NEXT STEPS IN COMMON
2019 Churchwide Assembly actions that connect with our life together

In this second of four reports, we focus on two actions taken by the 2019 Churchwide Assembly to address the legacy of racism in our denomination and commit us to authentic diversity, and how these intersect with LSTC’s own previous statements and ongoing commitments.

People of African Descent declaration
On the second day of the Assembly, the Declaration of the ELCA to People of African Descent was publicly presented to representatives of the African Descent Lutheran Association (ADLA). The declaration expresses the church’s bondage to the sins of slavery, racism, discrimination, white supremacy, and quietism, and was adopted in June 2019 as an action of the ELCA Church Council. In presenting the declaration, the ELCA recommitted our church to the work of racial justice, socioeconomic equality, and racial reconciliation.

As a seminary, we also lament that our church’s complicity in the enslavement, oppression, and marginalization of African descent people and others has included us as well. With the school’s relocation and construction in 1962–67, we displaced African American families early in the gentrification of Hyde Park. During our lengthy history, we have confused ethnocentrism with Lutheran identity and so have overlooked the rich contributions to our church made by African descent and other marginalized communities, including scholarly offerings.

In response to the harms we have committed, we have constructively engaged these troubling issues through significant institutional commitments that include:

- Establishing in 2006 the Pero Multicultural Center to focus on multicultural leadership development, honoring Albert “Pete” Pero, Jr., the first African descent Lutheran from the USA to earn a PhD in systematic theology and join our faculty.
- Confessing in spring 2015 our institutional sins of racism and racialized harm (see attached), repenting of this to seek forgiveness, and committing our resources to become an antiracist school across all levels of the institution.

As a learning community, we have the chance to engage and model racial reconciliation in our church, but this will not be easy. How do we continue to confess and repent of the racism and white supremacy at the heart of who we are? What would a restorative justice look like today, not acquiescing to our discomfort over what we have done or who we have been?

Authentic Diversity strategy
In a related action, the Assembly adopted a Strategy Toward Authentic Diversity in the ELCA that recommends how our church can exhibit authentic diversity, including goals for racial diversity and inclusion. This report calls on the ELCA to go deeper in five areas: (1) theological framing and equipping, (2) healing action, (3) structural accountability, (4) theological education and leadership development, and (5) partnership with full communion partners, ecumenical and interreligious friends, and related organizations.
Regarding theological education, the document recommends that our seminaries require staff and rostered ministers to participate in antiracism training every 2–3 years, that our staff (e.g., professors, pastors, field education directors, and contextual education supervisors) be or become authentically diverse, that a percentage of faculty represent strategic authentic diversity, and that our schools be multicultural centers that offer space/safety, educational resources, and policy changes to engage the needs of people of color.

Our school has already taken several steps to move our community toward more authentic diversity that include the following:

- Along with Chicago Regional Organizing for Antiracism (CROAR), we host antiracism training for students, staff, faculty, board members, and others, and are building an Antiracism Team to dismantle forms of institutional racism in our midst.
- The Intercultural Development Inventory (IDI) is deployed across the institution, from students to board members, to explore how we individually and collectively can develop strategies to challenge and grow beyond intercultural bias.
- Our current strategic plan outlines our investment in attracting talented, faithful people who participate in and are formed by a gospel–centered community, including specific goals of becoming a culturally competent, diverse institution.

As the churchwide strategy underscores, authentic diversity will not happen by optimism or accident but through clear plans and hard work. How can this disposition become second-nature to our school in all our decision-making? Where can we build in opportunities to listen to and grow from those places where we still fall short?

We hope this report helped to highlight these two closely related actions of the Churchwide Assembly. Please follow the links to relevant documents, ponder the questions we posed, and consider our how our school might become more involved in each area. Many thanks to Scott Chalmers, Aaron Copley–Spivey, and Vima Couvertier–Cruz for help with the content.

The next installment of these reports will appear on September 20, focusing on the Faith, Sexism and Justice social statement.

Respectfully,

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