



Talks at the Desk

Discussion Guide

In the book *Shoes That Fit Our Feet: Sources for a Constructive Black Theology*, Dwight N Hopkins details the history of African American religion and culture from the adaptation of the master's religion to its radical transformation into a gospel of liberation. We are reminded that there is no one universal experience of American Lutheranism, let alone Christianity.

However, the popular expression of Lutheranism tends to omit the varied experiences of the African-descent community, along with other non-European-descent identities. How then might we shift that narrative and invite more faith-filled relationships to be centered in our tradition? "Talks at the Desk" is the starting point for that shift. This is an incomplete and flawed series, a mere sample of a rich Afro-Lutheran culture as old as the church's legacy in North America.

Black Girls Are Magic Reflection Questions

- When was the first time you heard the name Earlene Miller? Do you know who she is?
- What emotions did you hear from the speakers?
- Where did you feel tension in yourself when listening to the pastors? Why do you think that tension is coming up for you?
- A few times in the video, Black women correlate their experiences in the church with surviving abuse and the violation of bodily autonomy. What is our responsibility in disrupting that harm?
- Bishop Patricia Davenport dreams of a future church in which Black leaders can be called not exclusively to a handful of urban congregations but to all contexts, and safely. Is your congregation prepared to receive diverse leaders? In what ways could your community become better prepared?
- Why do we want people from the margins and young people to join our church?

Black Boy Joy Reflection Questions

- When did you first hear of Nelson Trout? Do you know who he is?
- How does your congregation invest in youth and youth ministry?
- Tiese Giles first started preaching at 4 years old. Tristen has been presenting his art at church for years. How does your congregation make space for youth to explore their interests?

- Which stories stuck out to you most? Why?
- In a moment of vulnerability, the video participants express deep concern about the wellness of Black boys and men. How should we respond to Black youth's fears about surviving in the world? How do we reckon with years of justice being denied in the deaths of Black youth and men?
- Why do we want young people and people from the margins to join our church?

Our Black Church Reflection Questions

- What assumptions do you have about Black church culture?
- Is your church Reconciling in Christ? How long did it take for your church to make that commitment and adapt a welcome statement?
- Has your congregation taken steps to address immediate and/or long-term needs in your community? If so, which steps have you already taken? What further steps could you take?
- Bethlehem Lutheran Church is making an ambitious commitment to address the housing crisis in its city. How can the collective church support initiatives such as this? What is your pledge?
- Bethlehem is the only African-descent ELCA church in New Orleans, a predominantly Black city. What do you think that says to the rest of the African-descent community in the ELCA?
- Why do we want young people and people from the margins to join our church?

Black Lives Matter Reflection Questions

- How old were you when you first learned about lynching?
- Alice speaks to the value of faith-based activism. How do you see your faith connect to justice?
- When you hear the phrase “black lives matter,” what do you think of? Does anyone featured in this series come to mind?
- In almost every city featured, the murder of a Black person was not only a landmark but a time stamp of events, impacting life both inside and outside the church. Besides the murder of George Floyd, have any of these injustices affected your community in the same way? What are the cultural time stamps for your context?
- What does “liberation” mean to you?
- Why do we want young people and people from the margins to join our church?