



Evangelical Lutheran Church in America
God's work. Our hands.

Our Black Lutheran History

ELCA Presiding Bishop Elizabeth Eaton Weekly Video Message

Feb. 5, 2021

February is Black History Month. And I want us to take a look at the rich contributions of Black Lutheran history. Did you know that Anton Amo was kidnapped from what is now modern-day Ghana by the Dutch East India Company, taken to Europe, given as a “gift” to a couple of German dukes, was baptized and confirmed, and later on went to the universities of Halle and Jena. He was a promising lawyer and a leading philosopher of his time in Europe. And he received what is the equivalent of, today, a Ph.D., from Wittenberg. Yes, *that* Wittenberg.

Did you know that in 1714 some people, feeling that Manhattan was getting too crowded, decided to go out to the wilderness of New Jersey? And they wanted to start a church. Zion Lutheran Church had its first worship service in the home of a freedman, a freed slave, Aree Van Guinea. His wife and children were confirmed and his grandchildren were baptized at that service.

Did you know that Jehu Jones was the first Black person to be ordained as a pastor in the Lutheran Church, in 1832, and he went on to found St. Paul's Lutheran Church in Philadelphia? Mind you, he never got paid, even though the ministerium had pledged to do that. But he served nevertheless.

All three of these people are part of the Lutheran movement from almost its very beginning. I think we have to be aware that, in some cases, Black Lutherans, who have been Lutheran for generations, sometimes have the feeling that they are not considered to be “real Lutherans.” We are unbelievably blessed and we are made stronger by Black Lutherans who have been our pastors and deacons, our colleagues, our bishops, our seminary presidents. It's a rich history, and it's our history altogether.

Peace.

Be well, dear church.