Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada
ELCIC
In Mission for Others

June 4, 2020

Earlier this week, National Bishop Susan Johnson, along with the Primate of the Anglican Church of Canada and the Moderator of the United Church of Canada, issued a letter to the churches regarding "the ongoing sin of racism in our communities." We are including this document along with this letter so that as many people as possible may see it.

We, as the bishops of the ELCIC, want to add our voice to that letter and we commend it to you.

We all have watched in shock the tumultuous events taking place across the United States. We acknowledge the hurt, pain, and anger and people's desire to seek systemic change against racism. As Bishop Susan, Archbishop Linda and Moderator Richard have stated: "Centuries of anger at injustice and anti-Black racism are literally bursting into flames as people stand for political and cultural change to address these deep-seated systems that work to oppress so many members of our communities."

To think that this is something that occurs just in the United States is to be blind to the realities here in Canada. Racism is within us and within our communities. We need to acknowledge that there is deep-seated, systemic racism within our country. Individually and collectively, we are guilty. We perpetuate stereotypes and racial slurs. We fail to challenge certain ways of thinking that are part of our upbringing but do not reflect Christ's call to love God and to love our neighbour. We often exclude people of colour from full participation in our churches. Our actions often treat people of colour as less than, inferior, as "other."

Each of us, as bishops, recognizes our inherent white privilege. We have been afforded opportunities and experiences not available to all people. We recognize that we are unable to fully appreciate the anger and desperate calls to action that we are witnessing.

To stay silent enables racism and injustice to continue. We affirm the statement issued by the Racial Justice Advisory Committee of the Eastern Synod, which accompanies this letter. The Committee calls us to account with the following:

> Furthermore, when we fail to speak out against acts of racism, we become silent perpetrators of injustice. In short, if we do not condemn racism, then we are guilty of it. It is our work, particularly as a community of faith, to speak out against acts of racism. It is our work to say loudly and clearly that we do not accept this reality. We must call out racism as sinful and deadly. That is only the beginning, for once we speak out against it, we must do the work of dismantling the systems that oppress.

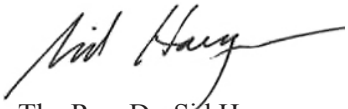
We need to repent — to kneel on one knee — in prayer, in faithfulness, and in compassion. And we need to commit to changing our ways of thinking and our actions that demean and hurt. We need to listen, learn, hear the stories, stand alongside of, speak up, speak out, and stand up against injustice.

We have difficult work to do ourselves. We need to educate ourselves. We need to look into the history of racism in Canada. We need to understand how our actions have impacted and oppressed others. We need to listen to the experiences of our black and other racialized members of our congregations and communities. We need to stand in solidarity with all who experience racism on a daily basis. We need to speak out against acts of racism and discrimination.

We urge all of our congregations and members to commit to doing the hard work that lies before us.

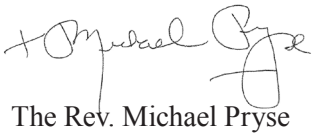
The Rev. Dr. Greg Mohr
British Columbia Synod

The Rev. Dr. Larry Kochendorfer
Synod of Alberta and the Territories



The Rev. Dr. Sid Haugen
Saskatchewan Synod

The Rev. Jason Zinko
Manitoba/Northwestern Ontario Syno



The Rev. Michael Pryse
Eastern Synod

The Rev. Susan Johnson
National Bishop, ELCIC

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The Anglican Church of Canada

The events taking place across North America in response to the murder of George Floyd have given all of us a stark reminder of the ongoing sin of racism in our communities. Centuries of anger at injustice and anti-Black racism are literally bursting into flames as people stand for political and cultural change to address these deep-seated systems that work to oppress so many members of our communities. Coupled with the death of Ahmaud Arbery, the threat against Christian Cooper who was participating in a park activity so many of us take for granted, and so many other day to day activities, we are reminded of the horrendous consequences of anti-Black racism again and again, depriving people of their safety, their freedom and their lives.

We as church leaders, acknowledge the pain, frustrations and anger of our Black communities, and recognize that systemic anti-Black racism is prevalent in our context in Canada as well; in the streets of our communities, in the justice and policing systems, and in our congregations and parishes. It is important for church members in our largely white churches to look at how we continue to perpetuate anti-Black racism, either inadvertently or intentionally.

George Floyd's words, "I can't breathe," continue to ring in our ears; they act as a prophetic voice of the pain and re-traumatization that is coming from peoples of African descent again and again. The voice is weary and tired. "We can't breathe" is the collective chant of peoples of African descent, especially those in North America, as they continue to struggle against centuries of racism and systemic discrimination.

We are hearing the same voice from ministers of African descent, particularly as they pastor predominantly white congregations. This voice is tired of violence towards Black lives. This voice is tired of the exclusion of people of African descent in our structures of leadership. This voice is tired of the emptiness that comes from supposed allies who aren't willing to acknowledge their own privilege and responsibility.

As Primate of the Anglican Church of Canada, The National Bishop of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada, and Moderator of The United Church of Canada we want to affirm our commitment to ending our silence about and working towards the dismantling of anti-Black racism.

In March, we jointly released a letter in support of the International Decade for Peoples of African Descent, acknowledging the reality of racism in our institutions and committing ourselves to naming and working towards the eradication of anti-Black racism. We are inviting the members

of our communities to join us in this commitment by visibly and concretely demonstrating the call for solidarity in the UN decade. Some suggestions are:

- Reach out to a friend of African descent and listen to their story and how these events have affected them. This is also a good practice for primarily white congregations whose minister is African descent.

- Conscientiously and prayerfully consider joining public expressions of solidarity towards seeking justice against anti-Black racism;

- Read books and other materials on Black history in the Canadian context, the impact of anti-Black racism, and the reality of white privilege;

- Research critical elements of Black legacy;

- Engage with the artistic and cultural production of people of African descent, with a commitment to learn the history and context within these expressions.

We call upon our members to join with us in this commitment.

Sincerely yours,

The Rev. Susan Johnson
National Bishop, Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada

The Most Rev. Linda Nicholls
Primate, Anglican Church of Canada

The Rt. Rev. Dr. Richard Bott
Moderator, United Church of Canada

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June 2, 2020

Dear Siblings in Christ,

If one member suffers, all suffer together with it; if one member is honored, all rejoice together with it. (1 Corinthians 12:26)

With the death of George Floyd, we witnessed yet another senseless murder of a black man in the United States. We again see tears and anguish pounding through each step marched in resistance, struggle, and public protest; we feel deeply the brokenness and the separation between God's vision for community and where the world sits at this moment in history.

This is not simply an American problem. Canadians are not immune to prejudice and racial injustice. We join in with resounding force against the questionable circumstances surrounding the death of Regis Korchinski-Paquet in Toronto, and the desecration of a Jewish synagogue in Montreal. As the whole people of God called to manifest God's mission in the world, we must not be complacent and silent in our status quo. The Spirit moves us to stand courageously, to advocate persistently, and to act compassionately as people of faith.

We are not living out God's vision for community.

Furthermore, when we fail to speak out against acts of racism, we become silent perpetrators of injustice. In short, if we do not condemn racism, then we are guilty of it. It is our work, particularly as a community of faith, to speak out against acts of racism. It is our work to say loudly and clearly that we do not accept this reality. We must call out racism as sinful and deadly. That is only the beginning, for once we speak out against it, we must do the work of dismantling the systems that oppress.

We, the committee that represents your Synod, feel called to use our pulpits and platforms to speak out against racism. To shine a light on the ways in which racism exists in our community, and to pledge to do the work to make changes. To stand in solidarity with all who live with racial injustice as a daily reality. We feel called to pray fervently, to write persistently, and to encourage one another to allow God to work in us and through us for equity, love and an end to all forms of discrimination and racism.

June 21st is Indigenous Peoples Day in Canada. Racism in our country often takes the form of discrimination against our Indigenous Peoples: the missing and murdered Indigenous women, dishonoring of historical treaties and present promises, and ignoring that the wisdoms of Indigenous Peoples teach us how to be caretakers of this land. We must interrogate the past, look clearly at the present, and let it motivate our work for justice to build a future for our common good.

The preamble to the mission, vision and values statement of the Racial Justice Advisory Committee states, “We acknowledge that we each have different experiences of privilege and that in different settings, some of us experience more privilege and some experience less.” Each of us will experience the current events differently, depending on our life stories. Reach out to colleagues, parishioners, neighbours, and friends who might be feeling particularly vulnerable this week. Be present and listen when oppressed voices speak and stand with them.

We pray for courage as we do this work together, as allies. It is not easy, nor comfortable, but it is necessary. We are truly all in this together.

In solidarity with our Siblings of Colour,

Your Racial Justice Advisory Committee members:

Rev. Joanna Miller, Chair
Rev. JoAnne Lam
Pat Lovell
Rev. Jennifer Hoover
Emily Savage
Rev. Philip Mathai
Rev. Chun Zhang
Rev. Jonathan Schmidt
Rev. Katherine Gohm
Joy Philip
Rev. Rick Pryce
Deacon Scott Knarr
Selina Broadshaw

Rev. Michael Pryse, Bishop, Eastern Synod of the ELCIC
Rev. Christie Morrow-Wolfe, Assistant to the Bishop