



Upstate New York Synod

Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

July, 2025

Trigger Warning: Violence, Racism, Death by Suicide, Gender-based Violence

Dear Church,

Earl Smith's recent death in Upstate New York has gone largely unnoticed and has left his family and community with many questions. The Medical Examiner's Office determined that he died by suicide. However, because of the history of our country, and because of the generational trauma of lynching and the current pain experienced by Black men in our country, when a black man is found dead, and hanging from a tree, there should be a thunderous cacophony of questions. There should be inquiries. Lynchings are still happening today.ⁱ

The generational trauma inflicted upon the Black community is a direct consequence of a long history of enslavement, racial violence, and systemic oppression. The Upstate New York Synod and Evangelical Lutheran Church in America laments the historical and ongoing violence against Black men and all BIPOC individuals, recognizing that such acts are profound sins against God's creation and deny God's intention for all people to flourish. We recognize that men and boys of color "may experience patriarchy and sexism particularly intertwined with white privilege," conveying the message that "men and boys of color are not fully men and boys."ⁱⁱ

We name and lament the violence against Indigenous women and all BIPOC women. The intersecting factors of race, gender identity and expression, ethnicity, national origin, nationality, religious identity, and immigration status, means that Indigenous women, BIPOC women, trans and queer folx, often face multiple,

Cultivating a G.R.A.C.E. Mindset: Collaboration

The Rev. Lee M. Miller II, Bishop
Upstate New York Synod, ELCA
116 W Glen Avenue, Syracuse, NY 13205
(315) 299-4955
www.upstatenysynod.org

overlapping forms of discrimination and violence. This violence often goes unseen, and the lives of our neighbors and siblings are silently and violently extinguished or disappeared.

As Resurrection people, activated by Love for justice and joy, we are invited to see through the shadows, illumine what is hidden, speak the truth, and amplify the voices of those who cry out to be heard.

There is a story in scripture of Jesus coming alongside two followers after the resurrection, only they did not recognize that it was Jesus. Their hearts were heavy, and their heads hung low with the impact of the trauma of oppression, occupation, and crucifixion. “We had hoped,” (Lk.24:21) they said to the one they thought was a stranger. They had hoped that Jesus would be victorious, that death would not be the end of the story, that imperial violence would not win the day. Jesus began to teach the disciples, about the way of the cross, the way of sacrificial love, the way of nonviolence in the face of violence, the way of reconciliation. Their hearts were opened to the truth, and once seeing the truth, of death and resurrection, their hearts were left burning, and they ran into action.

Having learned the truth of violence against Black men and boys, violence against Indigenous and BIPOC women, and violence against the LGBTQIA+ community, and the intersectionality of the lives of those impacted by this trauma, our hearts are left burning, and we are activated by the love of God to respond. We believe that God’s desire is “abundant life and equity for everyone” and we hold that “all people are created equally in the image of God.”ⁱⁱⁱ

Love activates us to participate in practices of justice. We are called to resist the temptation to stay silent, accompany people directly impacted by injustice and harm, and advocate for just laws for the dignity of each person.

This fall we will be providing training and resources for Community Organizing and Advocacy, equipping us to love our neighbors. I invite and encourage you to participate in these opportunities. God has formed us to be the Body of Christ for the sake of the world, the Spirit has gifted us with the tools we need, and Jesus sends us into the world to proclaim good news, release to those who are captive, heal the sick, and drive away evil.

“Let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream.” (Amos 5:24).



Your Co-worker in the Gospel,

Rev. M. Miller

Resources:

New York State Mental Health Hotline: 866-903-3787

ⁱ ["This Was Not a Suicide": Lynching in 2025 and the Legacy of Racial Terror – Dreamspace Studio](#)

ⁱⁱ ELCA. Faith, Sexism, and Justice, A Call to Action. Adopted 2019. pg. 5.

ⁱⁱⁱ Ibid., pg. 2-3.

