



# Southeastern Synod

## Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

God's work. Our hands.

May 12, 2020

Dear church,

On Friday, May 6, 2020, I walked around my predominately African-American neighborhood. I did this freely, without worry, without concern for my life. In fact, I was greeted warmly by my neighbors; it was an extension of grace and welcome. It was not lost on me the privilege that my whiteness affords me in this life and country.

And yet, on Friday, while I was walking, I began to think that day was supposed to be a day for Mr. Ahmaud Arbery and his family to celebrate his birthday. You see, he nor his family were able to celebrate his birthday. In February, while he was out for a jog, little did he know that the neighbors that met him that day were not extensions of grace and welcome. Little did he know he would need to worry, to have concern for his life, and that the color of his skin would indeed be of no privilege.

Mr. Arbery was chased down, shot, and killed by two white men. The father and son shooters, Gregory and Travis McMichael, racially profiled and targeted Mr. Arbery. The shooting was filmed, and the video eventually leaked onto social media. Following protest demonstrations, the two have been finally arrested.

The extrajudicial killings of young black men in America are not new, but because of technology, there is more proof of these actions. The racial profiling of black and brown bodies and innocent victim of racist attacks continues to plague this nation. We grieve for Freddie Gray, Philando Castile, Eric Garner, Mike Brown, and the many known and unknown victims of these attacks.

We grieve with the family of Mr. Ahmaud Arbery, as they remember his life and his birthdate. But we cannot stop with our prayers, our grief, or even our acknowledgment of our privilege. We must advocate and be a voice for those whose voices have been taken from them.

The shooting by the McMichaels is being called a racially motivated hate crime. The [U.S. Department of Justice](#) (DOJ) began prosecuting hate crimes on the federal level in 1968, but not every state in the country has a law against them. The DOJ defines a hate crime as one that is committed "on the basis of race, color, religion, national origin, sexual orientation, gender, gender identity, or disability."

According to the U.S. Department of Justice website, Georgia is one of only four states [lacking this type of law](#). The other three are Arkansas, Wyoming, and South Carolina. According to the U.S. DOJ, even if a state [does not have a hate crimes law, they can still be reported to the Federal Bureau of Investigation](#) (FBI).

As a church, we have committed to speak up in condemning white supremacy and racist rhetoric. We have made commitments towards racial justice, but our actions must be as strong as our words.

I share with you the following statement from the African Descent Lutheran Association, Southeastern chapter (ADLA):

Albert Einstein once said, *"If I had an hour to solve a problem and my life depended on the solution, I would spend the first 55 minutes determining the proper question to ask... for once I know the proper question, I could solve the problem in less than five minutes."* For people of color, we know the proper question: When will racism end?

In the book "No Bigotry Allowed: Losing the Spirit of Fear," Pastor Ronald Bonner presents the answer with certainty: *"White supremacy and racism will end when racism is no longer normative; the inability to see how one has benefitted from past injustices are all by-products of the racist pedagogy of white supremacy."*

With sadness, the killing of Ahmaud Arbery stirs no surprise but instead exacerbates our pain and trauma. The murder of black people and the inadequate responses of the police continue to anesthetize our community. State-supported inaction, as evidenced by the time lapse between the fatal shooting of Ahmaud Arbery and the arrest of his killers, as well as the complicity of the District Attorney's office, are all part of the systemic problem.

***The African Descent Lutheran Association, Southeastern chapter (ADLA) therefore, calls for immediate action to convene the appropriate oversight of the Department of Justice. We also call for the passage of HB 426 so that Georgians may be protected by a Hate Crime Statute enforceable by state and local law enforcement and upheld in the state and local courts.***

Further, ADLA extends its sympathy with the hope and strength we share in the resurrection of Jesus Christ to the family and friends of Ahmaud Arbery. We pray God's presence will bring comfort, peace, and hope as we continue to struggle with you for cleansing and justice.

Micah 6:8, *He has told you; O mortal, what is good, and what does the LORD require of you, but to do justice, and to love kindness and to walk humbly with your God?"*

Southeastern Synod of the ELCA, join me and urge the Department of Justice to follow this case. Urge our local and state officials to make Georgia a state that recognizes that hateful attacks based on "race, color, religion, national origin, sexual orientation, gender, gender identity, or disability" are crimes that devalue the humanity of all of God's people.

As Jesus tells us, *"Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me."* (Matthew 25:40) There is never a human being that when we look into their eyes, we do not see the very face of God. Each and every time someone is killed, we have dismembered the body of Christ and the family of God.

Journeying together with you!



+Bishop Kevin L. Strickland



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### **ELCA Resource Links:**

Resolution to Condemn White Supremacy:

[https://download.elca.org/ELCA%20Resource%20Repository/Condemnation\\_of\\_White\\_Supremacy\\_and\\_Racist\\_Rhetoric.pdf](https://download.elca.org/ELCA%20Resource%20Repository/Condemnation_of_White_Supremacy_and_Racist_Rhetoric.pdf)

Freed in Christ Social Statement:

<http://download.elca.org/ELCA%20Resource%20Repository/RaceSS.pdf>

Declaration to People of African Descent:

[https://download.elca.org/ELCA%20Resource%20Repository/Slavery\\_Apology\\_Explanation.pdf](https://download.elca.org/ELCA%20Resource%20Repository/Slavery_Apology_Explanation.pdf)

June 17 Emanuel 9 Day of Repentance from Racism:

[https://download.elca.org/ELCA%20Resource%20Repository/Establishing\\_June\\_17th\\_as\\_Emanuel\\_9\\_Commemoration\\_and\\_Day\\_of\\_Repentance.pdf](https://download.elca.org/ELCA%20Resource%20Repository/Establishing_June_17th_as_Emanuel_9_Commemoration_and_Day_of_Repentance.pdf)

Strategic Authentic Diversity Document:

[https://download.elca.org/ELCA%20Resource%20Repository/Strategy\\_Toward\\_Authentic\\_Diversity.pdf](https://download.elca.org/ELCA%20Resource%20Repository/Strategy_Toward_Authentic_Diversity.pdf)

African Descent Lutheran Lives Matter:

[http://download.elca.org/ELCA%20Resource%20Repository/Renewed\\_Action\\_Lutherans\\_African\\_DescentSPR16.pdf](http://download.elca.org/ELCA%20Resource%20Repository/Renewed_Action_Lutherans_African_DescentSPR16.pdf)