



New Jersey Synod
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America
God's work. Our hands.

Office of the Bishop

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August 3, 2015

Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ,

At our synod assembly in June, we began a conversation around race and racism. Many of you sent me notes and emails thanking me for providing the time and space for us to have this important conversation. Some of you reported that the time spent in your small group was a time of deep and painful conversation. Others said that your small group turned into a time of confession and forgiveness. And some of you expressed disappointment that your small group did not address the reality of racism in a helpful way. All of these experiences are, in fact, a true picture of the ongoing issue of confronting and dismantling racism in our church and our world.

Our assembly conversations were not the last word that we, as synod, will have together about the issue of race and racism. We will continue to find ways of addressing this sin, examining personal biases and beliefs, confessing our complicity in racist systems, and working to dismantle the structures that keep us from living out our baptismal relationships with one another. You, in your congregations and with your ecumenical colleagues, may have other opportunities to participate in these conversations and actions.

I am writing to highlight a couple of synodical and churchwide opportunities that can help us move our conversations forward. Please know that the materials we used at the synod assembly are available on our NJ Synod [website](#) for use in your own settings - with Sunday school, youth groups, adult studies, home gatherings, etc. Make use of them as seems appropriate in your local context.

Here are some other resources of note:

This Thursday evening, August 6, Presiding Bishop Elizabeth Eaton will be hosting a [webcast](#) with William B. Horne, II (member of the ELCA church council) titled *Confronting Racism*. The webcast is scheduled to begin at 9:00 pm and last for 45 minutes. I encourage you to gather a group from your congregation and watch this webcast together. If the hour is too late for a congregational gathering or the date too soon to organize such an event, plan to use this conversation at another time. Because it will be recorded and available online following the live broadcast, there is really no excuse for you not to use it in your setting. Let me know how your congregation has used this resource and what came from it.



At the recent ELCA Youth Gathering, our synod sent a team of youth and adults to lead an interactive experience called *Lovestruck*.



This experience on diversity was one of the activities in the Cobo Center in Detroit. Thousands of young people and their leaders engaged our team as they learned about the wonderful diversity of God's people that surround us every day. The *Lovestruck* team is available to work with you and your congregation in exploring diversity and bias. Contact [Jason Reed](#) for more information.

The Synod Council is in the process of appointing the committees and teams for the coming year. One of the teams that we are strengthening is our Anti-Racism Team under the leadership of Dr. Dianne Browne, former vice-president of our synod. This team will be offering resources for our congregations, including anti-racism training. Look for invitations and opportunities in upcoming Jersey Jottings e-newsletters.



Our staff is in the final planning stages of the ***Fall Convocation for Rostered Leaders***. This year, we will follow-up our assembly conversations by looking deeper into the ways racism keeps us from being the multi-cultural church we hope to be. While details with potential leaders are still coming together, you can mark October 13-14 (Tuesday-Wednesday) 2:00pm - 2:00pm on your calendar and look for the invitation in the next week or so.

Finally, thank you to those of you engaged in this important work every day. I rejoice to see that you are initiating conversations within your congregations and in your communities. I stand with you in your public actions to confront and dismantle racism as you "*strive for justice and peace in all the earth*", which is part of our baptismal covenant. And I pray, with you, that we will live to see the day when black and brown lives really do matter and are afforded the dignity that comes with being created in the image of God.

Let us pray: *O God, where hearts are fearful and constricted, grant courage and hope. Where anxiety is infectious and widening, grant peace and reassurance. Where impossibilities close every door and window, grant imagination and resistance. Where distrust twists our thinking, grant healing and illumination. Where spirits are daunted and weakened, grant soaring wings and strengthened dreams. All these things we ask in the name of Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord. Amen. (ELW)*

Your sister in Christ,

Tracie
The Rev. Tracie L. Bartholomew, Bishop

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