

Message on Racial Justice in the wake of Trayvon Martin's death

from Presiding Bishop Mark S. Hanson

In the wake of Trayvon Martin's tragic death, I call upon members of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America to join in public lament and to ask searching questions as we renew our commitment to act courageously and to work tirelessly for racial justice.

With all who mourn Trayvon's death we cry, "Lord, have mercy." For all who suffer the wounds that racism and violence infect we pray, "Christ, have mercy." For our turning God's gift of diversity into cause for distrust and division we plead, "Lord, have mercy." Who is more equipped to lament such agony, rather than deny it, than a people of the cross who trust that ultimately the power of God's love will reign?

May the sorrow and anger surrounding Trayvon's death move us to ask searching questions. How much longer shall any young person live in fear and be feared because of the color of their skin? Are we who are white ready to confront and lay down our power and privilege for the sake of a more just and inclusive society? Are we as a nation ready to reform our criminal justice system which "the cumulative effects of bias in the system as a whole have led to intolerably harmful effects on minority communities" ("ELCA Draft Social Statement on Criminal Justice").

Trayvon's death has emboldened the movement for racial justice. It calls for commitment from us. Now is the time for us as the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America to live up to the commitments we made in the social statement, "Freed in Christ: Race, Ethnicity and Culture" (1993). We said we will "model an honest engagement with issues of race, ethnicity and culture, by being a community of mutual conversation, mutual correction, and mutual consolation" and further that we will "participate in identifying the demands of justice, and work with others who would have justice for all."

Trayvon's death calls us to act courageously and to work tirelessly for racial justice. Such courage comes from the confidence of faith trusting that "he [Christ Jesus] is our peace; in his flesh he has made both groups into one and has broken down the dividing wall, that is, the hostility between us" (Ephesians 2:14 NRSV).



Trayvon Martin solidarity rally in Freedom Square, Washington D.C., March 2012.

Photo credit: Washington Post/Getty images

[CUIC Statement on Martin](#) 

Let us together courageously engage in God's work of restoring and reconciling communities. Let us together pursue justice and work for peace no matter how long the journey or wide the chasm. Let us tear down the walls we erect to divide us and turn those walls into tables of conversation and reconciliation.

In this season of Lent, let us repent and be turned by God toward our neighbor. Let us humbly confess that racism, both blatant and subtle, denies the reconciling work of the cross. Let us trust in God's promise of forgiveness that frees us from the enslavement of racism. Let us live in the power and promise of Christ's resurrection.

In God's grace,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Mark S. Hanson". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large loop at the end.

The Rev. Mark S. Hanson
Presiding Bishop
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

