



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

Our Black Lutheran Heritage
ELCA Presiding Bishop Elizabeth Eaton Weekly Video Message
Feb. 11, 2022

This month is Black History Month, and in honor of this observance, the ELCA celebrates the contributions of members of the African-descent community. But it's important to note that we celebrate these contributions every day, not only during this month.

Many believe that the Lutheran Church is a predominantly European, Anglocentric denomination, but the history of the African-descent Lutheran church is an essential part of who we are as Lutherans. The history of Black Lutheranism is as long as the American Lutheran tradition. By most accounts, the Black Lutheran church began in the 1600s. There are many significant African-descent Lutherans in the history of our church, but here are a few notable "firsts."

We remember Pastor Earlean Miller, who in 1979 was the first African American Lutheran woman to be ordained in North America. She served in a number of congregations across the country. Pastor Miller died in 2014, but her legacy lives on. The ELCA Fund for Leaders established a scholarship fund in her name that supports women of color who are attending seminary to become future leaders in our church.

We also remember Pastor Nelson Trout, who in 1983 became the first African American elected as bishop in U.S. Lutheranism. He served as professor and director of minority ministry studies at Trinity Lutheran Seminary in Columbus, Ohio.

But this month we also honor the historic ministry of all members of the ELCA African-descent community who make up the American Lutheran tradition. For generations African-descent Lutherans have brought their unique stories to the larger story of the ELCA. Their ministry is making a difference in communities across this church, building up the body of Christ. We honor these contributions and remember that we are all ELCA Lutherans, partners in doing God's work in the world together.

Be well, dear church.