim to be doctrinal authority, which resides not in an article of the constitution, but rather in their constant usage as reference and resource in the actual daily practice of our church.

## **Evangelical Lutheran Church in America**

### **Cynthia A. Jürisson**

Words are important: they can be used to enlighten or to deceive, to speak truth or to obscure it, to enslave people or to free them. Words about God are especially important, which is why Lutherans are so committed to the task of theology. Theology is the attempt to speak words of truth about God, words that will give people hope and a future, words that will free rather than enslave.

During Luther's lifetime and for several years afterwards, when the Lutheran movement was still quite young, Lutheran theologians and pastors wrote a number of theological treatises to explain what Lutheranism was all about. These public declarations of faith clarified Lutheran beliefs about a number of things including the persons and work of the Trinity, the sacraments, the nature of sin and salvation, the office of the ministry, and the church. These treatises were assembled together and are now known collectively as the Lutheran Confessions, they are, like the ancient creeds of the church (to which they subscribe), grounded in the Holy Scriptures. Lutherans believe that responsible theology, truthful words about God, must be deeply grounded in Scripture, since the Scriptures are God's primary means of revelation to the human race.

The central and basic testimony of Scripture is that God created the human race, that the whole human race has turned away from God and rejected God's will, and that God sent his Son to redeem sinful humankind. The Scriptures also testify that God is present in the world for humans as the Creator of all that exists, as the Redeemer of humankind and as the Holy Spirit who calls and gathers together believers and preserves our faith and the faith of the whole Christian church until Christ's return.

People in every epoch of history have been deeply concerned about their sinfulness and have sought ways to please or to appease God and to avoid God's judgment. This was certainly the case with Martin Luther. As a young monk Luther tried very hard to keep his monastic vows, thinking that in this way he could earn God's favor and secure his own salvation. But no matter what he did, Luther could not make himself perfect. No matter how hard he tried, he remained a sinner in thought, word, and deed. Luther was caught in a vicious circle: knowing that he had sinned, tormented by the fear of death and hell, he worked even harder to live a sinless life and thereby ensure his salvation. But the harder he worked, the more he was confronted with his sinfulness and the more terrified he became.

Finally, trying to find a way out of this vicious circle, Luther turned to the Scriptures. What he found there was not only a God of wrath and judgment, but also a God who so loved humans that he became human and died on a cross for our sins. After years of practicing harsh monastic self-discipline and doing good works to earn his own salvation, Luther realized that he could not earn his salvation; he could only accept it as a gift of God, a gift given by a God who "so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life" (John 3:16).

The Lutheran Confessions assert that it is in the person of Jesus Christ that God has most fully revealed himself, most fully revealed his love for the human race. Thus, Lutheran "God-talk," Lutheran theology, aims to be Christ-centered, and particularly, centered on what Jesus Christ accomplished for us on the cross.

Luther's realization that humans are saved (or justified, as Luther called it) not by their own work but by the work of Christ, is still the central and most fundamental principle of Lutheran theology. Lutherans know this idea as "justification by faith through grace." Simply put, the principle of justification leads Lutherans to insist that there is nothing that we humans can do to earn our salvation. Salvation has nothing to do with our good works, our intelligence or talents, our race or gender, our national or denominational allegiance. Our salvation is simply a free gift of God—the result of God's unconditional, unshakable love for us.

Though this is a fairly easy principle to state, it is actually quite difficult for humans simply to accept the idea that salvation is a gift of God that cannot be earned. Luther recognized, as have many theologians before and since, that the essence of human sin is the unwillingness to recognize our sinful state and our dependence upon God for all that we have. This sinfulness takes many different forms. Some of us tend to make bargains with God: "If you do this for me, God, I'll do such-and-such for you." Some of us are so ashamed by our sins that it is hard for us to believe that we can ever be forgiven. And many of us want to believe, like the Pharisees did, that we are better or more righteous than others and thus more deserving of God's grace. But the scriptural witness against such ways of thinking is incontrovertible. In Rom. 4:23-24, Paul writes, "for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified freely by God's grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus."

God's promise of salvation is manifested in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. God's promise is also manifested in the gift of the preached Word, and the sacraments of Baptism and Holy Communion. Luther rejected the Catholic tradition of seven sacraments. Based on his reading of Scripture he argued that there were just two rites in the church that were ordained by God and carried within themselves the saving power of God's grace. These two rites, both initiated by Jesus Christ, are Baptism and Holy Communion.

In the Small Catechism, a pamphlet written to help pastors and parents teach children about the Christian faith, Luther states that Baptism "effects forgiveness of sins, delivers from death and the devil, and grants eternal salvation to all who believe, as the Word and promise of God declare." This understanding of Baptism is consistent with the Lutheran principle of justification:

the forgiveness and salvation that we receive in Baptism are a gift that we receive, not something that we earn. The practice of infant Baptism, which Lutherans affirm, is vivid testimony to the sheer giftedness of God's grace. In Baptism we stand before God as helpless as tiny babies who rest in their parents' arms, totally dependent on them for all of their needs. In Baptism, God, our divine parent, encircles us with his loving arms, declares us his beloved children, and provides us with all that we really need in this life and the next: the promise of salvation and eternal life in Christ.

The only other sacramental rite instituted by Christ himself is the sacrament of Holy Communion, or the Lord's Supper. Lutherans believe that just like Baptism, the Lord's Supper is a visible manifestation of God's grace. Lutherans also believe that we receive God's promise of salvation in the Lord's Supper because we actually receive Christ our Lord in the Lord's Supper. Put another way, Lutherans affirm the real presence of Christ in the Lord's Supper. When, as Christ commanded us to do, we gather together to share the Lord's Supper, we can be certain that Christ is there with us, because he has promised that he is there. And we can be certain that our sins have been forgiven because Christ, who is truly present in the Supper, has promised that in the eating and drinking and hearing of the Word, we receive forgiveness of sins (Matt. 26:28).

## **POLITY AND MINISTRY**

### **African Methodist Episcopal Church**

#### **Kenneth H. Hill**

The African Methodist Episcopal church has a polity known as connectionalism. As a connectional body, each local church maintains its own Identity, yet is subject to a centralized governmental authority. No local church is an entity unto itself, but rather is connected at various levels to other units and offices of the national body.

Bishops are elected by the General Conference. Each bishop has oversight of an episcopal district, which is made up of two or more annual conferences. The bishop presides over the yearly meetings of the annual conferences, determines presiding elder districts, appoints the presiding elders, assigns pastors to the local churches within the episcopal district, and ordains candidates for the ministry who have been approved by the annual conference.

The AME church views the General Conference as the supreme law making body of the church. The size of the General Conference is determined by the number of districts and annual conferences. Each district and annual conference has the right to be represented at the General Conference by lay and ministerial delegates, and a majority of all votes is necessary for election. The election rules exist in the Book of Doctrine and Discipline, which governs requirements for voter eligibility, election administration, the form of the ballot, and the provisions dictating the conduct of the balloting on election day.

At the General Conference there are direct elections in which bishops and general officers are chosen. In the election of bishops and general officers, campaign committees are organized to help members make informed choices. These groups are congregational, episcopal or connectionally based. The broader the base of organizational support, the greater the possibilities of election to office. These groups perform their functions commonly attributed to political caucuses they conduct campaigns, lobby delegates, raise money, and frequently vote as blocs. In short, delegates choose their leadership in regular, free, and competitive elections in which candidates represent factions that continue from one election to the next.

The General Conference meets quadrennially. The proceedings of the General Conference include the convening of a number of committees responsible for initiating legislation and making specific reports. There are more than thirty of these committees. There is also a General Conference commission charged with all logistical matters concerning each General Conference connectional officer.

The general agencies of the African Methodist Episcopal Church are the regularly established commissions, committees, councils, boards, and departments. All the agencies of the AME Church are amenable to the General Conference and accountable to the General Board. Many of the programs of the general church are organized into twelve general church departments, each managed by a general officer. Again, the General Conference elects general officers quadrennially to direct and superintend the program and activities of the church.

Between sessions of the General Conference, the departments, councils, committees, boards, and commissions are accountable to the General Board. The evaluation of general agencies by the General Board is part of the accountability process. This is done through annual reports made by the agencies to the General Board. The purpose is to assist the agency in fulfilling and supporting its ministry.

Beneath the General Conference are the:

- Board of Trustees, which supervises all AME Church property receiving financial support from the church's budget.
- Judicial Council, which serves as an appellate court empowered to hear final appeals from any adverse decision affecting any church member by, for example, a bishop, commission, group, or pastor.
- Council of Bishops, which is the executive branch of the church, made up of all AME bishops. The council has the authority to administer the affairs of the church as set up by the General Conference and the responsibility to implement and enforce the decisions of the General Board in operating the general budget fund.
- General Board, which is the financial administrative body of the church, supported by various departments and commissions. This body develops the church's final budget recommendations to the General Conference and may authorize any budgetary changes between General Conferences. The General Board is made up of five representatives from each episcopal district and members at large, all of whom are elected at the General Conference.

- The AME Church has eleven standing commissions, which report to the General Board. These commissions review the reports and work of the church's departments and agencies. Each commission is chaired by a bishop elected by the General Board. There is usually one and sometimes two or more departments reporting to each commission. These departments are headed by either general or connectional officers.

The political structure of the African Methodist Episcopal Church encourages members to take part in politics by providing them with experience in democratic participation. At various stages there is consultation between bishops, clergy, and laity on matters ranging from church administration to the definition of appropriate church posture. Thus, the AME Church can be sure the position it adopts reflects members' preferences.

### **Our Ministry**

By 1916, when Richard Allen and his early followers became a part of the Methodist movement, the practices established in the 1794 Conference of Methodists were fairly well institutionalized. The term "bishop," which referred to the hierarchy of the church, had been adopted by Asbury, Coke, et al. Thus, it was a natural process for Allen and the early African Methodists to adopt the procedures and terminology from the Methodist Episcopal Church.

The AME Church follows the ordination procedure as outlined from the former Methodist Episcopal Church in the sense that it recognizes two orders of ministry. There is the order of deacon authorized to preside over the sacrament of Baptism and to assist an ordained elder in the distribution and administration of the Lord's Supper. However, a deacon cannot consecrate the elements of the Lord's Supper. A deacon can also preside at the rites at the church to the absence of an elder. The second order, that of elder, affords the responsibility to administer both sacraments and to function as a leader within the church. In the ordained clergy there is the itinerant deacon and itinerant elder. These persons follow very closely the doctrine of John Wesley that ministers should pastor wherever the need exists. The itinerant elder and deacon in the African Methodist Episcopal Church are known as 'professional clergy.' These men and women respond in their ordination vows that they will follow the church and go wherever they are sent to address the needs of the church and assignment by their bishop.

Additionally, there are local orders of deacons and elders. These persons for various reasons have decided that their ministry should be circumscribed within a given geographical area. These ministers are called upon to lead in worship and to function in the absence of itinerant deacons and elders. However, they are not authorized to practice their ministry outside the area in which they were ordained to serve.

Bishops in the AME Church function largely as do bishops in the Episcopal and Methodist Episcopal Churches. However, AME bishops are consecrated rather than ordained. It is clear, however, within African Methodism that these persons do serve, in effect, as a separate order. They are more than itinerant elders. They are senior elders charged with the responsibility of presiding over episcopal districts. A crucial part of their responsibilities includes the assignment

of pastors to churches. Once a person has been consecrated a bishop, he is no longer treated as an itinerant elder and is prohibited from pastoring a church. (In the case of an emergency, bishops 'may serve as Interim pastors).

### *The Process of Ordination in African Methodism*

Although African Methodists have adopted the Methodist Church's understanding of ordination, AMEs tend to place a higher regard, or 'a special "call," on ordained ministry than their United Methodist brothers and sisters. A person at the time of his or her ordination is often required to explain in some detail the nature of her call. Within African Methodism greater weight is placed upon a call to the ordained ministry than would be given a call to other vocations or professions. When one compares the concept of call, especially as delineated by Martin Luther, African Methodism considers the call to ordained ministry to be the major requirement for the ministry. Luther believed that we are summoned by God to whatever area of service we choose and that we, as Christians, should carry out this call to his glory.

Within the African Methodist Episcopal Church, a candidate for ordination must go through a process that extends over five years. First he or she is designated as a licensed preacher. This license must be received from the quarterly conference upon recommendation by the church conference. Ordinarily, persons who desire to be ordained go through their local pastor with the declaration that they feel "called to preach." The pastor is then obliged to talk with this candidate concerning his or her gifts for ministry. If the pastor considers these gifts to be sufficient, he or she encourages the person to become involved in activities in and around the church that allow these gifts to be developed.

Within a reasonable portion of time, the person will preach a "trial sermon" and then a church conference will be convened where the entire church holy votes on the person's fitness to begin the process for ordained ministry. If the vote within the local congregation is positive, then at the next session of the quarterly conference, which is convened by the presiding elder (that person who presides over several churches within an annual conference). At the quarterly conference, the candidate is presented and, if the quarterly conference under the leadership of the presiding elder gives a positive response, the candidate for ministry is licensed to preach. This means that person has the privilege to exhort, or proclaim the Word of God, within the area designated by his or her pastor. The candidate thereafter continues to serve in a local church and begins the process of preparation for admission to the annual conference. When the annual conference, that body presided over by a bishop, is convened, the candidate is presented for admission. If the annual conference approves his or her request for admission, the candidate is received as a member of the conference and begins a four-year course of study toward full ordination as an itinerant elder.

The introductory course of studies during the first two years includes materials concerning the Bible and information about the polity of the AME Church. At the end of this two-year period, if approved, the candidate is ordained as a deacon within the African Methodist Episcopal Church. Two more years of advanced study are required for ordination as an elder. In most annual

conferences within African Methodism, this four-year course of study is linked to the candidate's preparation within an approved seminary or school of theology. The tacit understanding is that upon ordination as an elder, the candidate will have completed the necessary requirements for the initial professional degree of Master of Divinity, or its equivalent. When a candidate for ministry has completed the course of instruction within the annual conference and has received the Master of Divinity degree, he or she is eligible upon recommendation by the annual conference and approval by the bishop to be fully ordained as an elder.

Apostolic succession has never been a part of the African Methodism ordination process, although the denomination does practice the "laying on of hands" as adopted from the early Methodists' ordination and considers it an Integral as well as inspirational aspect of the service. During the ordination ceremony, the bishop lays hands upon candidates for the order of deacon and commissions them to preach the Word of God and administer the sacrament of Baptism. When a candidate is ordained as an elder within the AME Church, the bishop and at least six other leaders must "lay on hands" as a climax of the ordination.

Within the African Methodist Episcopal Church, the procedure of laying on of hands is crucial for the ordination service. In this tradition, African Methodists follow not only the Episcopal and Methodist Church procedures, but also the New Testament understanding of how people are to be designated for service within the church. It is an honor and a privilege for candidates who are being ordained to have senior members of the clergy place hands upon us as they are validated for service.

## **Evangelical Lutheran Church in America**

### **Robert W. Kelley**

Lutheran identity has never been defined by church structure. Indeed, while others have chosen to identify themselves as Episcopalians or Presbyterians on the basis of their church polity, Lutherans have consistently witnessed that the organizational structure of the church is not of the essence in the church's life, but it is an adiaphoron, that is, a matter about which there is no biblical nor theological imperative for uniformity.

Thus, today there are Lutheran churches in the Lutheran World Federation that have an episcopal form of polity (including the Church of Sweden, which claims the historic episcopate) amid others that are organized congregationally. This variation is tolerable within the Lutheran family because there is uniformity among the churches in understanding the one essential description of the church: "This is the assembly of all believers among whom the Gospel is preached in its purity and the holy sacraments are administered according to the Gospel" (Augsburg Confession, Art. 7). The assembly of believers can be variously understood as the local congregation, the synods, the churchwide organization, or the church universal.

Consistent with this theological understanding of the church, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America seeks "to function as people of God through congregations, synods, and the churchwide

organization, all of which shall be interdependent. Each part, while fully the church recognizes that it is not the whole church and therefore lives in a partnership relationship with the others " (ELCA Constitution 8.11.). The congregation is church. The synod is church. The national structure is church.

The 5,234,568 baptized members of the ELCA are gathered together in 11,023 congregations. It is significant that there is a section in the constitution that specifically reserves to the congregations "authority in all matters that are not assigned by the constitution and bylaws of this church to synods and the churchwide organization" (ELCA Constitution 9.30.). Accordingly, congregations make all major decisions with regard to their life and mission, including the calling of pastoral and lay leadership. Congregations also have the authority to terminate such leadership so long as they engage in a process in which the synodical bishop is involved.

The congregations of the ELCA are gathered together geographically into sixty-five synods, "which bear primary responsibility for the oversight of the life and mission of this church in its territory" (ELCA Constitution 10.21.). Each synod has four officers (bishop, vice president, secretary, and treasurer) and a synod council who oversee and administer the work of the synod.

The highest authority in the life of the synod, however, is the assembly, which must meet at least biennially. Each congregation of the synod is represented at such assemblies by its pastor(s) and at least two laypersons, one male and one female. In accordance with the organizational principles of the ELCA, voting members of the assembly is to be ordered so that 60% shall be laity, 40% clergy. Additionally, 50% of the laity are to be female and 50% male, and 10% of the assembly is to be persons of color and/or persons whose primary language is other than English.

It would be no overstatement to say that congregations in the ELCA are viewed as the primary setting for life and mission. Each congregation is expected to organize itself as a worshipping, nurturing, witnessing, and serving community. Congregations are believers who gather regularly to worship and learn and who then scatter in the world to witness and serve.

While one of the basic responsibilities of the synod is to oversee and facilitate the ministry of congregations, that is not its sole function. As a matter of fact, the synod marshals the resources of the congregations in its territory and then finances the specific ministries that it will undertake as a synod. Obviously, because of the magnitude of resources, the synod is able to undertake projects and ministries that no one congregation would be able to support. Examples of such ministries can be found in the areas of theological education, campus ministry, outdoor ministry, and social ministry.

Likewise, the churchwide structure goes about churchly tasks that congregations and synods could not easily accomplish without such partnership. Examples here are global mission and the ecumenical outreach of our church. The present AME- ELCA dialogue is overseen and supported by our churchwide Department for Ecumenical Affairs.

Biennially, there is a Churchwide Assembly of about 1000 voting members who are

constitutionally the highest authority in our fellowship. This assembly is responsible for electing the churchwide officers and the Church Council, the interim decision-making body between churchwide assemblies. Additionally, the Churchwide Assembly responds to overtures or memorials from the synods regarding our shared life and mission. Synods of the ELCA elect the voting membership of the Churchwide Assembly in numbers proportionate to the number of congregations to the synod and the number of baptized members.

Clearly, from what is written above, it is obvious that the polity and governance in the ELCA reflect the political context in which we live and work. American democracy has had its impact, and we have chosen to mirror some of its representational principles as an aid to our life together.

Unlike the international nature of the African Methodist Episcopal Church, the ELCA and other Lutheran churches around the world are autonomous national or regional churches. A prevailing pattern of names conveys this reality: The Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Brazil, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Southern Africa, etc.

While the title of bishop is applied to the chief pastor of the church and each synod, that language does not convey any commitment to an episcopal form of polity nor does it convey authority to the bishop consistent with the episcopal pattern. As a matter of fact, even the term "bishop " is new to American Lutheranism, for the antecedent churches of the ELCA began using that term to designate their officers in the 1970s.

Because the Lutheran church was born out of a time in history (sixteenth century to Germany) when bishops of the church were viewed as obstacles to reformation, it is not surprising that some Lutheran churches, especially on the continent of Europe, decided not to organize episcopally. In some other areas, such as Scandinavia, where this was not their experience. The Lutheran church has used an episcopal polity.

The hesitancy of some Lutheran churches to organize episcopally or to use the title bishop for those given the responsibility of oversight in the church also stems from our view of the ministry of the church. A recent study of ministry in the ELCA has reaffirmed the historic Lutheran position that there is a unitary office of ordained ministry. Even as the church is defined as "the assembly of believers among whom the Gospel is preached in its purity and the holy sacraments are administered according to the Gospel," so also the office of ministry is connected to the Gospel and the sacraments. "Through these, as through means, he [God] gives the Holy Spirit, who works faith, when and where he pleases, in those who hear the Gospel" (Augsburg Confession, Art. 5). Although Luther was willing to speak of bishops in the church, it was important for him and his followers that the power of the bishops he seen to be none other than that given to the church in the pastoral office "to forgive and retain sins, and to administer and distribute the sacraments" (Augsburg Confession, Art. 28). It is certainly not a temporal authority, and, in general, it may be said that Lutheran usage of the term "bishop" implies a pastor with regional oversight responsibility not unlike the responsibility of a parish pastor.

This view of bishops is consistent with the Lutheran view of ordained ministry in general. While we continue to affirm that the pastoral office is a gift of God to the church and that one is called by God to the ordained ministry, we also affirm that there is no special status or character attributed to the pastor because of ordination. Moreover, it is imperative that the inner call to ministry of the pastoral candidate be validated by the church through the choice and call of a congregation. There is considerable respect for the pastoral office among Lutherans in actual practice, but it is respect directed toward pastors "for their work's sake" and not because of any particular status or power.

We Lutherans also emphasize the "ministry of all the baptized" consistent with the Reformation emphasis on the priesthood of all believers. Not all of the baptized are called to preach and teach to the church, but they are all called to live as God's people in the world in acts of witness and service. While all the faithful may call upon God with prayer, praise, and thanksgiving, not all are called to speak the Gospel in the congregation. Part of the discernment of one's call to public ministry is to be found in the candidacy process of the church whereby one is educated, trained, and subjected to examination and an approval process. One needs not only a living faith, but also the intellectual, social, and character gifts that the church perceives necessary for pastoral ministry.

While bishops are elected to terms of service (six years) in the ELC A, pastors are called by congregations to continuing service without a defined term. Present practice is for the bishop of a synod personally, and through staff, to be involved in the call process in a congregation by recommending suitable candidates in light of the mission and ministry profile of a congregation. Ultimately, however, the congregation must vote to call the candidate of its choosing, limited only to consideration of pastors on the clergy roster of the church.

The biblical and historical church terms "deacon" and "elder" are still used in some Lutheran church bodies and in congregations of the ELCA. However, there are no universally recognized definitions of what constitutes such ministries. The ELCA has only recently approved the creation of an office of "diaconal ministry" to the church, but it is not an ordained office. Rather, it will be viewed as part of the lay ministry of the church.

A current proposal for full communion between the ELCA and the Episcopal church carries with it the commitment of the ELCA to accept the historic episcopate not as a requirement for fellowship and the recognition of ministry, nor as a guarantor of the Gospel, but as a response to fellowship and for the sake of the Gospel.

## **WORSHIP**

### **African Methodist Episcopal Church**

**Kenneth H. Hill**

African Methodist Episcopal worship finds its primary grounding in the tradition of John Wesley and Richard Allen. African Methodists, like their African forebears, worship with body, mind, and soul.

Communion with God through worship is a central need of African Methodist Christians. African Methodists believe that the order of service must have unity so as to insure that all members of the church will feel at home in any AME church. The following article discusses that practice of African Methodist Episcopal worship.

### The Introit

During this part of the service, the choirs and clergy are assembled in the back of the sanctuary. The song, "We Have Come Into This House," serves as a means of focusing the assembly's attention on the purpose of its gathering. As all stand, they face the altar-table, which is the main architectural symbol of Christ's abiding presence among his people."

### The Processional

After the Introit, the choirs and clergy process toward the altar, the pulpit, and the choir lofts. During this aspect of the service, the choirs sing. "Come and Go with Me to My Father's House." This symbolizes the purpose for which the assembly has gathered. The Processional hymn, as it is normally called, serves as the means of affirming the purpose of the assembly in marshaling. As the choir proclaims, there are peace, joy, and other benefits that arise from coming into God's house. The congregation is uplifted during this period, and people are transported from their mundane existences to a spiritual existence in God's house.

### The Call to Worship

This functions also to direct the congregation's focus, and officially to invite the congregants to worship. It is an exchange between the minister and the congregation of portions of Psalms. This litany builds upon the Introit and the Processional hymn. The minister proclaims, "I was glad when they said unto me, let us go into the house of the Lord ...," to which the congregation responds, "...I had rather be a doorkeeper in the house of my God than to dwell in the tents of wickedness."<sup>2</sup> Proceeding, the Call builds until the proclamation that flows into the next aspect of the service is made: "O sing unto the Lord a new song.... Make a joyful noise unto the Lord ... and sing praises."<sup>3</sup>

The hymn of praise often emphasizes the idea of grace. It begins by saying, 'I was sinking deep in sin ... sinking to rise no more.' Then it continues, 'But the master of the sea heard my despairing cry, from the waters lifted me, now safe am I.'<sup>4</sup> God, who is defined in this song as the master of the sea and love, is the one who pulls humans from the drowning seas of life.

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## Invocation

The Invocation is the first prayer uttered within the context of the worship service. Before this, upon entering the pulpit, the ministers kneel at their seats and pray, but the Invocation is the first corporate prayer offered. It is a call for the Holy Spirit to be present in the worship service. The minister says, "Father, there are persons who have come here confused as to which way to go. We ask that you would send your Spirit to heal their confusion." The point is that the minister identifies *problems* that burden those who are gathered for worship, and asks that God's Spirit will be present to release them from these burdens. This freedom will allow the parishioner truly to worship God.

## The Anthem

This is usually a formal song offered by the choir. Often, it will move the congregation, other times it will not. Its place in the service has been controversial. Some African Methodist churches substitute slave spirituals for anthems proper. Others disregard the idea of an anthem and just sing a song. Some sing hymns. Many feel that anthems lend an air of formality to the worship experience. African Methodists have placed a great emphasis on the singing of hymns and other songs in the worship service. Hymns are the mainstay of African Methodist worship and the order of service.

## The Scripture

The Scripture lesson is not taken from the lectionary. It is part of the minister's function to choose an appropriate Scripture for the gathering of the church. This is true of all African Methodist services. There are very few occasions in the AME Church where the Scripture is chosen in advance, although sometimes a Scripture lesson is chosen for its usefulness in connection with a holiday or other special event in the life of the church. Scripture lessons chosen in advance are printed in the worship bulletin. Generally, the Scripture lesson is read from a version familiar to the assembly. Usually, only ministers read the Scripture.

## The Decalogue

The Decalogue (i.e., the Ten Commandments) is recited in its entirety on Communion Sundays and other times of high worship (e.g., ordinations, annual conferences). The minister begins by instructing the congregation to rise. (S)he then moves them to singing, "From all that dwell below the skies, let the Creator's praise arise, let the Redeemer's name be sung, through every land, by every tongue." Between the recitation of the commandments, the congregants sing a modified form of the Kyrie: "Lord, have mercy upon us, and incline our hearts to keep this law." Between the sixth and seventh commandments, the congregants sing a traditional Methodist song that emphasizes the possibility of falling from grace (i.e., the doctrine of the possibility of final apostasy; Articles of Religion, 12). After the last commandment and the Kyrie, the congregants

sing, "Nearer my God, to thee! " Then follows Christ's pronouncement of the two commandments that summarize the law, after which the congregants sing the Gloria Patri.  
Ministry of Music

The Gospel choir sings here. As the name indicates, this choir sings a song that is Inure contemporary than the anthem sung earlier. It is important to note that this is seem as a ministry. That is, whatever gift one can bring to the Lord's service is part of that individual's ministry.

### The Ritual of Friendship

This is a modern version of the sign of peace. Originally, this was a full kiss on the lips. Now, people shake hands, hug, and converse. Order breaks down in the service at this point, but this ritual is necessary to affirm the intimacy of the assembly. The emphasis here is on reconciliation. Order is reestablished in the service by the next transition.

### Altar Call

This is the moment of utmost participation within the African Methodist tradition. Everyone participates. It is a liturgical recreation of the incident at St. Georges. Often, the minister exhorts the people to pray for particular persons or problems that directly affect the assembly. The minister is expected to lead the people in public prayer, as is true of the Invocation. The minister must pray for and on behalf of the people, and not simply out of some immediate feelings that the minister may possess. Due to the incident at St. Georges, there is an almost mystical significance surrounding the altar and altar call within African Methodism.

Individuals come and kneel at the altar, praying as long as they please. Usually they line up along the walls or down the middle of the aisle, waiting their turn to kneel at "the mercy seat." There is no rush placed on this part of the service, and it lasts for as long as necessary. Everyone must be given the opportunity to pray, an opportunity denied Allen by his fellow Christians.

A song accompanies this part of the service, to focus the attention of those who do not approach the altar and those retuning. When one prays at the altar, one joins millions of African Methodists who kneel every Sunday, all over the world. And, when one prays at the altar, one joins millions of African Methodists, who prayed at this and other altars for over two hundred years.

### The Sermon and Invitation to Christian Discipleship

African Methodists see the sermon as the proclamation of the Word of God made by God's chosen vessel. It is in this portion of the service that the assembly is instructed on how to carry out the commands of Christ, what the grace of God means, and how to reconcile radical evil with the purposes of God. Throughout the service the assembly has experienced the Word of God through prayer, through song, and through fellowship. Nevertheless, the sermon informs all other aspects of the worship experience.

This does not mean that in every service there will be a sermon. There are times when the enthusiasm of the assembly is running so high that a sermon would do violence to the mood. Rev. Renita J. Weems, professor of Old Testament at Vanderbilt University, made a comment that describes these occasions:

And, when the *Shekinah* is present, the Chronicler says,  
that the cloud descended on people.  
It was so thick, it was so heavy, that the preacher got up to preach,  
and he could not preach.  
The choir member got up to sing, and he could not sing.  
The usher got up to usher, and he could not usher, because the *Shekinah* glory of God  
was in their midst.  
When the *Shekinah* is present you would speak, if you could speak.  
You would shout, if you could shout.<sup>5</sup>

Since the emphasis in African Methodism is on conversion, the invitation to Christian discipleship is extended to all those who are outside the church, or are looking for a church home. This is a catchall invitation, encompassing converts, backsliders, and members transferring from other churches or denominations. The invitation is extended even at functions where there is no sermon. The reason behind this seems to be the idea that any event where the assembly is gathered is a proclamatory event.

#### Offerings and Announcement

General agreement seems to be that there is no good place to put either of these parts in worship service. After monies are collected, the church rises and sings, "All things come of Thee, O Lord. And of Thine own have we given Thee. Amen."

Worship ends with the doxology. After the doxology, the choir and clergy recess toward the rear of the sanctuary. The choir sings and the minister concludes with the Benediction and perhaps some closing reflections,

### **Evangelical Lutheran Church in America**

#### **James Kenneth Echols**

Lutherans believe and teach that worship lies at the very heart of the Christian life. In worship, the Gospel of Jesus Christ is proclaimed through Word and sacrament, faith is imparted through the power of the Holy Spirit, and God's people are empowered to celebrate God's goodness.

Traditionally, Lutheran worship has borne four 'marks.' Lutheran worship has been catholic in form and pattern, evangelical in content, contextual in thrust, and ecumenical in spirit.

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## The Catholic Mark of Lutheran Worship

Lutheran worship has been marked by its catholic or universal character. Historically, Martin Luther was concerned to reform the church and its practices rather than to reject the church and its practices. Such an approach recognized that worship forms and traditions that had developed from the early church could be retained. Indeed, Luther believed that they should be retained unless they obscured the Gospel of Jesus Christ. This understanding has informed and shaped Lutheran worship and contributed to its catholic character. It has inclined Lutherans, as much as possible, to adopt those forms and patterns of worship that have been used by Christians throughout the ages.

The inclination of Lutherans to adopt and use traditional worship forms and patterns has been manifested in several ways. First, Lutheran worship on the Lord's Day has conformed to a pattern established in the early church. Typically, Lutheran liturgies have consisted of the following catholic elements: entrance, Scripture readings, preaching, intercessory prayers, collection of gifts, and the Eucharist. Secondly, Lutherans have used such catholic liturgies as Morning Prayer, Evening Prayer, and Prayer at the Close of the Day for daily worship. Finally, the church calendar, containing the church year, the lectionary, and various major and minor festivals, has guided Lutherans in their worship.

## The Evangelical Mark of Lutheran Worship

While the use of catholic worship forms and patterns has been important to Lutherans, the evangelical content of their worship has been essential. Thus, Lutheran worship has borne an evangelical mark.

Confessionally, Lutherans have believed that human beings are justified by God's grace through faith in Jesus Christ. As such, the proclamation, affirmation, and celebration of God's gracious gifts of salvation, forgiveness, and faith in Christ have been central to Lutheran worship.

First and foremost, Lutheran worship has emphasized what God has done and continues to do for humanity. This Good News has constituted its evangelical mark. In Lutheran worship, this Good News has been declared through the means of grace. It has been through the proclamation of the Word (preaching) and the administration of the sacraments (Baptism and the Lord's Supper) that God's promises have been declared and that the Holy Spirit has produced faith in human hearts. In a real sense, Lutheran worship has accorded all glory and praise to God alone.

Secondly, Lutheran worship has been a means through which the baptized people of God have responded to the Gospel of Jesus Christ. This response has been expressed through confession and petition, through singing and offering.

Of the four marks of Lutheran worship, the evangelical mark has been foundational and fundamental. It has been noted that theology is best expressed in liturgy and that liturgy conveys theology. At its best, Lutheran worship has expressed and conveyed God's gracious Gospel with clarity and power.

### The Contextual Mark of Lutheran Worship

Thirdly, Lutheran worship also has home a contextual mark. This mark has recognized that worship forms and patterns may well differ in various contexts for various reasons. Their common mark, however, has been their evangelical mark.

In the sixteenth century, Martin Luther contributed substantially to this mark. In 1523 Luther encouraged limited use of the language of the people, German in that case, within the Latin mass. Luther's counsel eventuated in the use of German in the sermon and in singing a few hymns. However modest Luther's first step was, this move was quite significant. The shift took seriously a context in which many people did not understand the Latin language. Moreover, it reflected Luther's concern that the Gospel he proclaimed in ways that were accessible and intelligible to God's people. It placed a contextual mark on Lutheran worship.

Two years later, in 1525, Luther went further. He provided the German people with the German Mass and Order of Service. While catholic in form and evangelical in content, the liturgy was contextual in thrust. The German Mass not only provided the German people with a vernacular service; it also provided a liturgical setting based upon the unique structure of the German language. The German Mass was a Lutheran liturgy that bore a contextual mark.

Today, the Lutheran Book of Worship (LBW) bears the contextual mark of American Lutheran worship. While the book's liturgical forms reflect its catholic mark and the book's liturgical content reflects its evangelical mark, the book's hymns reflect its contextual mark. The LBW has included hymns from the various traditions of Euro-American Lutheranism that have been brought together in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. As such, the LBW has become the norm for worship in the ELCA.

Nevertheless, folk liturgies and jazz liturgies based upon LBW liturgies have been developed. Furthermore, hymns from a variety of traditions and books have been sung in the context of Lutheran liturgies.

Since the sixteenth century, Lutherans have been free to adapt their worship forms and patterns to their local contexts. Thus, the contextual mark has meant that Lutheran worship has been characterized by diversity rather than uniformity and by flexibility rather than rigidity.

### The Ecumenical Mark of Lutheran Worship

At its best, Lutheran worship has never been sectarian in spirit. It has focused neither on Martin Luther nor on the Lutheran Confessions.

By contrast, Lutheran worship has become an ecumenical mark. It has sought to unite Lutherans of every time and place with all other Christians of every time and place in receiving the Good News of God's gracious love in Jesus Christ and in responding to God's love. In the context of worship, the confession of the Ecumenical Creeds and the praying of the Lord's Prayer have united Lutherans with other Christians. At its best, Lutheran worship has been ecumenical in spirit, honoring and giving thanks for the entire household of faith.

Indeed, there is a profound sense in which there is no such thing as "Lutheran" worship. Finally and fundamentally, "Lutheran" worship is simply the worship of Christians who honor the forms of the past, who focus on Jesus Christ, who are concerned about relevance, and who affirm their unity with other Christians. From this perspective, the catholic, evangelical, contextual, and ecumenical marks of "Lutheran" worship are not unique to it. They are present as well in the worship of other Christian traditions.

## **MISSION**

### **African Methodist Episcopal Church**

#### **Dennis C. Dickerson**

Although Richard Allen, Daniel Coker, and others established the African Methodist Episcopal Church as a response to the racism that white Methodists practiced in Philadelphia, Baltimore, and other Middle Atlantic communities, inclusiveness was their main motivation. Insulted and segregated on account of race, they determined to found a denomination that would eschew such attitudes and actions and open membership to whoever accepted Jesus Christ as the Redeemer of humankind.

An incident involving Daniel A. Payne, who was elected an AME bishop in 1852, illustrates this point. Shortly after he attained the episcopacy, Bishop Payne presided in the Philadelphia Annual Conference. A white woman wished to become a member of one of his congregations. As a teacher in a black school this woman—ostracized by whites—socialized within Philadelphia's African American community. When she expressed her desire to join an AME Church, "the colored sisters objected."

Payne, who denounced these sentiments, happily discovered that the pastor and a class leader already had told the white woman that they would receive her as a member. Stubbornly, those who opposed her membership threatened to withhold financial support both from the pastor and Bishop Payne.

While the frightened minister reversed himself and then abrogated the white woman's membership, Bishop Payne held steadfastly to the principle of inclusiveness. He noted that the

"AME Church, like Christianity itself, was open to all and for all." Moreover, the bishop "resolved to let those evil-minded ones know that I belonged to that class of Christian minister who cannot be controlled by hack nor belly."<sup>6</sup> Clearly, Payne would not budge from his position that whites would belong to the AME Church.

At the same time, AME progenitors including Allen and Payne knew that their denomination would mainly serve persons of African descent. In a declaration co-authored with Daniel Coker and James Champion, Allen noted the "spiritual despotism" that white Methodists imposed upon them in Philadelphia and Baltimore. "From these, and various other acts of unchristian conduct, we considered it our duty to devise a plan in order to build a house of our own, to worship God under our own vine and fig tree." They added: "Many of the coloured people, in other places, were in a situation nearly like those of Philadelphia and Baltimore, which induced us ... to call a general meeting . . . taking into consideration their grievances, and in order to secure their privileges, promote union and harmony among themselves, it was resolved, 'That the people of Philadelphia, Baltimore &c. &c. should become one body, under the name of African Methodist Episcopal Church.'" While the African Church would bar no one from membership, the founders believed that they had a special mission "to guide our people in the fear of God, in the unity of the Spirit, and in the bonds of peace."<sup>7</sup>

The current Council of Bishops, while honoring the necessity of inclusiveness, note that "the African Methodist witness speaks to the deeper need of black people and, therefore we must initiate and articulate a meaningful process, which will extend our unique ministry and goodly heritage to brothers and sisters around the world," An unequivocal 'stand against racism in all of its manifestation(s)' is also a part of the AME mission. They added that "we see racism as a process of dehumanization, a negation of personhood: a vicious demon which must be completely eradicated." Moreover, "the AME must fully identify with the poor and the oppressed in their struggle for human dignity. This participation in human development is not optional, nor is it an addendum to an already crowded agenda. It must be the very heart of the life and work of our church."<sup>8</sup>

The AME Church's special mission to persons of African descent manifested itself institutionally during the first decades of its existence. In 1824 Richard Allen sent missionaries to Haiti to evangelize in that newly established republic. In 1840 the Canada Annual Conference was established. Although the Canadian congregations became the British Methodist Episcopal Church in 1856, they returned to the AME fold in 1884. With their return came a special mission to blacks in the British Empire. Hence, AME congregations spread in Canada, mainly to Ontario, Quebec, and the Maritime Provinces, and to Bermuda and British Guiana in South America. In 1891 the denomination grew in West Africa in Sierra Leone and Liberia. In 1896 the Ethiopian Church, a dissident group of Africans formerly in the Wesleyan Methodist Church, joined the AME connection. In the 1960s and in the 1980s the AME spread to blacks in England and the Netherlands respectively. Now, the denomination exists in over thirty nations outside of

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the United States. In the Caribbean and South America there are the Jamaica, Haiti, Dominican Republic, Virgin Islands, Guyana-Surinam, Windward Islands, and Bahama Islands Annual Conferences. In Africa there are five episcopal districts in West, Central, Southern (2), and East Africa. Clearly, the mission to serve persons of African descent has been achieved.

## **Evangelical Lutheran Church in America**

### **Dorothy F. Ricks**

#### The Mission of God and the Nature of the Church

"Mission" is derived from a Latin verb meaning "to send." The Old and New Testaments abound in various forms of verbs meaning "to send." Particularly significant for a theological study of mission are the hundreds of cases where God or Christ is the subject of the verb "send." God sent Joseph to preserve life in Egypt, Moses and Aaron to deliver the people from bondage there, Nathan to reprove David for killing Uriah, an angel to save Jerusalem under siege, prophets to proclaim the Word of God in terms of judgment and of salvation and comfort, the word itself to bring blessings on Jerusalem. God sent John to bear witness to the light, messengers to preach, and angels to rescue Peter from prison. God sent Jesus Christ, the only Son of God, to justify ungodly humanity, to provide life through him, to be the expiation for our sins, to be the Savior of the world. God sent the Holy Spirit, through whom the Good News might be preached.

As God sent Jesus into the world, so Jesus Christ sent his apostles to preach the nearness of the kingdoms of God, to heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse lepers, cast out demons, and enable the Gospel to the Gentiles. Indeed, the word "apostle" means nothing other than "one who is sent."

This survey of the biblical usage of "sending" makes abundantly clear that God is the "sender" of various persons in order to preserve life, to reprove, to deliver, to save, to proclaim the word as judgment and salvation, to bear witness, to justify, to inspire. Having been sent, Christ is the "sender" of apostles to announce the kingdom of God in word and deed, to preach the gospel where it is not known.

Theologically, then "mission" (literally, "sending") is the work of God by which God reaches out to the world in order to effect the divine will. Therefore, one can speak of "the mission of the church" only in the most literal meaning of the word "apostolic," namely, being sent. Perhaps in order to avoid the impression that the church is the sender, the initiator, the designer, or the sole proprietor, one should speak rather of "the mission of God" in which the church participates by being sent into God's world.<sup>9</sup>

#### ELCA Vision for Mission

The Purpose Statement and Principles of Organization set forth in the constitution of the

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Evangelical Lutheran Church in America includes vision and describes mission in the ELCA. The statements include Implementation steps for the churchwide units, the synods, and the congregations. Together they articulate a vision for mission in the world—even in the twenty-first century.

The vision includes ministries that are local, regional, churchwide, and global. The vision includes mission through:

- congregations with Word and sacrament ministry;
- policies that include all people;
- worship, education, service, evangelism, stewardship;
- support that is mutual and interdependent;
- care of facilities, property, and resources;
- relationships with other religions, other churches, other groups; support of institutions, agencies, colleges, seminaries, social ministry organizations, community service groups, advocacy for justice ministries, health care ministries, and others;
- synods and churchwide units that expands our ministry beyond the local to the city, the rural areas, overseas;
- people who are in the church(es) and all in the society.

In some parts of the ELCA and ecumenically the vision is fulfilling—the mission is being lived—as the ministries are taking place.

#### The Division for Outreach/The Division for Global Mission

The churchwide structure, synods, congregations, institutions, colleges, schools, and seminaries are interdependently involved in the "Mission of God" in the ELCA. The two divisions mandated by the constitution to work intensively in the area of outreach ministries are the Division for Outreach and the Division for Global Mission.

The mandate for the Division for Outreach states:

This division shall provide leadership and support for this church as it reaches out in witness with the Gospel of Jesus Christ in the USA and the Caribbean in the areas served by developing new ministries and congregations; supporting existing ministries and congregations in transitions or with special needs; working with synods in developing area strategies for outreach; administering capital funds for real estate acquisitions and building programs in support of new ministries and congregations (ELCA constitution 16.11.91.).

The mandate for Global Mission states:

This division shall be responsible for this church's mission in other countries and shall be the channel through which churches in other countries engage in mission to this church

and society (ELCA constitution 16.1 IF91.).

The interdependence envisioned in the Purpose Statement and Principles of Organization can be witnessed in excerpts from the Division of Outreach's reports submitted to recent ELCA Churchwide Assemblies, and in the commitments of the Division for Global Mission listed below:

- The Division for Outreach participated with 10 denominations in a joint congregational development task-force to address issues such as selection of developers, strategies for ethnic specific outreach, demographics, studies, and attitudinal research.
- Working closely with the Commission for Multicultural Ministries, the Division for Outreach served as a major partner to implement the ELCA "Multicultural Mission Strategy." The adoption of this requires the establishment of new congregations in ethnic-specific communities; help for existing ethnic congregations to revitalize their outreach and evangelism; work with congregations that have opportunity to outreach to ethnic communities; and develop leaders and networks that are appropriate to a church that seeks to reach out effectively in a pluralistic society.
- Demand for consultation services to help synods strengthen outreach to African American, Asian, Hispanic, and Native Americans have increased.
- In 1994, 137 ministries were under development, 47 of which began during the biennium—24 in 1993 and 23 in 1994.
- Of the 47 new ministries begun during the 1993-94 biennium, 31 are white and 16 are ethnic specific communities (1 African American, 4 Asian, 10 Hispanic, and 1 ministry with persons who are deaf).
- During 1994, 255 congregations were served through the program for newly organized congregations: 55 were in ethnic specific or multicultural communities, 221 received partnership (financial) support.
- The urban ministry program provides direct support to congregations in special circumstances, and it provides consultation and training for lay leaders and clergy who serve in urban congregations. As of 1994 this program assists 202 congregations undergoing ministry transformation due to racial, cultural, or economic transitions. There are congregations among Native Americans and approximately 50 congregations serving in areas of extreme poverty where the witness of the Lutheran church is essential and long term support is needed.
- Rural ministry programs provide direct support to congregations in transition, as well as consultations and training for clergy and lay leaders in rural congregations. In 1994, 54 ministries received financial support.
- The Division of Outreach, working with the omission education team of the Division for Global Mission, the Division for Congregational Ministries, and Augsburg Fortress Publishers, is developing resources that can be used by a variety of age groups to achieve better understanding of God's mission and the church's participation in it.
- The Division of Outreach, together with the Division for Ministry, continues to provide support for the Horizon (rural and urban) Intern Program. Each year the program supports

- 30-35 interns in ethnic specific and urban and rural congregations.
- More than 400 adults serve as ELCA missionaries in 40 countries: about 180 ELCA children/youth under 18 live in missionary families overseas.
- The ELCA cooperates with about 73 Lutheran churches, 23 other churches, and 90 ecumenical institutions and agencies in placing missionaries and supporting missionary programs. Approximately 1800 ELCA congregations are involved in a personal relationship with missionaries through the missionary sponsorship program.
- The ELCA's annual budget for Global Mission is approximately \$26 million: one-third of this funding is ELCA Hunger Appeal monies designated for overseas relief and development work.

The Division for Global Mission in its commitment statement for Missions in the 1990s began and ended with the biblical text from Acts 1:8: "But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you: and you will be my witnesses ... to the ends of the earth.

## **SOCIETY**

### **African Methodist Episcopal Church**

#### **William P. DeVeaux**

##### Historical Perspective

Richard Allen, the founder of the African Methodist Episcopal Church was born a slave, February 14, 1760, in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, and purchased his freedom from his owner, in a city near Dover, Delaware for \$1,000. He held a variety of post-freedom jobs ranging from cutting cord wood to bricklaying and driving a wagon. A devotedly religious man, Allen never lost faith even in dire economic times as stated in his memoirs: "After I was done with the brickyard, I went to days work, but did not forget to serve my dear Lord. I used oft times to pray, sitting, standing or lying down; and while my hands were employed to earn my bread, my heart was devoted to my dear Redeemer."

Allen believed that faith should liberate rather than enslave the mind and left Delaware for Philadelphia to pursue a profitable living as a blacksmith. Richard Allen affiliated with St. George's Methodist Episcopal Church and began preaching during the Sunday service at 5:00 a.m. Allen was a gifted preacher and his messages inspired new members to in St. George's. These African American swelled the membership rolls and the white leaders faced the reality that a sizable portion of their congregation was black.

##### The Birth of African Methodism

Congregational growth continued at St. George's Church and the church embarked upon a

building campaign to accommodate the new members. Pledges of time and money for the new space came from all segments of the church, especially its black members. Through this campaign the church was able to add seating galleries to her sanctuary. For Richard Allen and the other black parishioners at St. George's Church, a rather ordinary worship service in November 1787, their first Sunday in the renovated church, became a pivotal event in their life—and the life of all black Americans. When Absalom Jones, Allen, and others arrived that morning, the sexton ushered them to the newly built gallery. They hurried up the stairs to seats just above where they had formerly sat, assuming that these seats were open to all persons. As they slipped into the seats, the first hymn ended and the elder opened the service in prayer.

While praying, Allen was interrupted by the sounds of a scuffle taking place at this side. Unable to ignore the commotion, he looked up to see a trustee of the church forcibly pulling Absalom Jones off his knees, ordering him away from his seat. Apparently, blacks were not even allowed to sit in the gallery and a protest erupted as other blacks in the balcony departed with Allen and his friends from St. George's.

This protest emphatically expressed that segregation in the Lord's house was degrading, as well as insulting and that blacks would no longer accept it. Allen later stated, "We all went out of the church in a body, and they were no more plagued with us in the church." Allen's vision of the church was to serve its people, not to denigrate them. For Allen, the church was a place of hope in the face of despair and shelter in the midst of chaos. Hope and shelter were not just theological concepts for Allen; these concepts had to be embraced by an action agenda. Early on, Allen had perceived that a white-led church would not always be quick to act upon the needs of black members.

The protest march led by Richard Allen became the foundation upon which black religious thought would evolve. Themes of justice, liberation, hope, love, and suffering would become the focal point of black preaching. Black preaching and singing in these contemporary times still embodies the themes from Allen's protest at St. George's. Black consciousness is raised through protest acts and songs as the community copes with social, political, and economic woes.

Allen was a man of action, a preacher motivated to help and minister to his people. As head of the AME Church, he would eventually go forth to fight for the rights of the black community in all segments of American society. It is evident that Allen's actions reflected the necessity for a new kind of church, one built on truth and reality and run by black people.

#### Mechanism for Coping with Slavery, Oppression, and Segregation

For African Americans, religion is more than an abstract theology. Rather it is personal, heartfelt, and requires a conscious effort to improve oppressive conditions. During slavery, Reconstruction, "Jim Crow" segregation, and the conservative, religious right backlash to today's world, African Methodists consider protest of such inequities an obligation, not a luxury. African Methodism was founded more than fifty years before the Emancipation Proclamation was signed. Though its founders, Richard Allen, Absalom Jones and their colleagues were

"feedmen," the majority of blacks were enslaved. Their departure from St. George's Church was the first AME "walk out" in protest. The AME Church was founded in protest of segregation and that legacy is a pervasive aspect of our philosophy.

AME clergy and the churches they represented were among the first to denounce the separate but equal practices that governed American at the beginning of the twentieth century through the early 1960s. Thurgood Marshall came south at the behest of an AME congregation in South Carolina. That visit to observe effects of segregation in the educational system eventually led to the Supreme Court's historic *Brown vs. Board of Education* decision that outlawed school segregation. Justice Marshall and noted sociologist Dr. Kenneth W. Clark were able to document the pernicious ramifications of segregation in the black psyche and its damage to a healthy self-concept. These findings, spawned by AME protests, strengthened Marshall's case for the 1954 court ruling.

During the Civil Rights movement, AME churches were sites for rallies, strategy sessions, and protest meetings. These congregations risked death, threats of fire bombings to their buildings, and loss of jobs for the sake of what was right.

AME protest does not limit itself to American issues and mounts its outrage to include ill treatment and inhumanity wherever it occurs in the world. Thus, twenty years ago, AME churches displayed signs that proclaimed, "FREE SOUTH AFRICA." and marched on the South African Embassy, risking arrest to make their view known. Financial contributions and still more protests about the recent plights in Bosnia and Rwanda bespeak the continuing AME commitment to protest injustice whenever and wherever it might exist.

### Education, Uplift, and Self-help

Richard Allen was ordained to preach by Francis Asbury, and his philosophy of this "call" empowered the notion that preaching the Gospel must also embrace "the doing of the Gospel." This approach to religion has defined the AME method of Christian service from 1757 to present day. The African Methodist motto, "God our Father, Christ our Redeemer, and Man our Brother," is truly indicative of the special trinity that guides the AME view of its role in society. The spiritual language of this motto ultimately harkens back to Jesus' final post-resurrection commandment: "Feed my sheep."

In Richard Allen's day, lack of education and job skills were the most pressing needs for freed African Americans. Consequently, the first AME church was foremost a place of worship with a corollary priority of providing an education for its members. Allen was a self-taught man who had received no formal educational training. He passed his thirst for knowledge on to his followers and as a result those early classes held in his blacksmith shop in the 800s spawned AME schools and colleges that exist to this day. Wilberforce University, Allen University, Morris Brown College, Edward Waters College, Paul Quinn College, Shorter College, Payne Theological Seminary, and numerous educational institutions in Africa and the Caribbean continue Allen's mission to teach and uplift.

The principle of preaching the Gospel carried the responsibility of practicing it as well. Today, Richard Allen's spiritual heirs recognize that the societal concerns besetting black men are staggering. Unemployment, violence on the streets, drugs, and incarceration are some of the myriad problems that black men encounter.

Faith in Jesus ought to be empowering and a source of strength in hard times. Like our founder, AME churches have assessed the situation and established special ministries to men as well as prison ministries. Such ministries laud self-help and heightened self-esteem to encourage men to realize their full potential.

The scourge of AIDS, cancer, and the high incidence of hypertension, cholesterol, and heart disease among black people have led numerous AME congregations to create health ministries. Health in the 1990s is a concern for all segments of the American population and particularly so for African Americans. AME Church Health Ministries seek first to provide accurate information, methods of prevention, and finally serve as a resource for treatment, care, and coping with illness.

In African Methodism there is no separation between church and society. Society produces our membership and these worshipers bring their concerns with them into the sanctuary each Sunday. Whether the issue is single parenthood, aging, homosexuality, caring for older relatives, troubled marriages, the search for a spouse, or teen-age pregnancy, persons must feel that God is relevant in their lives. In 1787, Richard Allen correctly surmised that his mission was to impart the Gospel and that the best way to obtain this goal was to make church an integral part of his members' lives. Through its many service projects, community and overseas outreach programs, the AME Church continues that tradition.

## **Evangelical Lutheran Church in America**

### **Daniel F. Martensen**

In 1991 the ELCA adopted a social teaching statement entitled "The Church in Society: A Lutheran Perspective."<sup>10</sup> The introductory paragraph of the document reads as follows:

The Evangelical Lutheran Church in America is called to be part of the ecumenical church of Jesus Christ in the context in which God has placed it - a diverse, divided, and threatened global society on a beautiful, fragile planet. In faithfulness to its calling, this church is committed to defend human dignity, to stand with the poor and powerless people, to advocate justice, to work for peace, and to care for the earth in the processes and structures of society.

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A series of affirmations and statements of commitment then follows. The document affirms:

- that the church, the baptized people of God, is created by the Holy Spirit through the Gospel to proclaim and to follow God's crucified Messiah.
- that the witness of the church in society flows from its identity as a community that lives from and in the Gospel.
- that the ELCA is part of the "one, holy, catholic and apostolic church."
- that as a member of the Lutheran World Federation, a worldwide "communion of churches," the ELCA is united with churches around the globe in a common tradition and mission,
- that the Gospel does not take the church out of the world but rather calls it to affirm and to enter more deeply into the world.

Two central sections of the affirmation of the church's responsibility in society read as follows:

This church must participate in social structures critically, for sin also is at work in the world. Social structures and processes combine life-giving and life-destroying dynamics in complex mixtures and in varying degrees. This church, therefore, must unite realism and vision, wisdom and courage, in its social responsibility. It needs constantly to discern when to support and when to confront society's cultural patterns, values, and powers.

As a prophetic presence, this church has the obligation to name and denounce the idols before which people bow, to identify the power of sin present in social structures, and to advocate in hope with poor and powerless people. When religious or secular structures, ideologies, or authorities claim to be absolute, this church says, "We must obey God rather than any human authority" (Acts 5:29)<sup>11</sup> With Martin Luther, this church understands that "to rebuke" those in authority "through God's Word spoken publicly, boldly and honestly" is "not seditious" but "a praiseworthy, noble, and . . . particularly great service to God."<sup>12</sup>

Basic to the social teaching statement is the affirmation of the church as a community of moral deliberation. It recognizes that Christians fulfill their vocation diversely and are rich in the variety of the gifts of the Spirit. Because of that they often disagree passionately on the kind of response they make to various social questions. But, because they share common convictions of faith, they are free, indeed obligated, to deliberate together on the challenges posed to them by society. The deliberation process is to include people with different life experiences, perspectives, and interests. Of particular importance are those who feel and suffer with the issue; people whose security is at stake; pastors, teachers, theologians, ethicists and other teachers in the church; advocates; experts in the social sciences, the humanities, and the arts.

The section on commitments, in its entirety, reads as follows:

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The Evangelical Lutheran Church in America commits itself to sustain and support its members in their baptismal vocation to serve God and neighbor in daily life. Through its congregations, synods, and churchwide organization, and affiliated institutions and ecumenical relationships, this church shall.

- foster in its members a faith that is active in love, a love that seeks justice, and an insight that strives to discern what is right, good, and fitting;
- support its members in their calling to love their neighbor, to mend the creation, to advocate justice and mercy in situations of brokenness, and to seek peace where there is conflict;
- join with others to remove obstacles of discrimination and indifference that prevent people from living out their callings;
- promote sound, critical, and creative citizenship and public service among its members;
- work to further democratic processes throughout the territory of this church and the world, and to redress the persisting social and economic inequalities that prevent many from participating effectively in those processes;
- encourage its citizen-members to join in the public deliberations, at all levels, particularly through organizations that mediate between personal and public life, and to engage in prophetic actions.

The Evangelical Lutheran Church in America commits itself to serve God and neighbor in its life and work as all institution. Through Its congregations, synods, and churchwide organization, and affiliated institutions and ecumenical relationships, this church shall:

- adopt institutional policies and practices that model its beliefs and values and enhance its mission;
- support its educational and social ministry organizations in their response to human need;
- encourage congregations and affiliated institutions to engage to ministries that promote the well-being of the human community and the environment and that empower people to gain access to and influence in the systems that govern their lives;
- develop social statements through participatory processes of study and theological reflection to will guide the life of this church as an institution and inform the conscience of its members in the spirit of Christian liberty;
- speak out on timely, urgent issues on which the voice of this church should be heard;  
expect its pastors, bishops, mid lay church leaders to pray for and exhort those in positions of authority on the basis of God's prophetic Word.
- work with and on behalf of the poor, the powerless, and those who suffer, using its power and influence with political and economic decision-making bodies to develop and advocate policies that seek to advance justice, peace, and the care of

- creation;
- mediate to achieve just and peaceful solutions to social conflicts;
- participate in local, national, and international ecumenical organizations, and in interfaith and ecumenical partnerships in the service of common goals;

The Evangelical Lutheran Church in America commits itself to foster moral deliberation on social questions. Through its congregations, synods, and churchwide organizations, and affiliated institutions and ecumenical relationships, this church shall seek to:

- be a community where open, passionate, and respectful deliberation on challenging mid controversial issues of contemporary society is expected and encouraged;
- engage those of diverse perspectives, classes, genders, ages, races, and cultures in the deliberation process so that each of our horizons might be expanded and the witness of the Body of Christ in the world enhanced;
- draw upon the resources of faith and reason—on Scripture, church history, knowledge and personal experience—to learn and to discern how to respond to contemporary challenges in light of God's Word;
- address through deliberative processes the issues faced by the people of God, in order to equip them in their discipleship and citizenship in the world;
- arrive at positions to guide its corporate witness through participatory processes of moral deliberation;
- contribute toward the upbuilding of the common good and the revitalizing of public life through open and inclusive processes of deliberation.

The teaching statement ends with this declaration and a quotation from Martin Luther:

Our witness is a response to God's faithful love received in Word and sacraments. The bread and wine, the body and blood of Christ are a sacrament of love. `As love and support are given you, you in turn must render love and support to Christ in his needy ones. You must feel with sorrow all the dishonor done to Christ in his holy Word, all the misery of Christendom, all the unjust suffering of the innocent, with which the world is everywhere filled to overflowing. You must fight, work, pray, and—if you cannot do more—have heartfelt sympathy.'""

Since its formation in 1978, the ELCA has produced a number of statements and messages on societal concerns. In so doing, the ELCA speaks both to its own members, and to the community at large.

Some of the social statements are:

- Abortion: A Social Statement on Abortion (1991)
- Caring for Creation: Vision, Hope and Justice (1993)
- Church in Society: A Lutheran Perspective (1991)

- The Death Penalty (1991)
- Freed in Christi Race, Ethnicity, and Culture (1993)

Some of the messages are:

- AIDS and the Church's Ministry of Caring (1989)
- A Changing Europe: Peace and the Churches (1989)
- Community Violence (1994)
- End-of Life Decisions (1992)
- Homelessness: A Renewal of Community (1990)
- The Israeli—Palestinian Conflict (1989)

Other educational resources that have been prepared for use in the church include:

- Christian Faith and U.S. Political Life Today
- If Not Here, Where?
- Justice, Peace and Creation
- Our Church and Social Issues: A Guide for Discussion in the Congregation
- Principles for Consideration of the North American Free Trade Agreement
- Working Principles for Welfare Reform

## NOTES

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3. *Liturgy*, p. 10 *AME Discipline*, p. 359. *AME Hymnal*. p. xvii.
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9. F. McCurley, "A Vision for Mission," *D.M.N.A., LCA. 1987. pp. ix-xi.*
10. The full text of the statement quoted extensively here is under the following copyright  
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11. Augsburg Confession, Art. 16.
12. Commentary on Psalm 82, ed. Jaroslav Pelikan, *Luther's Work*, vol. 13: Selected Psalms II (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1956). P. 50.
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