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African Descent Lutheran Association Calls Church to Action in Wake of Fatal Police Shootings

September 23, 2016 - We speak the names of Terence Crutcher (Tulsa, OK) and Keith Lamont Scott (Charlotte, NC) and the many others who are suffering from “state sanctioned” violence. These killings and assassinations by police of unarmed Black humans are not isolated incidents. This is also not just a Black problem; it is a moral issue in our midst. After reviewing the many memorials and resolutions that have challenged our synod assemblies and overwhelmingly passed at our 2016 Churchwide Assembly in New Orleans, it is clear that the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) is coming to grips that racism is not a thing of the past. Now what?

In recent days a trending hashtag is #WhiteChurchQuiet. This is a bit of an indicting cyber discussion that provokes a look at churches that refuse to address injustice as having lost its moral authority and essentially become part of the problem and even agents of the State. We must become counter-cultural to the acceptance and value of the maintenance of a rationale divide between the heart and mind. For example, an emotional or heart truth is often seen as not as true a truth grounded in reason. This allows White privilege and White fragility to form as inherited and collective cultural narcissism that systemically and historically prevents many from having the heart to feel the injustice of White supremacy.

The intersectionality of race and age in America has deemed the Black adult childish and the Black child as a threat to the security of our established communities. Black bodies are feared and subjugated as entities of menace, aggression, and hostility. That’s why we lost Tamir Rice and Tyree King against their own will because their existence was never safe. How do we rid ourselves of this fear? What can the Church do about it?

The church needs to reclaim and proclaim the narrative about the worth of Black Lives in the face of the criminalized depiction of Black people and the developed perceptions that perpetuate marginalization. Especially as we approach the commemoration of the 500th anniversary of the Reformation, we should be involved in lifting up the breadth and richness of the Black Experience and other Ethnic Specific Experiences that will remain shadowed by the proliferation of White Lutheran hegemony.

We’ve said it before and it is time to say it again, “Black Lives Matter.”

In conclusion, there is so much for us to do as Church and many opportunities for us to grow in our faith. As these moral issues continue to arise in our world, we must:

- 1) Advocate for police training and legislative change that amends the “perceived threat” rationale used by law enforcement that stipulates particular behavior warranting deadly force.
- 2) Demand a need for independent prosecutors for every lethal case involving law enforcement.
- 3) Encourage the organization and appointment of civilian review boards that participate in the oversight of local law enforcement agencies.
- 4) Encourage the health and well-being of police officers with mandatory therapy for officers involved in fatal shootings and annual psychological evaluations for street and community law enforcement.
- 5) Advocate for whistleblower programs for police officers to report dangerous and rogue colleagues.

Yours in Christ,

The Rev. Lamont Anthony Wells, President, African Descent Lutheran Association (ELCA)

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