



Of One Heart and Soul: Trusting God's Promise

A Strategic Plan of the Delaware-Maryland Synod
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America
for Congregations Within Communities
of African Descent on its Territory.

Presented to Synod Council
May 15, 2010

Foreword

What follows is the result of a collaborative venture by members of the African Descent Strategy Core Group over the two year period from fall 2008 until April 2010. After several strategic brainstorming sessions, the decision to divide responsibility for this project into topical areas of concern happened at the October Prayer Breakfast of AALA 2008. Once the topical assignments were finished, the results were written, collated and edited into a draft form for review and presentation at the 2010 DE/MD ELCA Synod Assembly.

Of One Heart and Soul: Trusting God's Promise

***Now the whole group of those who believed were of one heart and soul...
(Acts 4:32 NRSV)***

A Strategic Plan of the Delaware-Maryland Synod ELCA for congregations within communities of African Descent on its territory.

Introduction:

Strategies for the sustenance and growth of Lutheran congregations in urban contexts have been plentiful. Each of the past strategies represents the well-intentioned hopes and commitment of the church to be faithful to Christ and communities situated in urban environments during times of declining membership and fiscal resources.

Strategies, in and of themselves, do not revitalize communities. True revitalization emanates from the experience of God's grace moving in and among God's people as they are empowered by the Holy Spirit to be engaged energetically with the world. Prayerfully, joyfully and openly, the people of God confess that Jesus Christ is Lord of all. The global communion of Lutherans witnesses to the particularity of God's Incarnation in Christ when we attest: "In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God and the Word was God" (John 1:1) The experience of God's Word incarnated in Christ Jesus is a word of grace for all peoples in all times and places.

We believe also that the experience of God's Word Incarnate is particular, a word spoken to the exacting situation of people of African descent in the beauty and splendor of creation. "And the Word became flesh and lived among us..." (John 1:14)

Lutherans of African descent in the Baltimore area possess a long and distinguished history. St. Philip's, established 1890 and Augsburg as well as the congregations that merged to become All Saint's and Amazing Grace are amongst

the oldest Lutheran congregations (*on the U.S. continental mainland*) within communities of African descent.

God hears the cries of God's people. Faithfulness to God's Word may require the re-imagining of community models for serving God's people. As urban congregations strive to live their call to advance God's kingdom in this world, communities of African Descent have often found themselves bereft by economic calamity, internalized oppression, racism and Eurocentric modalities of cultural life. As daughters and sons of God through holy baptism, we believe that God and God's love forever urges us to participate in the repair and mending of this world. Hence, we strategize, once again, not simply for self-survival; we strategize, as a means toward faithfully participating in the repair and mending of this world, by promoting justice, healing and dignity for all.

Trusting then that God is our strength and refuge, our very source of help in times of struggle, we recommend the following:

1. Use the DE/MD synod's African Descent Strategy Core Group to devise a strategy for the Baltimore urban context.
2. Have as a major focus of this strategy the maintaining of Lutheran identity along with the simultaneous development of indigenous churches, emphasizing:
 - the Role of congregations.
 - Best practices/ what works.
 - the variety and diversity of cultures and traditions within communities and people of African descent on the territory of the DE/MD synod.

The overall framework of the DE/MD African Descent Strategy will be constructed by utilizing the ELCA's National African Descent Strategic Plan as a referent. The African Descent Strategy Core group for the DE/MD synod consists of the following persons: The Rev. Dr. Eric Campbell, the Rev. Dr. Joseph Donnella, the Rev. Lynell AlJoe Thurman, Mr. Reginald Price, Mr. John Henderson, Mrs. Marian Boston, Mr. Churchill Wortherly, Mr. Floyd Blair, and Mrs. Linda Chinnia.

Mission Context:

In 2008, the DE/MD synod of the ELCA identified eight congregations in the Baltimore area initially as the hoped for beneficiaries of this strategizing process. They are: All Saints Evangelical, Amazing Grace, Augsburg, Faith, Holy Comforter, People's Community Lutheran, St. John and St. Philip.

Visionary Pastoral Leadership

“I am because we are.”¹ This African proverb from the Xhosa community speaks of the network of mutuality undergirding humankind’s relationship with God and with one another. The social organism of community life provides the matrix out of which we human beings understand ourselves to be communities of persons united through the familial ties we share as children of God.

In North America, such understanding comprises one of the more distinctive traits of people of African descent. Exaggerated, extreme individualism and egoism has been chagrined by our ancestors. The statement, “I am because we are,” attests to a salvific understanding of life realized through the combined efforts of many with the help of God. Our very survival has depended on God’s mercy and our appropriation of counter-cultural values as a means of carrying the message of the gospel of God forward; we understand that were there no connection in our communities with life in God, with life in Christ Jesus in particular, we would be as lost. Thus we depend on the shared wisdom of our elders and teachers; we understand the “*oikumene*” of this world to be God’s house, so we *perceive* the relationship between economics and justice, stewardship and ecology, poverty and equanimity to be essential to our common life as children of God, our creator. Our common humanity as God’s children provides the recognition that ours is the responsibility to share the bounty of creation, to share the care of the earth, to share in the nurture of one another, to value this world as cherished by God, valuing what God values. We proclaim God’s story and we connect God’s story with our story as a people. We cannot imagine how one may authentically embark on life’s journey by following any other way.

Theologian James Cone declares: “Black worship is an eschatological event, the time when the people experience a liberation in their present that they believe will be fully realized in God’s coming future.”²

Visionary pastoral leadership invites the community of God’s people to experience the reality of God’s liberating presence in this world, in this life, in the here and now, in order that God’s will may be accomplished even to the ends of the earth. So, visionary pastors invite communities to participate in just actions, in alms giving, in prayer, in mutual learning, in building safe and nurturing spaces as a means of embracing lifestyles that promote God’s peaceable kingdom.

Earlier within the same volume James Cone states: “Telling God’s story is the essence of Black preaching. It means proclaiming with appropriate rhythm

¹ Michael Battle, *Reconciliation: The Ubuntu Theology of Desmond Tutu* (Cleveland: Pilgrim Press, 1997), 39.

² James H. Cone, *Speaking the Truth: Ecumenism, Liberation, and Black Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986) 29.

and passion the connection between the Bible and the history of Black people. What has Scripture to do with our life in a white society and the struggle to be **somebody** in it? To answer that question, the preacher must be able to tell God's story so that the people will experience its liberating presence in their midst."³

To that end, the city of Baltimore and the DE/MD Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) calls for pastors and lay leaders possessing such contextual skill, sensitivity and understanding. In order to share and articulate a new and vibrant life for the community of Christ in Baltimore, congregations, the DE/MD Synod and its partner institutions, as well as the church wide expression of the ELCA will have to partner in new ways to increase awareness, understanding and acceptance of the need for deeper levels of inculturation and sensitivity within the church. Some of the leaders needed are already present, however, a greater number of leaders possessing such knowledge and skills are required if future hopes to be communities of God's people where life is affirmed, sustained and nurtured by the Holy Spirit and the use of the means of grace are to be realized.

Mission Context

As of December 2009 there were 8 rostered leaders of African descent on the synodical register: 5 congregational pastors, 1 church college chaplain, 1 campus minister, and 1 African National mission developer. Baltimore has traditionally been a Lutheran stronghold amongst African American Lutherans and boasts of mother churches in predecessor bodies to the ELCA. Currently, one pastor is on leave from call, and 2 students are in preparation for ministry through the TEEM (Theological Education for Emerging Ministries) program.

The city of Baltimore contains a majority African American population (64.3%)⁴ according to the 2000 US census. The majority of Lutheran congregations within Baltimore are technically small membership congregations, averaging less 100 persons at worship.

Goal

That by 2016 rostered leadership within the DE/MD synod will more effectively reflect the demographics of the Baltimore community. Specifically that there be an increase in the number of African American, African Caribbean and African National leaders representing the diversity of cultures in and around Baltimore. And that rostered leaders of European descent serving in communities where community demographics demonstrate there to be a population containing 20% or more people of African descent make increased efforts through continuing education, workshops and retreats to become more contextually attuned to people of African American descent.

³ Ibid, 24.

⁴ Statistics taken from ELCA parochial reports. See <http://www.elca.org/outreach/renew/frontpagestory.html> (09 Nov 2007).

Mission Actions

Congregations are encouraged to:

1. Identify, discern, and support future visionary pastoral leaders by:
 - Developing appropriate formational opportunities for learning ministry skills, cultural sensitivity and service opportunities for all;
 - Encourage healthy lifestyles and support systems;
 - Establish peer mentoring relationships within their communities;
 - Envision plans for ministry in 5 and 10 year increments.

2. Provide present pastoral leaders with affirmation, opportunities for personal and professional growth and responsible care:
 - Guarantee parity and livable compensation packages so that clergy do not have to function as the “working poor”;
 - Consider time and expense allocations for continuing education and sabbatical leave
 - Consider retreats and time for spiritual and personal renewal as necessary aspects of ministry development and continuing education.

3. Communicate with synodical, regional and church wide offices regarding future ministry goals and objectives.

DE/MD Synod is encouraged to:

1. Encourage congregations and pastors to partner together to combat:
 - Internalized racism and the barriers that oppression places towards growth;
 - Review how financial resources may be best used to stimulate culturally grounded communities that give sound witness and embodiment to the gospel’s transformational and liberating character.
 - Provide retreat and spiritual life opportunities that are formational and culturally sensitive for both lay and rostered leaders.

- Develop resource mechanisms for rostered leaders and their families including confidential support, financial counsel, medical care, spiritual nurture and ongoing education.
2. Consult with existing visionary pastoral leaders to discover present opportunities and hopes.

Church wide units are encouraged to:

1. Assist with the creation of ministry networks for communities of African descent.
2. Provide opportunities and financial support for lay and rostered leaders serving communities of African descent so that leaders will have more opportunities to participate in culturally sensitive workshops, convocations, seminars and continuing education events.
3. Welcome and assist all expressions of this church in becoming increasingly sensitized to the needs, cultural perspectives and acclimatization concerns of African Nationals.
4. Provide orientation and mentoring partnerships between African Nationals < African Caribbean and African American leaders.
5. Utilize the Educational Resources of the ELCA in promoting contextual educational opportunities.

The African American Lutheran Association (AALA) is encouraged to:

1. Identify, encourage and support those whose vocational gifts are being stirred toward the rostered ministry;
2. Encourage the completion of theological education in seminaries, colleges, universities and contextually relevant institutions.
3. Encourage stewardship and the sharing of gifts that enhance ministry opportunities and witness.
4. Communicate the ways in which the connections of the ELCA foster the mutual enlivening of ministry and life.

The Conference of International Black Lutherans (CIBL) is encouraged to:

1. Develop processes and resources for teaching and communicating biblical and theological content that are faithful to indigenous communities, ecumenism, and the gospel.

Worship

Through the experience of worship, the community realizes the oneness shared between God, humankind and the created order. Our connection to the ultimate is renewed and restores as we hear God's Word addressed to us and we respond to God's presence proclaimed through Word and Sacrament. The experience of worship is vital to the religious life and development of people of African descent. We find life difficult without dedication to the divine. So we sing, dance, pray, proclaim, eat and drink anamnetically celebrating the transformation of life though Word and Sacrament.

Worship in the black community is more verb than noun, a holistic engagement of head, heart and body touched by the sacred. Telling the story, testifying, preaching, praying are communal acts, set in the context of music, movement and dance. All are infused with a deep awareness of the activity of the Holy Spirit within worship and a readiness for spontaneous response.⁵

In recent decades, Lutheran congregations have focused efforts on the renewal of worship bearing in mind confessional concerns for the recovery of ancient liturgical practices and understandings. Inculturation expresses the need for particular cultures to express the gospel using the patterns, words, actions and music of their context while at the same time bearing witness to the common elements: gathering, word, meal, and sending that unite the community of Christ at the table of the Lord. The African American Lutheran hymnal *This Far By Faith* speaks of the difficulty in applying the art of inculturation:

The interplay between worship and culture is often a messy enterprise. Practices that seem right and salutary in one era or within one culture may be judged odd or quaint in another. The dialogue between culture and the Christian faith expressed in worship is as old as faith itself. Fortunately, the Lutheran heritage welcomes this dialogue, calling for unity in common evangelical core of worship and at the same time allowing for flexibility and freedom in the ways this essential core is communicated and celebrated.⁶

The Nairobi Statement of the Lutheran World Federation presents a helpful framework:

The reality that Christian worship is always celebrated in a given local cultural setting draws our attention to the dynamics between worship and the world's many local cultures. Christian worship relates dynamically to culture in four ways. First, it is trans-cultural, the same substance for everyone, beyond culture. Second, it is contextual, varying according to local situation (both nature and culture). Third, it is counter-cultural challenging what is contrary to the gospel in a given culture. Fourth, it is cross-cultural, making possible sharing between different local cultures.⁷

⁵ *This Far By Faith*, (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress Publishers, 1999), p 10.

⁶ *This Far By Faith*, p. 11.

⁷ Nairobi Statement on Worship and Culture (Lutheran World Federation, 1996) as in *This Far By Faith*, p. 8.

Mission Context

The religious tradition of people of African Descent in North America is difficult if not impossible to understand without the music of the Black religious tradition. William B. McClain in the preface to *Songs of Zion* declares of this tradition that music in the black religious experience “is the fulcrum of the souls of Black folks.” Later, in the same preface McClain continues:

Singing is as close to worship as breathing is to life. These songs of the soul and of the soil have helped to bring a people through the torture chambers of the last three centuries. They reflect the truth of an old African dictum: “The Spirit will not descend without song.”⁸

For many years, Lutheran resources celebrating the treasury of the Black experience were unavailable, then in 1999; This *Far By Faith* was published, opening the beautiful resources and response of the Black religious tradition to the Lutherans in north America.

Singing has always been a vital aspect of the Lutheran tradition. Yet, Lutherans in North America have been slow to receive the enrichment that may be encountered through the imaginative and liberating experiences of grace known through Word, Song and Sacrament as inculturated by people of African descent. One of the major difficulties Lutheran congregations of African descent have had is in finding musicians able to handle the multifaceted demands of worship that remains faithful to the heritage of Lutheran liturgical traditions while at the same time not betraying the creative genius of the Black experience.

Goals

1. Increase the number of musicians available to support worship in the Black cultural idiom.
2. Further the inculturation process among African American Lutheran congregations in Baltimore by providing workshops and learning experiences that will emphasize the need to work against internalized oppression.

Mission Actions

Congregations are encouraged to:

1. Purposively study worship practices in relation to community context.
2. Use local colleges and music centers as resources for educating musicians and choral leaders.

⁸ *Songs of Zion* (Nashville, Abingdon Press, 1982) p. ix.

3. Develop assisting ministers, readers, communion assistants, deacons, and lay leadership so that the leadership of worship is rarely the work of the pastor alone.
4. Assist pastors and lay leaders to understand the cultural dynamics of preaching within the Black experience.

DE/MD Synod is encouraged to:

1. Sponsor workshops utilizing contextual resources produced by this church and other ecumenical partners.
2. Make at least one of the worship events at the annual synodical assembly reflective of the community of African descent.
3. Assist congregations in finding appropriately trained musicians.

Church wide units are encouraged to:

1. Provide contextually relevant resources.
2. Use contextual resources at National ELCA events.
3. Promote the use of contextually relevant resources by all congregations within the ELCA.

Seminaries are encouraged to:

1. Seek ways to increase knowledge of the cultural context of communities of African descent and the Black experience in worship as well as ways to faithfully integrate the theological and cultural understandings of the Black community with Lutheran practices.
2. Relate to ecumenical partners for help in achieving the previous stated goal.
3. Encourage the participation of rostered and lay leaders in culturally contextual learning opportunities especially in communities where the population demographics indicate that 20% or more of the population is of African descent.

The African American Lutheran Association (AALA) is encouraged to:

1. Voice the needs of communities of African descent for deeper levels of inculturation.
2. Identify resources that may assist African Descent congregations in the articulation of the gospel.
3. Identify future indigenous leaders.

The Conference of International Black Lutherans (CIBL) is encouraged to:

Develop resources that further biblical, theological and confessional understandings with a view toward indigenous and ecumenical expression of Christian unity and sacramental understanding.

DISCIPLESHIP

is lived out through several dimensions of the faith journey, in the command to go and tell, in inviting others to come and see, and in being sent out to witness, serve, and make disciples.

The connection of life and faith is enfleshed, incarnated. In our communities, we see ministry happening daily and the Word being lived out Monday through Saturday, not just on Sunday. It is not good enough for us to **say** that we are disciples; we are **called to be** followers of Jesus, to **be** disciples. Discipleship is not a “time-sensitive” program or project.

At its heart, discipleship is a series of relationships. The first relationship is the disciple's relationship with Jesus. The second is the relationship between disciples. The final relationship that must be included in any New Testament study of discipleship is the relationship of disciples to others. Each relationship begins in the same way: with an invitation and response.⁹

Worshiping communities prepare for discipleship through faith-filled, intentional study of the Word. This involves regular interactive sessions in which the gospel, its meaning, and the way it is lived out in our daily lives is engaged. Learning and living the gospel is not for one's individual benefit alone; it is also for becoming living examples in order to make disciples.¹⁰

MISSION CONTEXT

The ELCA, the Delaware Maryland Synod and its Ecumenical Partners offer an abundance of faith best practices and resources to congregations. Resources used in the African Descent Lutheran Community include : ***Doing Justice: Congregations and Community Organizing; Building King's Beloved Community;*** and ***Let the Glory of the Lord Rise Among Us***. These are but a handful of inspiring examples that African Descent congregations have used to engage in faith-based ministries.

Historically, the Black Christian community has a strong witness of prayer, bible study, testimony, revival: cultural manifestations of worship in the form of art, music and

⁹ “Called to Discipleship: Congregation Planning Guide”(Chicago:ELCA,2000),p. B-E

¹⁰ “Many Voices, tell the Story, Create the Vision: Build Our Future-ELCA Plan of Action for Ministry in African Descent Communities” (Chicago: ELCA, 2005), p. 25

dance; and sharing of faith stories. African descent congregations can and must build on this legacy and continue the journey of passing on the faith to the next generation. Making disciples is an intentional response to the Gospel.

GOAL

To prioritize discipleship over membership.

MISSION ACTIONS

Congregations are encouraged to:

- 1) Pray constantly for God's discerning Spirit to direct the life of the congregation.
- 2) Provide Bible study opportunities, encourage members to bring their Bibles to Bible study and worship, and provide Bible study teachers with training and resources.
- 3) Offer intentional processes for making disciples of every member (e.g., "each one teach one").
- 4) Create opportunities for discipleship to use the diversity of their gifts within their congregation and community.
- 5) Develop and design a congregational calendar of Bible study events and activities.
- 6) Create small groups to provide mutual encouragement and accountability among disciples in the congregation.
- 7) Have leaders who are proficient in the Word and model discipleship.

STRATEGY OBJECTIVES:

1. Provide Bibles for congregational use during worship.
2. Promote Men's and Women's Bible study groups.
3. Promote joint Bible study groups with other congregations and ecumenical partners.
4. Promote Summer Bible Study camps for youth.
5. Disseminate and publish a calendar of Bible study events and activities to increase participation and avoid scheduling conflicts.

Synods are encouraged to:

1. Encourage congregations to be communities that study the Bible and build ecumenical partnerships.
2. Create a communication network for congregations to share best practices for making disciples.
3. Coordinate and facilitate formal learning and interaction opportunities with teachers, theologians, the bishop and their assistants.

STRATEGY OBJECTIVES:

1. Provide ecumenical resources to congregations that foster Bible study.
2. Provide resources to assist congregations with the design and development of communication tools that will foster discipleship.
3. Provide resources to congregations interested in formal learning through Gettysburg Seminary, Philadelphia seminary and other ELCA and Synodical

resources.

The African American Lutheran Association (AALA) Baltimore Chapter is encouraged to:

- 1) Assist congregations by providing an atmosphere of outreach through open gatherings, events and activities that promote access to the gifts and community of African Descent Lutheran congregations.
- 2) Work with clergy, congregations, congregational councils, clusters, communities, Synod and ecumenical partners to promote events and activities that foster relationships within the Synod.
- 3) Identify and facilitate the deployment of resources meant to assist congregations in undertaking events and activities that will promote the witness of the community of Lutherans of African descent as active in and vital to the growth of the ELCA and the Synod.

STRATEGY OBJECTIVES:

1. Plan and promote four events/activities annually.
2. Develop proposals that will assist congregations in implementing specific goals in discipleship and outreach ministry.
3. Help direct congregations to local resources.
4. Expand and increase communication between congregations and congregational councils.
5. Host quarterly congregational council workshops to promote and discuss best practices that foster the growth and immersion of biblical study.

POTENTIAL ACTIVITIES AND EVENTS

- 1) Joint Bible study amongst African Descent congregations.
- 2) Mens Bible study groups.
- 3) Womens Bible study groups.
- 4) Summer Bible Study Camp
- 5) Revivals
- 6) Pilgrimage to the Motherland.
- 7) Visual arts, music, dance and performances of a religious nature.

STEWARDSHIP

Merciful God, we offer with joy and thanksgiving what you have first given us – ourselves, our time, and our possessions, signs of your gracious love. (Lutheran Book of Worship, p 108)

We experience the joy and passion of giving by sharing blessings from the gifts God has bestowed on us. We share blessings not with a bartering attitude or mind set, we share blessings out of the conviction that whatever we have, whoever we are, all comes from God as sheer gift. As a “community of communities” within the network of mutuality called to witness to God’s compassion, we believe that every child of God possesses gifts to share. We also believe that there is no better

time than the present for acknowledging and reflecting the mercy of God in our lives. Stewardship, then, begins with the acknowledgment that we must manage resources God has given in such ways that greater generosity and philanthropy are made possible, in accord with God's will.

Mission Context

Article VI of the Augsburg confession encourages us to engage in good works, not to merit God's favor; but in response to the grace we receive through Christ, and as a reflection of our love for, and commitment to, Christ. This New Obedience compels us to be models of Christ in the world, i.e. disciples of Christ. Our stewardship therefore should not be seen primarily as a fund raising strategy to meet budget needs; but as a means by which we live out our faith in the world as disciples of Christ. Good stewardship promotes the mission of the church and demonstrates the church's (each person's) commitment to the Gospel. Jesus' parable in Mathew 20:1-16 teaches that God is the owner of everything and we are stewards (*oikonomia*) managers to whom God has entrusted everything: time, talent, resources and gifts. If God is the owner of everything and God has called and entrusted to us everything, then everything we have should be used to bring glory to God.

Stewardship is linked with every aspect of a disciple's life.

GOAL

Encourage communities to embrace an African and biblical concept of spirituality, which sees God in everything, as the source and giver of all good and perfect gifts. Encourage the development of environments for the giving of talents, time, and financial treasures.

Mission Actions

Congregations are encouraged to:

1. Create an environment in which each member embraces the African and biblical concept of spirituality that sees God in everything, by:
 - Casting a vision for stewardship
 - Teaching Stewardship As:
 1. Discipleship
 2. Tithing as a necessary spiritual practice of faith
 3. Mission (fulfilling the Gospel) as the Goal
 4. A means to end a culture of dependency from a biblical perspective.
2. Developing a stewardship emphasis that will:
 - Motivate (By testimonies etc.)

- Promote faith and spending accountability
 - Educate regarding institutional racism with the support of ART .
3. Develop and educate leaders as models of good stewardship practices.
 4. Incorporate stewardship in understanding the mission of the church
 5. Provide workshops and education on Financial Management for individuals, churches, and entrepreneurs.

DE/MD Synod is encouraged to:

1. Provide stewardship training for pastors and lay persons similar to the presentations made for learning about how to run a church council.
2. Be deliberate in soliciting the gifts and talents of African Descent persons who will be included in the various agencies and committees of the synod to reflect the ethnic and cultural balance needed in the synod.
3. Dedicate resources to strengthen and support African Descent developing congregations with potential for growth but limited resources.
4. Call a qualified African descent staff person to serve as stewardship specialist.*

Churchwide units are encouraged to:

1. Support stewardship efforts of congregations and synod by providing necessary resources and personnel.
2. Emphasize stewardship as a key component of church development for new and redeveloping congregations.

Seminaries are encouraged to:

1. Include in their curriculum stewardship courses with special emphasis on tithing and financial management.
2. Offer seminars on writing programs and proposals for faith-based grants.
3. Develop programs open to the congregational leaders of local churches to promote healthy congregational asset management and planning.

African American Lutheran Association (AALA) is encouraged to:

1. Urge its membership to utilize existing programs to “grow” fiscal, volunteer, and creative assets in congregations.
2. Establish a directory of resources or people with various skills to support the needs of community.
3. Support the Campus Lutheran Outreach ministry at Morgan State University.

Social Justice

“But let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream” (Amos 5:24).

Mission Context

African descent Lutheran congregations have inherited a grand social and ethical tradition from both the historic Black church and the Lutheran church. From the Black church, people of African descent inherited an understanding that the Christian faith must be concerned about the body and soul of all members of its context. From the Lutheran church, people of African descent inherited a strong social ministry network. Both traditions embrace their mission to be a public church that serves and speaks on behalf of the “least of these”(Matthew 25).

The prophetic and priestly dimensions of ministry in African descent communities require Lutherans of African descent around the globe to be attentive to their context. Issues such as HIV-AIDS, homelessness, poverty, social justice in the judicial process, economic equality, educational opportunity, and health care accessibility converge on African descent Lutheran congregations in many ways. People of African descent need to be empowered in all arenas in the fight for justice.

Goal

Our mission goal is to "to protect against the defamation and discrimination of Black people, to educate, empower, and protect the political, economic, social, and civil rights of those of African descent". Our vision is to establish a society, in which those of African Descent have equal rights in the areas of education, health, and employment. In addition, we will advocate to ensure that justice is established and maintained within our Democratic government.

Congregations are encouraged to:

- To speak God’s Word forthrightly to those systems that continually drive life out of God’s people.
- Ensure the political, educational, social, and economic equality of people of African Descent.
- Protect Constitutional Rights and hold our elected Democratic government accountable to represent the best interests of ALL citizens.
- Seek enactment and enforcement of federal, state, and local laws securing our civil rights.
- Educate and empower people of African descent to establish self-reliance through unification.
- Educate persons regarding their Constitutional rights and take action to secure and protect these rights.

Seminaries are encouraged to:

There is no local Lutheran Theological Seminary in Baltimore. The closest Lutheran Seminary in an urban setting is the Lutheran Theological Seminary in Philadelphia which has an Urban Theological Institute. The Lutheran Theological Seminary at Gettysburg is also near. Gettysburg also has a focus on Town and Country ministry. AALA should utilize the resources of the seminary communities and ask for their assistance in the development of ministry resources aimed at the urban context:

1. Promote the exchange of ideas through seminars and convocations in which social justice is discussed to address the issues that prevent the body of Christ from being all that it can be in a chaotic world.
2. Equip future Lutheran rostered leaders of African descent with information and networking skills to access the myriad of political avenues through which justice can be pursued for all members of the body of Christ in the world.
3. Provide opportunities for training in community development that helps build appropriate organizations responsive to the needs of the urban community.

AALA is encouraged to:

1. Use the social statements of the ELCA (*e.g., Freed in Christ: Race, Ethnicity, and Culture*) as theological foundations for advocacy and service ministries.
2. Use available printed resources (*e.g., Criminal Justice Ministry: A Congregational Handbook*) as aids to encourage this church to be about faith active in love.
3. Partner with Lutheran social ministry organizations and Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service (LIRS) so that faith active in love might be lived out within communities of African descent.

In Baltimore AALA should partner with as many organizations that are involved in the social justice arena as possible. Thus making our presence known in Baltimore as major contributors to social policy affecting the lives of persons living in Baltimore.

4. Interact with the Lutheran Office for Governmental Affairs (LOGA) and grass-roots programs of governmental offices and agencies to empower and nurture the relationship between those officials and congregations of Lutherans of Locally AALA should join and become an integral part of the grass roots movement in Baltimore developing influential relationships with not only grass root organizers but also develop relationships with political and social leaders.
5. Develop plans to share effective congregational models of doing justice and showing mercy.

AALA should encourage local congregations to develop plans to form congregational models that address social justice issues.

6. Work with ecumenical and global networks pursuing social justice ministry.

AALA should coordinate a meeting with all local church leadership to discuss their plans for a social justice ministry. Suggest that members join the local chapter of the Interdenominational Ministers Alliance.

7. Develop resources for assisting all expressions of the ELCA in responding to HIV-AIDS, developing prison ministries, improving public school education, and working with other issues of importance to African descent communities.

AALA should encourage each church mission to focus on one of these as an outreach social justice initiative or begin to gather information on grants for the purpose of responding to these issues.

8. Convene a broad-based churchwide consultation for the purpose of identifying models of health-care ministries and developing plans for promoting healthcare among people of African descent.

AALA should join some of the existing health care initiatives in Baltimore as the *Healthcare for all Initiative*.

Unity and Diversity

Diversity constitutes the very nature of people of African descent. The three largest communities of people of African descent: the African American, the African Caribbean, and the African national- are all present within the Delaware-Maryland Synod. However, the diverse social, cultural, geographical, and historical presence of the African descent community continues to be under-utilized and under-appreciated within this Synod.

Mission Context

As a people continually discouraged from witnessing to their oneness with Christ in the literature, art, and music of the religious community, the diverse people of African descent willingly offer their gifts to the spiritual community that has cradled them and nurtured them with the means of grace. The Delaware-Maryland Synod African descent community seeks to respond to that invitation by sharing its heart and being with the church. "For the past 338 years of Lutheranism in a multicultural context, people of every race in God's creation have shared the love of Christ through the gifts of the diverse cultures from which they evolved. This reality calls this church to transcend culture and to build relationships with and within communities of color."¹¹

Goal

To create a strategic team of leaders from within the various African descent communities (African American, African Caribbean, African national) to develop

¹¹ *This Far By Faith* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress Publishers, 1999) p 10.

cohesive programs that will create authentic openings for recognized synodical leadership, not tokenism.

Mission Actions

The Delaware-Maryland Synod, Congregations, Committees, and Mission Teams will adopt the mission actions identified in the churchwide ELCA African Descent Ministry Strategy:

1. Extend an open hand of fellowship to all people with respect and dignity regardless of race, color, or culture.
2. Acknowledge the leadership styles, diversity, and differences of all people of African descent, and promote the recognition of such gifts.
3. Support and enhance the historical perspectives of Lutherans from diverse communities of color as effective and embrace them as willing leaders for the church.
4. Dismantle the glass ceiling that prohibits the growth of communities by removing political obstacles that impede the growth and nurture of leaders of African descent.
5. Through education, mentorship, and media, empower thoughts, words, and deeds that reflect the need to be responsive to Christ's call to the entire community.
6. Acknowledge prayerfully and deliberately the brokenness of the past and move towards the future as a unified body of Christ.
7. Regularly convene consultations that gather congregational leaders, rostered leaders, teaching theologians of color, synodical leaders, and churchwide staff to assess and plan future directions in this church's common ministry.
8. Convene and participate in regular consultations with this church's ecumenical partners engaged in multicultural ministry.

The Delaware-Maryland Synod will also:

1. Use all of the synodical communication tools to publicize and enhance programs and activities that promote the history of African descent members and/or celebrate their unique gifts to the ELCA in all expressions.
2. Fully endorse and financially support the work of the Synod's Anti-Racism Team to include all synodical leaders, conferences, and congregations.
3. Identify specific actions required to change the current "standard operating practices" that prevent and/or limit the participation of African descent leaders in the work of the Synod.

The African American Lutheran Association (AALA)– Baltimore Chapter will:

1. Educate Lutherans of African descent regarding the institutional structure of the Delaware-Maryland Synod and the ELCA and encourage members to request and accept leadership opportunities.
2. Identify candidates for the DE-MD Synod's leadership database.

3. Maintain a Web site that provides the historical background of Black Lutherans' journeys; a listing of rostered leaders of African descent; congregational, synodical, and churchwide news and events of interest; and on-line resources for dialogue.
4. Serve as an advocate for African descent members and rostered leaders in situations that may involve culturally sensitive issues.

**African Descent Strategy Core Team
Implementation Plan
January 31, 2009**

Action	Date	Responsible	Outcome
Letter and talking points for team members to share current status of the AD Strategy development	2/10/09	Dr. Donnella	Received and distributed 2/3/09
Congregational visits 20% AD membership <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ All Saints- Churchill Wortherly ▪ Amazing Grace- Reggie Price ▪ Augsburg- Rev. Eric Campbell ▪ Faith- Church Wortherly ▪ Holy Comforter- Linda Chinnia ▪ Peoples' Community- Rev. Clarke ▪ Spirit of Life- Rev. Herz-Lane ▪ St. John's Pimlico- Marian Boston ▪ St. Philip's- Gerry Grant 10-15% AD membership <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Epiphany- Gerry Grant ▪ Jerusalem- Gerry Grant ▪ Second English- Floyd Blair ▪ Christ, Inner Harbor- Rev. Campbell ▪ St. James, Rockdale- Linda Chinnia ▪ St. Paul, Liberty Road- Linda Chinnia ▪ Abiding Savior- Rev. Clarke 	3/13/09	Core Team	

Living Word- John Henderson				
Review reports from congregational visits	3/13/09	Core Team		
Contact ELCA Research/Evaluation Division for current data on identified congregations		Rev. Wolfgang Herz-Lane		
Share "Clemons" report with Core Team		John Henderson		
Compile list of Synod groups/leaders meetings dates for additional contacts by Core Team		Rev. Wolfgang Herz-Lane Linda Chinnia		