

METROPOLITAN WASHINGTON, D.C. SYNOD ASSEMBLY
Good Shepherd Lutheran Church Gaithersburg, Maryland
June 18, 2016

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Reference & Counsel Number: 2016 - 04

Secretary's Number:

Title: African Descent Lutheran Lives Matter

Submitted by: Rev. Michael D. Wilker, the District of Columbia Conference

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WHEREAS, African American, African Caribbean and African national communities of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) are gifted and culturally diverse. Within the ELCA there are more than 46,100 members that identify as people of African Descent, or 1.9% of the ELCA's total population; and,

WHEREAS, the ELCA African Descent community is within a denomination that affirms "There is no longer Jew or Greek, slave or free, male and female; for all of you are one in Christ (Galatians 3:28)." We are called to be a church that embraces each person and confronts racial, ethnic, cultural, religious, age, gender, familial, sexual orientation, physical, personal and class barriers that often manifest themselves in unjust treatment, inequalities, exclusion and violence; and,

WHEREAS, the United Nations declared 2015-2024 the "International Decade for People of African Descent." Whether as descendants of the transatlantic slave trade or as more recent migrants, people of African Descent constitute some of the poorest and most marginalized groups with limited access to quality education, health services, housing, and social services; and,

WHEREAS, the 1993 ELCA Churchwide Assembly adopted the social statement, "Freed in Christ: Race, Ethnicity & Culture" as a confession of the sin of racism. Despite many advances by people of African Descent within the ELCA and society, racism and racial discrimination, both direct and indirect, *de facto* and *de jure*, continue to manifest themselves in inequality and disadvantage; and,

WHEREAS, African Descent theologians and scholars are often rejected and avoided within not all but many Lutheran academic institutions. African Descent rostered leaders acquire higher education debt, wait longer to receive calls, are less likely to receive full-time calls, and less likely to reach synod compensation guidelines; and,

WHEREAS, the majority of African Descent ELCA congregations were birthed out of "white flight," a divestment from urban areas, taking socio-economic resources and abandoning a connection, call and witness. What is left are deteriorating, debt-filled buildings with shrinking memberships, in part due to the systemic and structural issues of discrimination and lack of full inclusion of African Descent gifts of leadership and worship styles; therefore, be it

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42 **RESOLVED,** that the Metropolitan Washington, D.C. Synod Assembly memorialize the 2016
43 ELCA Churchwide Assembly to include as part of its observance of the 500th
44 Anniversary of the Reformation and the commemoration of the United Nation’s
45 International Decade of People of African Descent the following:

- 46 ▪ Direct the ELCA Church Council to create a “Declaration of the ELCA to the
47 African Descent Community” similar to the “Declaration of the ELCA to the
48 Jewish Community (4/18/1994)” acknowledging the Lutheran church’s
49 complicity in the 400+ years of slavery and the oppression of other
50 marginalized groups; that people of African descent were victims of slavery,
51 the slave trade and colonialism and continue to be victims of its
52 consequences; and, the ELCA has perpetuated racism and discrimination
53 through attitudes, actions, policies and practices these communities still
54 endure. The Council will bring this “Declaration” to the 2019 Churchwide
55 Assembly for its consideration and action with a recommendation to include
56 this Declaration in the governing documents of the ELCA;

- 57 ▪ Direct the ELCA Church Council to require those who provide oversight and
58 support for theological education in partnership with the Conference of
59 International Black Lutherans (CIBL) to recognize and dismantle white
60 hegemony by lifting up, encouraging and incorporating academic exploration
61 of Black Liberation theology across ELCA educational expressions, to
62 allocate funds for the development of resources and to accomplish this by
63 the 2019 Churchwide Assembly; and,

- 64 ▪ Direct the ELCA Church Council to require the Domestic Missions Unit of the
65 ELCA to work in partnership with the African Descent Lutheran Association
66 to increase by 10% the number of African Descent leaders, congregations
67 and communities served, thereby renewing its commitment (see African
68 Descent Strategy, CWA, 2005) to create, sustain, reinvest in and support
69 this plan of action by the 2019 Churchwide Assembly and to encourage
70 Synods and congregations to do likewise.