

For the Love and Care of Neighbor: Committing Ourselves to the Transforming Work of Anti-Racism

I Call from Public Witness Team to NT-NL Synod

We condemn violence on the part of law enforcement and others that has resulted in the unjust killing of Black Americans, and we deplore violent racism that threatens the lives and families of Black, Indigenous and Latinx people, especially asylum seekers, in the USA. We call for a response from the NT-NL Synod that acknowledges the evil of racism and white supremacy in our culture, our governance, our congregations, and in ourselves. Further, we call the people of this synod to become aware of these evils and make a commitment to the vital, transforming work of anti-racism. Through study and prayer, active listening, and the tools of advocacy, let us work to change our civic life and our church so that love and care for our neighbors might prevail.

II Commitments

1. We commit ourselves to a courageous self-examination of the racism and white supremacist attitudes that exist within our systemic structures, within us as individuals and within our church communities.
2. We commit to the work of anti-racism, confronting and dismantling white supremacy in the ELCA, in the NT-NL Synod, and in our congregations.
3. We commit ourselves to begin this work by examining our biblical and Lutheran traditions with prayer and open hearts and minds, willingness to repent, and willingness to let go of attitudes and behaviors that we have heretofore and uncritically considered normative.
4. We commit ourselves to active conversations with brothers and sisters of color, with Black, Indigenous, Latinx and immigrant communities, to more fully comprehend their struggles and collaboratively and mutually determine our path forward.
5. We acknowledge that this will be difficult work requiring new tools and new perspectives. We commit to identifying those resources and engaging in the hard work to come.
6. Finally, we commit ourselves to intentional and active engagement with civic leaders in our community at all levels.

III Statement of the Public Witness Team

In response to the killing of George Floyd and the many others who have been killed at the hands of police brutality, the brutal and inhumane treatment of undocumented immigrants, including the separation of children from their parents, and our recognition that all of these reveal the continuing presence of racism, white supremacy, and the urgent need for increased anti-racism work in our country, communities and in our church, the following statement was adopted by the NTNL Public Witness Team at their meeting on Saturday, June 13, 2020.

Lutheran Christians in the Northern Texas - Northern Louisiana Synod (NT-NL) of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) join communities throughout the United States in expressing our shock and grief at the killing of George Floyd and many others by police officers. We continue to be dismayed and angered by the inhumane treatment of undocumented immigrants and their children. These acts of violence and inhumanity by civil authorities are inexcusable manifestations of the racism and white supremacy that exist and penetrate our life together as human beings and citizens of this country and the world.

Our Christian faith and our Lutheran tradition emphatically call us to be in community with siblings whose cries of pain and fear are now being heard! Within the body, “if one member suffers, all suffer together with it” (1 Cor 11.26). Luther’s explanation to the fifth commandment states, “...if you see anyone unjustly condemned to death or similar peril and do not save him, though you know ways and means to do so, you have killed him.” We confess as a predominantly white Christian community that we have often ignored the cries of our siblings, who live in fear and suffering, who have been unjustly condemned and we have done nothing. We have not carried one another’s burdens as Holy Scripture requires of us.

The United States was built with stolen labor on stolen land, actions justified by the same white supremacy present in the founding of our country and on full display today. These injustices continue in a fundamental pattern of unequal protection before the law experienced by Black, Indigenous, Latinx and other persons of color throughout the United States, leaving persons in these communities burdened with constant fear for their safety and for their lives.

No human being was born a racist or even a white supremacist. However, we learned racism and supremacy in and through the systemic structures of our families, our schools and cultural communities, our economic structures and policies, our governmental policies and practices, our social environs, and even within our church communities. We learned to be afraid of people different from ourselves and we have shut ourselves off from them, ignoring them as fellow human beings.

It is our Christian responsibility and duty to confess the sin of our learned systemic and individual racism, to repent of what we have learned and begin anew by building new structures and systems and learning new attitudes and behaviors that will be life giving to our brothers and sisters who

live in constant fear of injustice and violence. As Lutheran Christians who live under the cross that compels us to “call a thing what it is” (Martin Luther, *Heidelberg Disputation*), we commit ourselves to a courageous self-examination of the racism and white supremacist attitudes that exist within our systemic structures, within us as individuals and within our church communities. We commit to confronting and dismantling these realities in the ELCA, the NT-NL Synod and our congregations. For the sake of the inclusive Gospel of God’s love that we are called to proclaim, we commit to an examination of our past and present in order to shape a more loving and responsible community that will reflect the future into which God calls us to live, move and have our being.

Racism and white supremacy are present not just in our country but in our communities and in our church. We commit to confronting and dismantling white supremacy in the ELCA, in the NT-NL Synod, and in our congregations.

We confess that we have been apathetic to the “fierce urgency of now,” to the necessity of naming and confronting the forces of racism and white supremacy that destructively infect us. We have not lived up to our tradition’s demand to “call a thing what it is.” We have accepted the status quo of our lives and church communities as normative; we have accepted, justified, and made excuses for ourselves and our exclusive behaviors. In doing so, we have alienated and harmed our own members and congregations of color and have cut off our ability to respond effectively to their challenges and cries of suffering as well as those in our surrounding communities. By this sin of omission, our complacency has allowed racism and white supremacy to go unchecked and unchallenged.

We therefore commit ourselves to active conversations with our siblings of color, listening to and acting in community with them as we confront the systems and structures of racism and white supremacy that are among us. Recognizing that dismantling these structures is not about a black/white binary alone, we commit to engaging with Black, Indigenous, Latinx, and immigrant communities in order to more fully comprehend their struggles, and collaboratively and mutually determine the path forward.

The present moment has again brought government law enforcing practices to the fore. Our Lutheran tradition values civil law and its enforcement as a benefit for the common good of all residents and citizens; we thus emphasize equal protection and standing before the law. Our tradition also recognizes that all government is given by God through which the safety and the well-being of all, regardless of race or economic status, is protected. We recognize that government and its agents, however, all too often act to preserve the interests and benefit of the wealthy and those with economic power, primarily persons in the white community, ignoring the well-being and safety of persons of color and other marginalized communities.

Government at all levels must be responsible to exercise oversight and control of its authority to ensure that all persons stand equally before the law and are given the benefit of its services. We commit ourselves to intentional and active engagement with civic leaders in our community at all levels – city councils, state representatives, and congressional leaders – to advocate on behalf of those who are neglected or denied their civil rights under the law.

Therefore, we:

- recognize that policing in the United States has been historically structured as a tool for protecting white communities and reinforcing white supremacy,
- recognize that the prison industrial complex is an extension of white communities' efforts to ensure the continued inequality of persons of color,
- recognize that problems with policing, like racism itself, are both a matter of individual actions and a problem of structures and systems,
- recognize that we have asked law enforcement officers to do the work of psychiatrists, social workers, educators, marriage counselors, medical doctors, and housing specialists, all of which is outside the scope of their training and responsibility. We commit ourselves to changing the way these services are provided for the public good.
- decry the militarization of policing and the use of police to threaten and suppress peaceful assembly,
- call for fundamental reforms in policing practices, training, and oversight with the explicit aim of revealing explicit and implicit bias and dismantling white supremacy.

As Lutherans in the NT-NL, we are a predominantly white community, wittingly or unwittingly, consciously or unconsciously, participating in structures and systems that protect our self-interest and privilege as a white community. That is why naming and dismantling racism and white supremacy is crucial work for and of the white community. To assign this work to persons of color is simply another way of maintaining our silence and deferring our responsibility to unlearn what we have learned. This project will require new tools and new perspectives. We commit to identifying those resources and engaging in the hard work to come.

With this in mind, we commit ourselves and our Church to examine biblical and Lutheran traditions with open hearts and minds, a willingness to repent, a willingness to let go of racist attitudes and behaviors that we have uncritically considered normative. We walk into this moment together, aware we are a diverse church but aware also that past and present racial injustices require deep soul searching and accountability from predominantly white congregations. As Church, we seek to faithfully act in light of our confession every Sunday morning in the Apostles and Nicene Creeds that we trust in a reality that calls us to transform injustices in our world. This reality rejects belief that we are self-made creatures who have the right to dominate others in our drive to succeed. We stand against racism and place ourselves and our trust in the hands of the one triune God who has equally created every human being along with all of creation; we believe that this creation is for all to share equally. We claim that Jesus the Christ who suffered and died on behalf of all humanity is the Lord of our life, not as others who wish to be lord over us and lead us to believe that we succeed in life through power and domination over others, but as one who gave himself that others might have life. To follow our Lord means that we reject power and domination as a way of life but take on humility and mercy as marks of discipleship. We believe that the Holy Spirit is among us, empowering us through Word and Sacrament to be a new community that will engage the world with reconciliation,

courage, and hope. The power of the Resurrection is ours to live out here and now in this critical moment of history.

Living in the now and not yet of God's future, we commit ourselves to be more engaged in community-based conversations, that we may each add our voice to the great cloud of witnesses advocating for freedom and justice for all.