

Episode 1: Introduction and Origins of African-descent Lutherans in the Western Hemisphere

Greetings from Liverpool, NY!

My name is Howie Mansfield & I am the producer of this podcast series: STORIES WE COULD TELL – AFRICAN-DESCENT LUTHERANS IN THE ELCA. The congregation in which I (and my family belong) is: King of Kings, Lutheran, in Liverpool, NY.

We are celebrating Black History Month – in 2019 -- and have asked our INTENTIONAL INTERIM PASTOR: The Rev. Dr. Julius Carroll to share an historical narrative of African descent Lutherans in the Western Hemisphere.

A word about our presenter/ host:

An ordained pastor of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, The Rev. Dr. Julius Carroll has served as a congregational pastor in Philadelphia, Washington, D.C and Oakland, CA., and Raleigh, NC. He served as a bishop's associate in the Southeastern Penna. Synod (director for urban ministry/director for evangelical mission). Dr. Carroll served as the Program Director for African Descent Ministry in the Multicultural Ministries Unit of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. Dr. Carroll served as associate professor of contextual education at the Lutheran Theological Southern Seminary. In his retirement Dr. Carroll has served as an intentional interim pastor in: New Orleans, LA, Greensboro, NC and presently, Liverpool, NY.

Pastor Carroll's Doctor of Ministry Project is entitled: "A Theology of African Descent Lutheranism" 2004

Pastor Carroll, WELCOME TO THIS PODCAST SERIES!

Thank you, HOWIE, it's a pleasure to be a part of King of Kings' 2019 African American History celebration! You know, as quiet as it has been kept: We African – descent Lutherans do: have a story to tell. So, how shall I begin?

My wife, Geneva, and I were worshipping at a Lutheran congregation in South Carolina that had historically taken a seminarian from the Lutheran Theological Southern Seminary for field education. This is a time for a student to learn and experience – first hand- the tasks of being a pastor in the Church.

I had not received a response to my invitation for the pastor to serve as a field education supervisor for the coming year, so I was hanging back in the 'receiving line' --- AFTER SERVICE to ask her personally if she would accept my invitation. When, an elderly southern gentleman standing in line to greet the pastor said to my wife: "Aren't you people Baptist?" To which my wife responded that - we were not Baptist, but Rather, Lutheran and that in fact her husband was on the Lutheran seminary faculty in Columbia.

The gentleman was incredulous, and as he shook the (now embarrassed) pastor's hand, he loudly protested: "But pastor, **they say that they are Lutheran!**"

YES, 'WE' are Lutheran & have been so for: **353 YEARS!**

Howie let me share a little bit about: **African – descent Lutheranism in the Danish West Indies - -- The stories we could tell.**

In 1687, the [Danish West Indian] Company began: Slave trading and at its peak in 1725, there were 4,490 slaves on the island Of St. Thomas.

Bringing-in slaves from the Continent of African, you see, was a response to the failure of the experiment of using: Danish convicts for manual labor on the Caribbean Islands. The Danes living in an unfamiliar tropical climate; the death of pastors; the edict the Governor that made attendance at worship mandatory; two worshiping congregations—Danish and African descent—and the church buildings destroyed by fire or hurricanes all Necessitated the importing of African slaves who were used to the (at times) oppressive tropic climate. It is interesting to note (Howie) that most of the slaves who were imported --- were people from the African Continent --- and not people ingenious to the Virgin Islands.

So, what was the Lutheran Church's role in witnessing to Jesus on St. Thomas, St. Croix and St. John's? Well, the first baptism of an African slave was recorded by Pastor Christian Fischer on the island of St. Thomas in 1713. A few years later in 1718 Pastor Hans Christian Brandt baptized a few more slaves. Brandt is credited with baptism among the 'coloured' on both St. Thomas and St. John's.

The language initially used in the Sacrament of Holy Baptism and the Rite of Confirmation was Danish. So, the native voice of the African-descent West Indians was neither honored nor, used within the life of the congregation. Gradually, however, missionaries began to use Creole in their teachings of the Christian faith.

The year 1848 brought an Emancipation Proclamation === freeing all the slaves in the Danish West Indies. But this brought about little change, however, in the life of the Lutheran Church on the islands, because—at the time of the proclamation—only about one-sixth of the mission congregations were slaves.

Negotiations between the governments of Denmark and the United States regarding the transfer of the three islands (now known as the "United States Virgin Islands") lasted from 1867 until March 31, 1917! This transfer necessitated a great deal of adjustment for the Lutheran Church, for it meant that the church would become an independent congregation after two and a half centuries of being the established DANISH State Church.

In the first quarter of the twentieth century the number of Danes living on St. Thomas was so minimal that the two congregations merged into one English-speaking congregation. Danish language services were occasionally held, the last one in 1949.

Today, proud of their Danish cultural heritage and aware of their African roots, the people of Frederick Evangelical Lutheran Church; their sister congregation on St. Thomas; 4 congregations on St. Croix and 1 on St. John's celebrate living in the tension of being African-Caribbean in a predominantly European denomination. The lilt of their voices and the beat of their music proclaim their celebration of being Lutheran in an Afro-centric context for lo, the better part of **5 centuries!**