



Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

God's work. Our hands.

Dear ELCA Rostered Leaders,

Grace and peace to you in the name of Jesus Christ. Today we join sisters and brothers the world over in observance of the anniversary of the martyrdom of the Emanuel Nine. We continue to mourn the loss of those nine precious lives, and we pray that their families may find comfort in God's love.

Over the past year we have wrestled as a nation, and as a church, with the challenges of confronting racism. Together through our various ministries, the ELCA has participated in prayerful lament, and pursued acts of racial justice and reconciliation. These have also been times of deepening engagement with our ecumenical partners, including the African Methodist Episcopal Church (AME).

The AME Council of Bishops issued a [powerful statement](#) on the occasion of the Charleston anniversary. I draw your attention to three calls to action, which I invite you to consider:

1. We call upon other communions, particularly our predominantly white communions, to join with us in preaching, teaching and condemning racism.
2. The Council of Bishops of the African Methodist Episcopal Church request that clergy across the nation, during the weekend of June 24-26, seek a pulpit exchange with another church or faith body and preach about race, diversity and inclusion. Also arrange for fellowship and interactions between local congregations. This exchange should be with a communion or interfaith organization of a different race or religion. *(Please consider next weekend as the beginning of a time for such exchanges, continuing over the summer months.)*
3. That local clergy and interfaith organizations begin discussions with local political leaders on issues of policing, education, housing and other issues where race is a factor and impacts any group negatively.

The tragedy of June 17, 2015, embodied our church's tangled relationship with racism. Our relationship to the shooter – Dylann Roof, who was a member of an ELCA congregation – as well as to two of the slain – the Rev. Clementa Pinckney and the Rev. Daniel Simmons, who were graduates of Lutheran Theological Southern Seminary, Columbia, S.C. – remind us of both our complicity and our calling. Together we confess that we are in bondage to the sin of racism and, at the same time, we rejoice in the freedom that is ours in Christ Jesus who “has broken down the dividing wall, that is, the hostility between us” (Ephesians 2:14). May God continue to guide us as we seek repentance and renewal, racial justice and reconciliation among God's precious children.

In Christ,

Elizabeth A. Eaton Presiding Bishop