



**ADLA National President Rev. Lamont Wells'  
Response to the Declaration of the ELCA to People of African Descent**

To our Presiding Bishop Eaton  
Secretary Chris Boerger  
Vice-President and ADLA Lifetime Member William Horne  
To this Blessed Churchwide Assembly

I'm standing with the Executive Board Leadership and members of the African Descent Lutheran Association on behalf of our response to this apology.

I don't care how we sugarcoat this or attempt to make this palatable for everybody to agree. We must start at the truth, which by faith, I believe can right now make us free.

My siblings in Christ, we can disagree and still love each other, unless your disagreement is rooted in oppression and denial of humanity including our right to exist.

People were bought, sold, raped and abused and land was stolen. Countless lives were ruthlessly destroyed by people who claimed to follow the "Prince of Peace." Yes, generations have passed, but our society is still cursed by this evil.

From colonial rule to this present day, racism has remained a constant. This structural racism has resulted in perpetual wage gaps, achievement gaps, and wealth gaps.

And the Church, the very organization that has been called to "stand in the gap" for all of God's people has often expanded the gap into a larger chasm.

If this apology is real, we must abandon our lust for oppressive power, wealth and even our own comfort for the sake of fulfilling God's command to love others.

Throughout history, people have been hurt by this very particular sin. Therefore, we, the people of African Descent of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, can receive this apology as a divine mark of repentance that serves as a catalyst for change.

We cannot receive this apology simply as a cheap indulgence to clear the conscience of our oppressors.

If this assembly and Church could only be sensitive enough to understand that receiving this apology without the ELCA's intentional and equitable change in our practices could make this beautiful sentiment null and void.

It's just like the Black, Queer author and theologian from Harlem New York, James Baldwin, once said: "I can't believe what you say, because I see what you do."



So how can we move forward and where do we go from here?

Well, I recommend we rush boldly to the throne of grace, and ask the Lord to help and guide us.

Jesus is our North Star of Hope. In fact he is The Bright and Morning Star who is able to keep us from falling back into this bondage of sin.

This apology is received because Jesus has shown us the way towards reconciliation.

How can we grow from this?

We can grow, because We are Church!

And because we are Church, we are the very body of a Middle Eastern man, a Palestinian Jew, who just like Sandra Bland was wrongly accused and arrested by law enforcement.

We receive this in the name of Jesus, who was wrongly incarcerated, by the ruling class just like the Central Park (now Exonerated) Five.

We accept this apology in the name of the one who was given the death penalty by the most powerful empire in the world, just like many unarmed people of African Descent.

We hope this apology will lift every one of our voices to sing a song full of faith that the dark past has taught us.

We pray this apology, truly acknowledges that we have come over a way that with tears has been watered.

We hope this declaration realizes that we as people of African Descent have come treading our path in this Church through the blood of the slaughtered.

Unfortunately, The Rev. Jehu Jones, the first ordained Black Lutheran Pastor could not be here to hear this apology.

Unfortunately, Rosa Jinsey Young, the mother of Black Lutheranism, a great educator, could not be here to read this apology.

Unfortunately, The Rev. Earline Miller, the first ordained Black woman, couldn't be here to witness this apology.

Unfortunately, Sister Emma Francis, the first Black Deaconess, couldn't be here to pray with us on this occasion.



But it's because of them and many others who have gone on before us, that the ELCA is blessed today to have those of us who are alive and remain.

Therefore we are committed to helping this Church grow in many ways. In spite of the history of many aggressions and the effects of slavery, Michelle Obama said it best, "when they go low, We go high".

Even though many of us are still underpaid according to the Church's guidelines...  
Even though we are often called to impossible situations and expected to work miracles...  
Even though we have been disconnected far too long from our African and Caribbean homelands...

Even though many of us are like, democratic strategist, Fannie Lou Hamer, "sick and tired of being sick and tired"

We receive this apology knowing that "life ain't been no crystal stair".

To the first installed woman Bishop of African Descent, Bishop Vivian Thomas-Breitfeld, they can't change history and you have our support.

So you might ask..."How and why are you receiving this apology today?"

It's because of Jesus' love for all of us as less than perfect people. Forgiveness of sins is one of the main deliverances in the death of Jesus.

*Dear Church... it's time for us to Love Big.*

So I end with a few words from Dr. Angelou as an official response to this apology for over 400 years of oppression:

*You may write us down in history with bitter and twisted lies...  
You may trod us in the very dirt  
But still, like dust, We'll rise*

*Out of the huts of history's shame... We Rise  
Up from a past that's rooted in pain... We Rise  
Leaving behind nights of terror and fear... We rise  
Into a daybreak that's wondrously clear... We Rise*

*To this Church we bring the gifts that our Ancestors gave,  
We the people of African Descent are the very dream and hope of the slave*

*We Rise  
We Rise  
We Rise*

**African Descent Lutheran Association**  
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