



# **PREPARING FOR THE HEAVENLY FEAST: ALL RACES, ONE CHURCH**

By grace, all of God's people will be at the final heavenly banquet. Therefore, the ELCA congregations of North Carolina are committed to living out this promise now through the power of the Holy Spirit, both by repenting of our sins of racism and embodying the Kingdom of heaven through the increased presence and participation of peoples of African Descent and heritage.

**AN AFRICAN DESCENT OUTREACH STRATEGY FOR THE  
NORTH CAROLINA SYNOD ELCA**

# An African Descent Outreach Strategy For The North Carolina Synod ELCA

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## **I. Purpose**

The purpose of this strategy is to provide the North Carolina Synod information, data and a deeper understanding of African American culture as well as a plan for mission and ministry to and with persons of African Descent.

## II. Introduction / History

The process of creating this strategy began with the 2003 Annual Gathering of The African American Lutheran Association, North Carolina Chapter. At that gathering, the following resolution was adopted:

***Be it resolved that we the members of the NC Chapter of the African American Lutheran Association and its partners will be actively engage in developing a strategy for ministry with persons of African Descent within the North Carolina Synod.***

***Be it further resolved that it is our intent to partner with the Office of the Bishop of the North Carolina Synod, the Mission Director and the Multicultural Committee.***

***Be it further resolved that the Board of NC AALA engage the community in identifying and endorsing from amongst ourselves, willing, capable, and committed persons to represent us in this process.***

***Be it further resolved that at the 2003 North Carolina Synod Assembly that we submit a resolution affirming the synod's support and efforts in ministry with persons of African Descent, calling them to partner with us in this process and to work with the team that is endorsed by the North Carolina African Descent community.***

This paved the way for the 2003 North Carolina Synod Assembly to adopt the following resolution:

RC03.16 Original

### ***A Resolution for the Development of an African Descent Strategy***

***WHEREAS*** the North Carolina Synod affirms the ongoing goal of the ELCA to achieve membership of at least 10 percent by people of color and/or primary language other than English, and

***WHEREAS*** we further affirm the vision of our Church to be truly welcoming of all people, regardless of race or ethnicity, and

***WHEREAS*** we affirm ongoing ministry with people of color and/or primary language other than English;

***THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED*** that the Office of the Bishop of the North Carolina Synod, the Mission Director (Division for Outreach), the Multicultural Committee of the Synod, and the North Carolina Chapter of the African American Lutheran Association partner together and actively engage in developing and implementing a strategy for ministry with persons of African Descent.

*Submitted by: The Executive Board of the North Carolina Chapter of the African American Lutheran Association and endorsed by Synod Council at its June 5, 2003 meeting.*

Following the adoption of the aforementioned resolutions, in consultation with Rev. Taylor Harmon, Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) Division of Outreach and Rev. Philip Tonneson NC Synod staff, a Strategy Team was formed including:

- Ms. Ann Clegg
- Pastor Manisha Dostert
- Pastor Steve Gerhard
- Mr. Ted Goins
- Ms. Diana Haywood
- Mr. John Johnson
- Pastor John Mack
- Mr. Bill McDonald
- Pastor Gordon Myers
- Ms. Rose Reubel
- Ms. Gail Starr
- Pastor Phil Tonneson
- Ms. Linda Warren
- Ms. Lenore Wilkinson-Watson

The Strategy Team has met on a monthly basis to conduct its work.

#### **Support Statement From NC AALA Gathering:**

We, Lutherans of African Descent in North Carolina, affirm the ongoing goal of the ELCA to achieve membership of at least 10 percent by people of color and/or primary language other than English. We further affirm the vision of our church to be truly welcoming to all people, regardless of race, background, status, or family situation. We stand in agreement to ongoing comprehensive ministry. With that in mind, the goal of the African Descent strategy within the North Carolina Synod is: *to enhance the Lutheran experience by intentionally exploring and affirming cultural diversity in our worship and congregational life and developing opportunities for vibrant participation, membership and leadership.*<sup>1</sup>

The NC AALA Gathering identified the following areas to provide guidance for God's ministry among, for and with persons of African Descent and heritage in the North Carolina Synod. These areas were viewed in context and conjunction with the overall strategy of the ELCA and as evidence of the commitment of the North Carolina Synod to reach out to all people with the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Areas specifically identified are:

1. Membership - Enhancing the membership experience among persons of African Descent within the Lutheran Church
2. Leadership - Developing a culture that provides opportunities for persons of African decent to assume and be trained for positions of authority and leadership at both synodical and national levels. This leadership should be directed and available for both targeted youth and adults and should be balanced on the basis of gender as well.
3. Worship - Exploring and affirming cultural dimensions of worship in the forms of music, preaching, art, prayer, and fellowship.
4. Stewardship - Dealing effectively with community concerns that are unique to the community of persons of African Descent.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Statement adopted by the NC AALA 2003 Gathering

<sup>2</sup> Action Areas identified by the NC AALA 2003 Gathering

The research, action plans, and goals presented in this strategy represent a beginning. This strategy is a work in progress. **Therefore an overwhelming goal of this strategy is that the North Carolina Synod persist in efforts to be intentional about outreach to persons of African Descent/Heritage by maintaining an African Descent Strategy team to:**

1. Continue exploring new ideas and ways to do ministry with and for persons of African Descent/Heritage
2. Continue collecting research data and recommending effective ways of being more welcoming and inclusive
3. Continue calling the North Carolina Synod to promote and reflect diversity
4. Continue encouraging and challenging congregations to learn about their communities, and to develop and implement plans for outreach in their neighborhoods with persons of African Descent/Heritage
5. Annually evaluate progress and report to the Synod Council and the Synod Assembly

The leadership of AALA and the commitment of the people of the North Carolina Synod have come together to make this strategy, and the ministry it describes, a major component of the Church's agenda in North Carolina.

### III. Situation

#### *The Nature Of The Church*

***“When it was evening on that day, the first day of the week, and the doors of the house where the disciples had met were locked for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said, ‘Peace be with you.’<sup>20</sup> After he said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord.<sup>21</sup> Jesus said to them again, ‘Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you.’<sup>22</sup> When he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, ‘Receive the Holy Spirit.’<sup>23</sup>***

In John’s account of the Resurrection, the risen Jesus breaks through the locked door of human fears and separations to share his peace with those who follow him. His disciples are then sent into a fearful and divided world with the mission of sharing his peace and practicing reconciliation.

Jesus in his earthly ministry, consistently ignored and transcended the social conventions that kept people separate and apart. He modeled a style of ministry that intentionally bridged the divisions of gender, nationality, ethnicity, and social standing.

The Church proclaims: “One Lord, one faith, one baptism” and “in the one Spirit we were all baptized into one body- whether Jews or Greeks, slaves or free- and we were all made to drink of one Spirit”<sup>4</sup>.

Within that Body, there is no distinction.<sup>5</sup> The Church is much more than a human institution. Instituted by our Lord Jesus Christ and empowered by the Holy Spirit, the Church is envisioned as the very Body of Christ.

#### *Racism: A Perversion Of The Nature Of The Church*

***<sup>1</sup>My brothers and sisters, do you with your acts of favoritism really believe in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ? ...<sup>8</sup> You do well if you really fulfill the royal law according to the scripture, ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’<sup>9</sup> But if you show partiality, you commit sin and are convicted by the law as transgressors.<sup>10</sup> For whoever keeps the whole law but fails in one point has become accountable for all of it.<sup>6</sup>***

In spite of its origins, the Church, particularly in America, has been infected and affected by its societal context and has not been immune from the sin of racism.

Both slave and free persons of African Descent have been a part of the Lutheran church in America since 1669. In 1809, the North Carolina Synod passed a resolution stating: “pastors

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<sup>3</sup> John 20:19- 23

<sup>4</sup> I Corinthians 12:13

<sup>5</sup> Romans 10:12

<sup>6</sup> James 2

have permission, on the wish and pledge of their Christian masters, to baptize their slaves". These baptisms were often contingent upon restrictions such as a special examination of moral conduct and instruction in the German language.

At the conclusion of the Civil War, attitudes shifted in the South. A notable example is a resolution passed in 1866 by the Tennessee Synod that because "colored people among us no longer sustain the same relation to the white man that they did" and "owing to the plainly marked distinctions which God has made between us and them, giving different colors, and so forth, it is felt by us and them, also, that there ought to be separate places of worship, and also separate ecclesiastical organizations, so that everyone could worship God with the least possible embarrassment".<sup>7</sup>

These post Civil War attitudes have persisted with an incredible tenacity as evidenced by the ELCA's current membership statistics.

"Thus the words of Martin Luther King, Jr. are recalled, namely that the church is the 'most segregated major institution in America,' eleven o'clock on Sunday morning is the 'most segregated hour of America' and Sunday School is the 'most segregated school of the week'." Although occasional progress has been made, 'the realities of racism and the process of transition have meant that most Black Lutherans, like their White Lutheran sisters and brothers, belong to segregated congregations.'<sup>8</sup>

The Church by the way it welcomes, or does not welcome, evangelizes or does not evangelize, continues to institutionalize racism. Historically, 'Lutherans tended to have little interest in evangelizing non-Lutherans of whatever color or social status, preferring instead to preserve the old country's culture and religious practices through the continued use of the mother tongue.'<sup>9</sup>

"The need for 'those others' to be like 'most of us' is evidence of institutionalized racism. It is also an outright denial of the marvelous diversity of God's colorful creation."<sup>10</sup>

By allowing divisions and separations to persist, the Church has participated in nothing less than the dismemberment of the Body of Christ.

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<sup>7</sup> "Why There Aren't More Black Lutherans in America: A History up to 1865" Rev. Manisha Dostert

<sup>8</sup> "Study of Black and Lutheran Congregations", Institute for Mission in the U.S.A., Trinity Lutheran Seminary, p. 4

<sup>9</sup> Ibid

<sup>10</sup> "Even the Stones Will Cry Out for Justice", ELCA Division for Congregational Ministries, p.5

Even so, the Church boldly claims the promise shared by the prophet Isaiah:

**<sup>6</sup> On this mountain the LORD of hosts will make for all peoples  
a feast of rich food, a feast of well-matured wines,  
of rich food filled with marrow, of well-matured wines strained clear.**

**<sup>7</sup> And he will destroy on this mountain the shroud that is cast over all peoples,  
the sheet that is spread over all nations;**

**<sup>8</sup> he will swallow up death for ever.**

**Then the Lord GOD will wipe away the tears from all faces,  
and the disgrace of his people he will take away from all the earth,  
for the LORD has spoken. <sup>11</sup>**

### ***Mission Context Of North Carolina***

Various aspects of the context of the North Carolina Synod's territory were considered in composing this Strategy.

1. Of the over 8 million total population of North Carolina, 21.6% are persons of African Descent. <sup>12</sup>
2. Persons of African Descent represent a significantly higher percentage of the total population in North Carolina than in the nation as a whole (12.3%).<sup>13</sup>
3. There are 88,727 members of the North Carolina Synod in 238 congregations.<sup>14</sup>
4. Of the total membership of the North Carolina Synod, the most recent information indicates only 610 are persons of African Descent. <sup>15</sup>
5. Of the 238 congregations, only three include greater than 10% persons of African Descent among their membership. The membership of two congregations is predominantly persons of African Descent.
6. Persons of African Descent represent less than one percent (.7%) of the membership of the North Carolina Synod.
7. In order for the North Carolina Synod to be statistically representational of the North Carolina population as a whole, it would be necessary to add 18,555 new members of African Descent.
8. In order for the North Carolina Synod to achieve the ELCA goal of 10% of persons of color and/or primary language other than English, it would be necessary to add 7,849 new members of color and/or primary language other than English.

These statistics create a dramatic picture of both the extent to which our Church has failed to be faithful to its mission as well as the magnitude of the opportunity which lies before us.

The experience of our church has taught us that new congregation starts, intentionally directed toward persons of African Descent, are the single most effective and immediate strategy to increase participation.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Isaiah 25

<sup>12</sup> 2002 data from the US Census Bureau

<sup>13</sup> IBID

<sup>14</sup> "Together in Ministry", 2002 statistics, NC Synod, The Lutheran, October 2003

<sup>15</sup> IBID

<sup>16</sup> Rev. Taylor Harmon, ELCA Division for Outreach

## IV. Commitment

The ELCA has, from its inception, affirmed and proclaimed its commitment to faithfully be a welcoming and inclusive Church. Our commitment to greater faithfulness, forms the mandate for the work of the Strategy Team.

### *History*

The Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, at its constituting convention in 1987, adopted the following goal: "It shall be a goal of this church that within 10 years of its establishment the membership shall include at least 10 percent people of color and/or primary language other than English".<sup>17</sup>

This was understood as a call for the "Evangelical Lutheran Church in America to an intense beginning of an ongoing comprehensive ministry with African American, Arab and Middle Eastern, American Indian and Alaska Native, Asian, and Hispanic people".<sup>18</sup>

The ten percent goal is, of course, only an intermediate goal--a useful benchmark and challenge--encouraging all the church to renewed effort. The real vision is of our church being truly welcoming to all people.

In 1997 The Evangelical Lutheran Church in America voiced a renewed commitment to this call. Specifically concerning persons of African Descent:

1. All baptized members of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America to reflect, confess, and act on our personal commitment for ministries with African American...
2. All members of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America to support and encourage the ministry of congregations with predominantly African American...
3. All congregations to learn about their communities, develop, and implement plans for outreach in their neighborhoods with African American...
4. All ELCA congregations to become partners in this effort;
5. All synods in cooperation with churchwide units to identify congregations in racially changing communities and assist them to develop strategies for outreach;
6. All synods to provide leadership to congregations that are engaged in or exploring ministry with African American...
7. All ELCA pastors, rostered lay ministers, and persons in leadership positions to accelerate efforts to develop and support leaders to serve in multicultural ministries;
8. All synodical bishops, pastors, rostered lay ministers, persons in leadership positions, and congregation members to receive training sessions in order to combat racism and classism;
9. All synodical bishops, pastors, rostered lay ministers, and persons in leadership positions to work with pastors and African American...to address the issues of justice and advocacy on behalf of people living in poverty, in prison and discriminated against due to race, ethnicity, or gender.

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<sup>17</sup> ELCA continuing resolutions 5.01.A87

<sup>18</sup> IBID

### ***Strategy Mission Statement***

With the hope of synodically affirming and promoting the vision of the church to be truly welcoming to all people, the North Carolina African Descent Strategy Team adopted the following mission statement:

**By grace, all of God's people will be at the final heavenly banquet. Therefore, the ELCA congregations of North Carolina are committed to living out this promise now through the power of the Holy Spirit, both by repenting of our sins of racism and embodying the Kingdom of heaven through the increased presence and participation of peoples of African Descent and heritage.**

## **V. Challenges**

The North Carolina Synod African Descent Strategy Team recognizes that there are significant challenges which must be addressed as the church attempts to live out its mission. These challenges include:

### ***“This is the way it has always been done...”***

Unfortunately, the territory of the North Carolina Synod has a painful and regrettable history which has been both actively complicit, as well as passively tolerant of racism. While public and social institutions have formally adopted policies and procedures moving toward justice, informally, traditions and attitudes have demonstrated a remarkable resistance to change.

All too often, the church itself has reflected the values, judgments and practices of the society in which it is planted, rather than the Gospel to which it is called.

### ***Cultural Differences***

Within the cultural context of our country, people of different races, even those living in close proximity to one another, may have significantly different values, appreciations and experiences. Infrequent opportunity for the establishment of deep personal relationships across racial lines allows prejudices, assumptions and misjudgements to persist unchallenged.

Consequently, some of the outreach attempts of the Church have been impaired by cultural insensitivity. To be effective, the Church is required to commit to the hard work of listening and learning to develop the necessary language systems and cultural skills.

### ***Scarcity Of Resources***

Change is always costly. In the past, the Church has occasionally been able to articulate the need for change but has rarely committed and prioritized the resources required to effect that change.

### ***The Need For Both Rostered And Lay Leaders***

A consequence of very low participation by people of African Descent in the ELCA is an extremely limited supply of leadership. We as a church are unable to respond to many exciting opportunities simply due to that limited supply. To meet the challenge of our mission, requires us to intentionally search for, identify, nurture and prepare appropriate leaders.

### ***Resistance / Persistent Racism Among Clergy And Membership***

Racism is a pervasive and insidious element of our history and culture that has become woven into the fabric of our society. It regularly impacts economic, educational, real estate, and other public opportunities. The church is certainly not immune to this infection. Frequently, ELCA

members of African Descent are confronted with both subtle and blatant racism within our church. Our church has multiple important internal issues to confront in order to be more welcoming.

### ***Historic Model Of Congregational Planting In Predominantly High-Income / High-Growth Caucasian Communities***

There has not been a mission congregation start directed to persons of African Descent in our Synod for over 30 years. Our mission priorities have often targeted areas of new growth, persons previously associated with the Lutheran tradition, or those who match a demographic profile of our existing membership... in other words: “people who look like us”.

### ***Social Economic Realities***

The historic, geographic and demographic realities of our territory often result in racial isolation. In North Carolina, many communities or neighborhoods, especially in rural areas, tend to be mono-chromatic. Even in communities which are racially diverse, there is a tendency for persons of African Descent to be virtually “invisible” and un-noticed by the Caucasian majority.

In addition to the barriers represented by racial differences, there are other divisions based upon economic and social standing that often prevent people from associating with one another. Our congregations tend to be homogeneous – socially, economically and racially.

## **VI. Assets**

Despite the challenges that confront us, the Church has been endowed with significant resources to draw upon to accomplish its mission.

### ***The Holy Spirit's Calling The Church To Reformation***

We affirm that the Holy Spirit is at work in our Synod, stirring up hearts and minds and making new things possible.

### ***The Lutheran Tradition's Strong Theology Of Grace***

The Theology of Grace, which so richly informs the Lutheran tradition, is a message which addresses the spiritual needs of all people. God's loving gift of Grace is in powerful contrast to a world filled with judgments, prejudices and injustice.

### ***Faithful Servants / Committed Disciples***

Throughout our Synod and congregations, there are faithful and committed people who recognize the need for improvement and are willing to invest themselves in this important work. We are especially blessed with Lutherans of African Descent who have accepted positions and roles of responsibility.

### ***The Commitment And Re-Commitment Of The ELCA To Diversity Goals***

The ELCA has consistently and repeatedly articulated its commitment to diversity. This has been an important witness both within the Church and in the public arena.

### ***The Commitment Of The North Carolina Synod***

The North Carolina Synod has provided encouragement, resources, and staff support to the development of this Strategy.

## **VII. Strategies / Opportunities**

Although the work of the Strategy Team is ongoing, it is appropriate at this time to point to several strategic priorities and opportunities. These strategies and opportunities provide guidance, leading the North Carolina Synod further toward our ministry goals.

### ***Identify Sites For Congregation Starts Intentionally Directed Toward Persons Of African Descent***

Intentionally directed ministry starts have been demonstrated to be the most effective method of increasing minority membership in the ELCA. Therefore, we recommend that the ELCA's Division for Outreach and the North Carolina Synod immediately start the process of establishing a minimum of two new ministries in consultation with the Strategy Team.

### ***Support Existing African Descent Congregations***

The Church of the Abiding Savior, Durham, and Prince of Peace, Greensboro, are composed primarily of persons of African Descent. It is critical to assist these congregations to continue as vital centers of ministry. Therefore, it will be important to assess needs, develop plans, and dedicate resources to strengthen and support them.

### ***Assist Existing Congregations To Be More Welcoming***

Grow and strengthen the ministry of persons of African Descent in predominantly Caucasian congregations, especially in communities with a high percentage of persons of African Descent (30%+).

1. Encourage participating congregations to self-designate as a "Diverse Congregation," which will incorporate items 2 through 8.
2. Include a diversity statement in the congregational mission statement or other defining documents.
3. Include diversity in the strategic plan of the congregation.
4. Make diversity/anti-racism training available to every baptized member of the congregation.
5. Encourage different worship styles and opportunities.
6. Conduct an evangelism effort aimed at persons of African Descent at least once every six months.
7. Form a partner program with a local congregation whose members are predominantly persons of African Descent.
8. Establish Diversity Teams able to consult with congregations interested in improving their welcome to people of African Descent.

## ***Learning To Become More Welcoming: Listening To Our Members And The African Descent Community:***

Our existing members of African Descent provide a rich resource for learning about how a predominantly Caucasian church can more effectively communicate across racial and cultural divisions. This research will explore:

1. The qualities or characteristics of the Lutheran experience which may be attractive to people of African Descent.
2. The qualities or characteristics of the Lutheran experience which may be an impediment to the participation of people of African Descent.
3. The existing attitudes, perceptions, and spiritual needs within the African American community.

Additionally, information from the Percept program will be accessed along with other statistical and demographic data for the territory of the North Carolina Synod. This information will be compiled to assist in the selection of sites for ministry development and to identify congregations whose communities represent significant opportunities for outreach to persons of African Descent.

## ***Leadership Identification And Development***

Our church needs to develop a culture that provides opportunities for persons of African Descent to assume and be trained for positions of authority and leadership at both synodical and national levels.

Leadership opportunities should be directed to and available for both targeted youth and adults and should be balanced on the basis of gender as well.

To address leadership needs we recommend:

1. The development of a Leadership Institute for Youth. There is a need to create a new model for affirming and developing leadership for African Descent youth. Our intention is to synthesize the powerful spiritual impact of a Church Camping experience and living in an intentional Christian community, with the structured hands-on learning of a Leadership School. The Institute will include the use of Service Learning projects, under the support and guidance of mentoring church leaders.
2. Encourage congregations and institutions conducting Campus Ministry, or in proximity to campuses, to include Historically Black Colleges and Universities and students of African Descent in their ministry. Use the diversity to assist them in this endeavor.
3. Development of a plan to establish scholarships to Lenoir-Rhyne and Southern Seminary for persons of African Descent by 2005.

## ***Reducing Institutional And Residual Racism***

Without intentional and consistent action, institutional racism simply persists. In order to achieve progress, the Strategy Team recommends the following actions:

1. Develop and conduct training for majority Leaders, Pastors and Candidates for ministry
2. Encourage representation of persons of African Descent on all Synodical Boards and Committees.
3. Dedicate the Synod Assembly's theme toward issues of racism in 2005.
4. Work with Church institutions and organizations including: Camps, Colleges, Lutheran Services for the Aging, Lutheran Family Services in the Carolinas and others, to be more inclusive, welcoming and multi-cultural in their ministries.
5. An ongoing work of the Strategy Team will include continuous evaluation and consultation toward assisting all the activities and ministries of the North Carolina Synod to become more inclusive and welcoming to persons of African Descent.

## ***Forming Productive Partnerships With Other Brothers And Sisters***

Our church should not ignore opportunities to work together with fellow members of Christ's Body. Such collaborations, include identifying and forming alliances with congregations, denominations, organizations, and leaders serving predominantly persons of African Descent. In order to achieve progress, the Strategy Team recommends the following actions:

1. Invite pastors and denominational leaders of African Descent to participate in Synod Assembly, educational opportunities, and other local and synodical events.
2. Collaborate with Hood Theological Seminary, a Salisbury, NC AME Zion affiliated institution:
  - a. Continue to allow Lutheran seminarians to receive credit for coursework at Hood.
  - b. Encourage use of synod agencies and institutions as sites for Hood internships.
  - c. Joint continuing education.
  - d. Pulpit exchanges.
  - e. Invite Hood students to preach sermons in area Lutheran churches.
  - f. Encourage participation in Pastor-in-Residence program at Lenoir-Rhyne College and Lutheridge Lutherock Ministries, Inc. (LLMI).
  - g. Offer placement or even a minor discount for Hood Seminary students and faculty and their children at LLMI, Agape, etc.
  - h. Share resources and promote financial assistance when Hood Seminary relocates adjacent to the Synod office.
3. Seek out other institutions like Hood Seminary and create similar action plans, where possible.
4. Identify and form partnerships with local community organizations and agencies serving persons of African Descent.
5. Offer to present the N.C. Synod's African Descent Strategy to other partners in ministry.
6. Encourage collaboration in ministry with other denominations opposing injustice and Oppression.

## ***Dedication Of Resources To Implement This Strategy***

Undertaking the task of implementing the components of this Strategy must include planning for the provision of the resources necessary for its implementation. A plan will be developed in conjunction with Synod Council and appropriate ELCA divisions in order to commit the resources.