

Sierra Pacific Synod: Resolution 2022-3 Regarding Sierra Pacific Synod Reparations Fund

WHEREAS, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) and its predecessor church bodies have advocated for action against racism and racist structures for over 50 years. In 1964 the Lutheran Church in America stated that “The church must oppose such false views [racist discrimination] with all the power of the truth of God: in its prayer and worship, in its theological thought, in its nurture of the personal life, in its institutional forms, and in individual and corporate action in society.” In 1974 the American Lutheran Church stated that, “The American Lutheran Church should explore earnestly, in depth of honesty and courage, how it can make amends to its nonwhite brothers and sisters for the exploitation, injustice, and dehumanization they have suffered under its white racism.”

WHEREAS, in 2019 the ELCA committed itself to reconciliation with people of African Descent and stated that “Institutional racism currently exists in the ELCA through discriminatory treatment within the call process; inequitable compensation of clergy of color; racial segregation; divestment from black communities and congregations; systemic policies and organizational practices; and failure to fully include the gifts of leadership and worship styles of people of African descent. ... Beyond empty promises or well-meaning intentions, this church recommits to the work of racial justice, socioeconomic equity and racial reconciliation.”

WHEREAS, in the years following the end of the Civil War, racist laws, policies, and practices prevented people of African descent from acquiring generational wealth. This took the form of violent but legal theft including but not limited to sharecropping, convict leasing, withholding GI benefits from Black veterans, segregation, denial of home and business loans, redlining, poorly funded schools, mass incarceration, and predatory lending. People of African descent face an extraordinary wealth disparity as compared with white peers that compounds over a lifetime.

WHEREAS, in the United States all people of color face discrimination and socioeconomic disadvantage.

WHEREAS, rostered leaders of African descent and of color in the Sierra Pacific Synod suffer the financial effects of past and present racist policies and practices. ELCA Churchwide data for 2020 show that full-time clergy of color earn a median of \$8,579 less per year than their white colleagues. Not adjusted for inflation, over a period of twenty years, a clergy person of color would typically earn \$171,580 less than their white colleagues, and \$17,158 less would be contributed to their pensions by the congregations they serve.

WHEREAS, by some estimates, slaveholders extracted more than \$14 trillion worth of labor, in today’s dollars, from their captives. White people continue to benefit financially from enslavement, as well as from land theft, low wages paid to people of color, and other racist financial laws, policies, and practices. This is the case whether their

ancestors were personally enslavers or not, and whether they personally put into place or engaged in discriminatory laws, policies, and practices, or not. Congregations in the Sierra Pacific Synod, the majority of which are white, have attained generational wealth through the contributions of their members and the acquisition of buildings and property.

WHEREAS, the term “reparation” refers to the process and result of remedying the damage or harm caused by an unlawful act. Forms of reparation include acknowledgement of wrongs done, payment for wrongs done; cessation of wrongs done; long-term commitment to those wronged and their descendants; and closure for all parties.

WHEREAS, examples of financial reparation are found in scripture. In the book of Ezra, the King of Persia released Israelite captives to return to Judah and taxed Persian citizens to assist the Israelites in their return. Those who paid the tax may or may not have personally enslaved Israelites, and the Israelites who returned to Israel may or may not have been personally enslaved. In the gospel of Luke, Zacchaeus the tax collector encountered Jesus and repented of the wealth he had gained through legal theft. Zacchaeus promised to repay anyone he had cheated fourfold, after which Jesus said, “Today salvation has come to this house.”

WHEREAS, neither the Sierra Pacific Synod nor the ELCA has made full reparations to people of African Descent and other rostered people of color.

WHEREAS, the Sierra Pacific Synod seeks not only to speak but to act, stating on its website: “We work hard to put our faith into action. In today’s complex world, we strive to make a difference in practical, realistic ways.”

RESOLVED that the Sierra Pacific Synod hereby establishes a designated Reparations Fund for the purpose of payment for wrongs done to the Sierra Pacific Synod’s rostered leaders of African descent and rostered leaders of color; and be it further

RESOLVED that the Sierra Pacific Synod Council (or its designees) shall draft operational rules and guidelines concerning the aforementioned Reparations Fund for review and possible ratification for approval at the 2023 Sierra Pacific Synod Assembly; and be it further

RESOLVED that – to the extent that it is fiscally and legally responsible – the operational rules and guidelines of the Reparations Fund shall embody the following values:

- a) that the Reparations Fund shall be overseen by a governing board of no less than 5 people, and that a super-majority of no less than 66% of those board members be self-identified people of African descent and/or people of color, and additionally that a super-majority of no less than 66% of those board members be laypersons; and

b) that the sources of income of the Reparations Fund shall include (but not be limited to) 10% of the monies generated from the sale of buildings and properties owned by the Sierra Pacific Synod, as well as 10% of monies generated through the sale of congregational buildings and property, and subsequently given to the Sierra Pacific Synod as undesignated funds; and

c) that annually at least 10% of the corpus of the Reparations Fund shall be disbursed to applicants who are self-identified people of African descent and/or people of color who are currently rostered in the Sierra Pacific Synod (or who have at one time been rostered in the Sierra Pacific Synod and/or in its predecessor bodies); and

d) that funds disbursed to qualified applicants shall – to the fullest extent possible – be used at the discretion of those recipients; and be it further

RESOLVED that Policy 13-001 - Policy on the Sale, Retention, and Management of Real Property, shall be amended to include the phrase "10% of the net proceeds shall be deposited into the Synod's Reparations Fund," and shall read as follows: "Upon sale of any property, 10% of the net proceeds shall be forwarded to the ELCA, 15% of the net proceeds shall be deposited into the Synod's general fund, 10% of the net proceeds shall be deposited into the Synod's Reparations Fund, up to 5% of the net proceeds shall be deposited into the Property Management Fund (not to exceed a balance of \$250,000-See 9f.) and the remainder shall be deposited in the Sierra Pacific Synod Mission and Ministry Endowment Fund"; and be it further

RESOLVED that the Reparations Fund Governing Board shall be seated no later than the first Synod Council meeting after the 2023 Synod Assembly and that the first disbursement of funds from the Reparations Fund shall be made prior to the 2024 Synod and that an annual report from the Reparations Fund Governing Board shall be offered at the 2024 and subsequent Synod Assemblies.