



EFFECTIVE MINISTRY
in INTERCULTURAL
COMMUNITIES

A STATEMENT
COMMENDED
BY THE CHURCH

(Adopted by the Second General Convention of The American Lutheran Church, October 21-27, 1964, as a "statement of policy for an effective intercultural ministry to guide the work of all boards, institutions, auxiliaries, and congregations of The ALC.")

EFFECTIVE MINISTRY IN INTERCULTURAL COMMUNITIES

I. An Evaluation of Segregation and Stratification

Segregation and social stratification, both based on essentially external differences, regrettably occur in Christian churches. Segregation grows out of many different causes such as tradition, custom, and economics, and is frequently interrelated with man's prejudices, fear, envy, and pride. It is not always easy to discern which is the dominant factor. Segregation often finds its support in differences in skin color or physical appearance. Social stratification is reflected in levels of wealth, education, or social standing. Frequently these man-made distinctions of race and class restrict the ministry of love and belie the fundamental unity of the human race in the redemptive plan of God as revealed in Jesus Christ. The presence of segregation and stratification in the churches hinders the power inhering in the Gospel for uniting men through Christ in fellowship with the Father.

In the Body of Christ, each person possesses talents peculiarly his own, and each has his unique functions to fulfill, yet all persons are alike in being individually of sacred worth. All are created in the image of God; all stand convicted of sin and in need of redemption; all are invited by Christ to come to Him; and God's gift of faith is available to anyone who accepts it. St. Peter was moved, against his own inclinations, to confess, "Truly I perceive that God shows no partiality" (Acts 10:34). St. Paul, describing the Christian fellowship, declared, "Here there cannot be Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave, free man, but Christ is all, and in all" (Col. 3:11).

Wherever and whenever the churches help to foster race or class distinctions between people, and wherever and whenever they support attitudes of superiority or inferiority between persons, groups, or classes on the basis of race, class, national or ethnic origin, or economic position they violate God's will. St. James warned against distinctions based on wealth or power, saying, "But if you show partiality, you commit sin, and are convicted by the law as transgressors" (James 2:9).

Congregations, therefore, must avoid segregation and stratification and repent of the evil fruit of natural man's pride and his assumption of superiority over those who are different from him in color, economic position, national origin, or ethnic grouping.

The fact of race and class groupings opens to the church the joy of a ministry that embraces all people without any semblance of exclusion. Under Christ's influence, pride and prejudice are renounced in race and class relations. Snobbery and discrimination are rejected. Jealousy, envy, quarreling, and dissension have no place. The fruits of His Spirit, working in reborn lives, can bring joy, peace, patience, kindness, gentleness, and self-control into the dealings of race with race and class with class.

Were His Spirit to rule in men's hearts and lives, problems of racial segregation and harmful social stratification would diminish. The free and voluntary actions of men who genuinely love neighbor as self because of God's love for them will exceed in justice and equity the compulsory actions forced by decree upon the unwilling.

When persistent and willful rejection of the gracious will of God erodes and destroys a man's willingness and ability to love his neighbor, then the children of God in the orderly processes of a free society must share in the establishment of such justice and equity as are possible in and through the structures of good government in every level of social organization.

It is further incumbent upon Christians, their churches, and their church agencies, so far as it lies within their power, to practice to the full the realistic insights of their faith in dealing with issues of race and class. Assumptions of superiority or privileged position draw the Master's censure today as they did for the sons of Zebedee.

It is the unique task of the churches, shared by every Christian, to seek to bring the power of the Word, the Sacraments, and the corporate fellowship to bear upon individuals, thereby changing their hearts and lives. The witness of personal and corporate example which treats every person, in every relationship of life, as a human being created in God's image is a powerful testimony to the believer's life in Christ. This course alone promises the ultimate corrective for the evils of segregation and stratification.

Nevertheless, churches, their members, and their leaders need also to exercise Christian social responsibility. They have the duty to protest against and to act responsibly, beginning in their own communities, to correct those cruelties and injustices which deny basic human freedoms. Christians, both personally and corporately, have the duty to press for and to support measures which insure that all persons, regardless of color, economic position, national origin, or ethnic grouping have fair and equal access, for example, to education, housing, employment, voting, and public accommodations.

In times of tension the churches have another duty that makes them especially subject to being misunderstood. They need to stress that with power goes responsibility, that freedoms entail obligations, and that respect has to be maintained as well as attained. Churches cannot become so identified with the cause of any one race or class that they alienate themselves from all others. Their chief purpose is to proclaim the Word. Reform of social structures is a valuable product of such proclamation.

II. Constitutional Foundation for Action

Consistent with the foregoing viewpoint the Constitution of The American Lutheran Church assigns to the Division of American Missions the objective:

“2) To encourage and help existing congregations reach out to all unchurched people in the entire community regardless of race, economic standing, religious background, or other circumstances, in order that they may be brought under the power of the Gospel of Jesus Christ and won for Him and His Kingdom.” (P. 42)

Such a mandate is given because this is believed to be in obedience to the Word of God, to which The American Lutheran Church submits “as the only infallible authority in all matters of faith and life.” (P. 27)

By its Constitution The American Lutheran Church has jurisdiction over its congregations solely for the following purposes:

“1) To insure faithful adherence to the doctrines of the Church.

“2) To apply discipline when disloyalty to the Church’s doctrinal position is evident.

“3) To enlist wholehearted cooperation with the program approved by the Church.” (P. 29)

It is to its districts that the Church assigns the duty to “exercise general supervision over its clergy, congregations, and conferences” as well as to “consider matters which pertain to the life and program of The American Lutheran Church and present recommendations to the General Convention.” (P. 49) The General Convention is empowered to “adopt a program of activity for the Church, and take the steps necessary to provide for its accomplishment.”

III. Applications in Specific Policies

Each congregation of The American Lutheran Church is responsible for ministering to the entire neighborhood and area in which it is located. This full ministry of the Law and Gospel includes the Lord’s command to love, to seek out, to evangelize, and to minister to all persons and through the power of the Holy Spirit to bring them into full membership in the Church, with all the rights and privileges that inhere in such membership in the Body of Christ. Anyone who will respond to the regenerating Gospel should be welcomed into the fellowship of the congregation.

All pastors are expected to teach, to support and to practice the concept of the inclusive ministry. Any pastor who in word and deed denies this Biblical mandate should receive the pastoral counsel of his district president and executive committee.

All boards and departments of the Church share in the responsibility for teaching and practicing the concept of the inclusive ministry. Distinctions, preferment or exclusions based solely on economic, racial, educational, or cultural advantages or disadvantages have no place in the life of the church, or in the establishment of policy.

The occupancy of a particular area for a full-orbed and inclusive Gospel ministry, or the relinquishment of such an area ministry, is a question of program and strategy of the entire Church. Making the appropriate decision ought not be considered the responsibility solely of a particular congregation or solely of the Division of American Missions. It rather should be a joint decision mutually arrived at after careful consideration of the facts and circumstances affecting each individual situation and the congregations involved.

The district American mission committee is charged to be alert to all mission opportunities in the district and is kept currently informed on the policies, program, and strategy of the Board of American Missions. Therefore, the district American mission committee or departmental committee responsible to the American mission committee shall be expected to counsel with congregations facing the problems and challenges of a changing community. In so doing it may call upon the services of the Board of American Missions, the Division of American Missions of the National Lutheran Council, and such other specialized assistance as may be necessary. Their objective should be to help the congregation to see and to weigh the alternatives before it: whether to leave its present field, whether to accept its opportunities for an inclusive ministry in its present field, or whether simultaneously to occupy and develop a new field while continuing to minister in its present field.

The Church exists to win men to Christ and thus to restore the lost into fellowship with the Father. It avoids mere institution-building or the simple perpetuation of a man-made cultural heritage. Should these latter aims supplant the true purpose of the Church, or should the opportunities for a significant ministry diminish because of a reduction in the numbers of people reached, the Church as a whole has no obligation to provide financial assistance for such a congregation.

Should a congregation willfully and persistently refuse to accept into its membership individuals who in faith and life qualify for membership in a Lutheran congregation, or stubbornly cling to patterns of segregation and discrimination, that congregation should become the object of the pastoral concern of The ALC through the district president and executive committee of the district of which the congregation is a member. The District President also shall report this violation of Church practice to the Church Council of The American Lutheran Church. Any pastor who loses his pastorate under such a circumstance should receive the moral and spiritual support of his brethren, and financial assistance from the district for a limited period until he receives a call to a new pastorate.

**COMMISSION ON RESEARCH
AND SOCIAL ACTION**

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