***Religion that is pure and undefiled before God, the Father, is this: to care for orphans and widows in their distress.. James 1:27***

Recently, the domestic abuse shelter, Embrace, which serves Barron, Price, Washburn and Rusk counties in NW Wisconsin, lost county funding for the work that it does to help individuals and families find safety and protection from abusive partners. The reported $25,000 cut in funding was in reaction to the organization’s display of Black Lives Matter placards at its facilities and its antiracism statement on its website. Several local and national news agencies picked up the story.[[1]](#footnote-1) About 15% of the victims that are served by Embrace are Black, Indigenous, People of Color (BIPOC). When I read Embrace’s anti-racism statement[[2]](#footnote-2), I was struck by how it echoed many ideas expressed in statements of my church, The Evangelical Lutheran Church in America’s condemnation of racism and white supremacy.[[3]](#footnote-3)

It grieves my heart that funding for the only domestic abuse shelter in four counties in Northwest Wisconsin has been cut. A study from Rutgers documented[[4]](#footnote-4) an increase in domestic violence since the beginning of the COVID 19 pandemic. Access to the support of a domestic abuse shelter can be a matter of life or death. Surely this conflict will put the most vulnerable families among us in even more danger.

My response to this situation may be perceived as a partisan political statement. Let me assure you it is not. It is a matter of faith. Racism and the resulting racial violence is a sin. Domestic violence is a sin. As Christians we are called to “Do justice, love mercy and walk humbly with God.” Micah 6:8. For me to be silent in the face of this injustice is sin.

As a church, as people of faith, we are called to care for the” least of these my brothers and sisters,” for those on the fringes, the weak, the poor, and the vulnerable. We are called to end the root causes of injustice, violence, and poverty. As ELCA Lutherans we often say, God’s Work, Our Hands, and I add Our Voices. Addressing injustice in our society is God’s work and it requires our voices.

If you are a person of faith, I invite you to pray about how you can speak the truth and act justly in the face of this situation. Pray that the conflict between the board and Embrace is resolved and funding restored. Pray that we work together to end racism, racial violence and domestic violence. Pray for courage and wisdom. Use the voice God has given you to speak on behalf of those whose voice has been silenced or unheared.

# Bishop Laurie Skow-Anderson, Northwest Synod of Wisconsin, ELCA

**ELCA reaffirms commitment to combat racism and white supremacy Signed by all 65 bishops**

5/29/2020 2:45:00 PM

 What does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness,

and to walk humbly with your God? (Micah 6:8).

The Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) reaffirms its commitment to combating racism and white supremacy following the recent murders of Black Americans. Ahmaud Arbery, Breonna Taylor, Dreasjon (Sean) Reed, and George Floyd were our neighbors. Ahmaud Arbery was chased down, shot, and killed by a retired police officer and his son while jogging in Brunswick, Ga. (Feb. 23, 2020). Breonna Taylor, a 26-year-old emergency medical technician, was shot eight times by Louisville Metro Police Department officers who entered her apartment while serving a "no-knock warrant" (March 13, 2020). Dreasjon (Sean) Reed, a 21-year-old from Indianapolis died after being shot at least eight times by an Indianapolis Metropolitan Police Department officer (May 6, 2020). George Floyd was killed by police in Minneapolis while begging for his life, a block away from Calvary Lutheran, an ELCA congregation (May 25, 2020). As the Conference of Bishops, we condemn the white supremacy that has led to the deaths of so many unarmed Black, Indigenous, and Persons of Color in our country. We grieve with, pray for and stand in solidarity with the families and friends of all whose loved ones have been and continue to be victims of injustices run amok, racist violence and the insidious venom of white supremacy.

The ELCA's social policy [resolution](https://download.elca.org/ELCA%20Resource%20Repository/Condemnation_of_White_Supremacy_and_Racist_Rhetoric.pdf?_ga=2.203569043.221586474.1590507628-706161550.1552512868), "Condemnation of White Supremacy and Racist Rhetoric," adopted by the 2019 ELCA Churchwide Assembly, states: "As persons called to love one another as God has loved us, we therefore proclaim our commitment to speak with one voice against racism and white supremacy. We stand with those who are targets of racist ideologies and actions." As church, together we must work to condemn white supremacy in all forms and recommit ourselves to confront and exorcize the sins of injustice, racism and white supremacy in church and society and within ourselves as individuals and households.

[[5]](#footnote-5)

**Embrace Supports Communities of Color**

In the midst of a national uprising and dialogue on state violence, Embrace adds their voices affirming the humanity and dignity of Black, Indigenous, People of Color (BIPOC). We share the global grief over the lives of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, and Ahmaud Arbery as well as the shootings of Jacob Blake, and the many other acts of racist violence perpetrated against Black people over the past 400 years in this country. Like Martin Luther King, Jr. and Emmett Till, they will not be forgotten.

As an anti-violence organization, Embrace cannot end one form of violence without addressing the other, and we cannot properly serve all survivors if we do not acknowledge and address the oppression and violence the most marginalized survivors are experiencing. Embrace does not support or advocate violence against anyone, even those who are accused of doing harm. Racism, police violence, sexual violence, and domestic violence all have the same root causes, and they interact and compound on each other both in society and within the survivors we serve. Intimate partner violence will not end if we silo it and ignore the other oppressions. If we put the most marginalized and oppressed person in our community at the center of our work and work toward their safety and liberation, it will necessitate the safety and liberation of everyone else too. We will not remain silent and neutral in the face of violence and oppression.

If we want to end intimate partner violence and sexual violence, we must grapple with our country’s long history of racism, slavery, genocide, and colonization. Racism and white supremacy are prevalent in our communities. Violence disproportionately affects our Communities of Color. Listening to the lived experiences of BIPOC survivors, colleagues, and community members, we recognize racial trauma and violence is a daily occurrence that directly impacts BIPOC and robs the rest of us of our humanity. We are committed to acknowledging these experiences. We understand we are consciously and unconsciously shaped by a culture deeply embedded with white supremacy. We know the burden lies with white allies to undo the violent system we live in and benefit from and that People of Color suffer the most in.

We are aware that our own anti-violence movement is not immune to enabling oppressive systems. We recognize the voices that have built and continue to build the philosophies that drive our work come from Black women, Indigenous women, and those with multiple marginalized identities who have been co-opted and silenced. Embrace is working toward change, both internally and externally. We will show our commitment by evaluating our internal policies and practices including our hiring practices and strengthening our anti-racist education, examining our external partnerships and using our network to inform others, as well as developing an explicit framework on “centering Survivors of Color” to guide our organization. Embrace hopes that People of Color in our community will view our spaces as increasingly safe and inclusive. We urge more community members, colleagues, and agency partners who work in all systems – judicial, law enforcement, education, health care, housing, social services – throughout our community to acknowledge the recurrent problem of racial biases, reimagine their roles, explore community-led solutions, and commit to being anti-racist through their actions and words. Feel this moment in history, listen, and do not look away. We cannot rely only on the continuation of past efforts to achieve these goals.

Embrace supports the movement for Black Lives. We will hear their words, lift up their voices, and stand in the anti-violence values of our organization. We hope you will join us in breaking the cycle of trauma created by racism and violence.

[[6]](#footnote-6)

1. <https://www.huffpost.com/entry/domestic-violence-black-lives-matter-police_n_5f88c8a1c5b66ee9a5ee43d7?fbclid=IwAR0MCfBEV9aeWybM91X82jKBVPd7X9sBMRoSOv1xbGWsILtZzO-2lDbdBTQ>

   <https://www.cnn.com/2020/10/20/us/wisconsin-embrace-police-funding-cut-trnd/index.html>

   <https://wqow.com/2020/10/14/25k-in-funding-cut-from-domestic-violence-shelter/> [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. <https://www.embracewi.org/antiracism-statement> [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. <https://www.elca.org/News-and-Events/8039?fbclid=IwAR3lOEtprOMxn5wc3t6A_VJlW2aUB7C0OexHWgP3ii-iNKTTfZMihCnKzBA> [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. https://www.eurekalert.org/pub\_releases/2020-09/ru-adv091120.php [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. https://www.elca.org/News-and-Events/8039?fbclid=IwAR3lOEtprOMxn5wc3t6A\_VJlW2aUB7C0OexHWgP3ii-iNKTTfZMihCnKzBA [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. <https://www.embracewi.org/antiracism-statement> [↑](#footnote-ref-6)