

Virginia Synod  
African American Outreach Team [AAOT]

## Outreach Ideas

In recognition of the fact that significant numbers of people of African descent are returning to the South, and in keeping with ELCA and Synod initiatives about inclusive outreach, we offer this page of ideas and tactics as a resource to help congregations fulfill our Church's vital goal in this historic opportunity for witness.

Our sense of "outreach" encompasses the work of witness/evangelism committees, service/social ministry committees, member volunteer work—all part of our commitment to be faithful, loving people in the Church *and* in the world.

We have three keywords: *Visibility...Hospitality...Consciousness-raising*

### 1. Visibility

Be present in your community; bridge the church/community gap;  
get recognized as an ally, a partner *in the community's concerns*

- a. attend community meetings about issues, service projects, etc.
- b. host community meetings; offer your facilities for on-going programs so people come into your building; don't just collect food to be taken elsewhere
- c. support efforts for the good of the community with volunteers, in-kind services  
Consider the example of a congregation near a regional hospital that created 24-hour daycare when they learned of hospital staff needs for 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> shift daycare. What needs exist? There could be a real niche for your congregation.
- d. show up at school concerts, games, fund-raisers; have delegates at meetings
- e. post your information about services or special events in grocery stores, coffee shops, laundromats, schools in the neighborhoods around your building
- f. be online too, with a sentence of welcome—not a generic "All are welcome"—with visuals, map and directions, times, notice of accessibility, and a prayer for the community
- g. organize neighborhood visitation—yes, knocking on doors—to get your Word and invitation out there
- h. chat outside before and after services so passersby can see who's there; wave!
- i. when tragedy strikes, visit the spontaneous memorial "shrines" that arise—the flowers, cards, messages, etc.; let your congregation share in others' grief
- j. organize a month-long summer day camp; create a multi-racial staff of college student/interns (they could use the stipend, claim an internship, and be part of a close-to-home 'mission project.') Maybe local congregations could partner-up to do a more extensive outreach project like this.
- k. do not be surprised to hear of *revival* possibilities in the Synod.

## 2. Hospitality

Make members and visitors feel welcome—you have noticed that stores have greeters; Outback even has a person who opens the door to all customers!

- a. be gracious hosts at each assembly and meal of God's people; if you don't know if a person is a visitor or a member, just introduce yourself and greet him or her
- b. offer guidance about the liturgy, the facilities
- c. have multi-racial visuals—posters, art—in the narthex; check ELCA resources or local museums; or make your own collage of images and words from magazines, etc. that envisions your hoped for community
- d. regularly include songs and hymns from *This Far by Faith* in your repertoire of service music
- e. circulate, mingle at coffee hours so visitors who stay are not left standing alone
- f. include intercessions for persons in the community—keep up with news—and for the well-being of the community and its officials, leaders, and workers
- g. consider pulpit or choir exchanges or shared services or other fellowship opportunities with African American congregations to share the faith and step across the “color line”

## 3. Consciousness-Raising

Increase awareness of African American culture and heritage, and especially the strong religious contributions to American history and culture, and sensitize our congregations about racism and ways to move beyond it.

This category lends itself to congregations sharing in the organizing of learning or sensitivity events, especially with regard to bringing in speakers or a musical group or another resource person.

- a. hold classes and dialogues based on ELCA resources or AAOT information or with team members
- b. discover African American resources in your areas—any “historically black colleges” nearby?—or other church bodies, or Virginia historical sites?
- c. invite speakers, musicians, artists, veterans, civic leaders, who can bring African American perspectives
- d. consult sensitivity trainers on matters of race and strategies for defusing hot button issues and reaching across the lines [some public agencies, businesses, universities have such staff]
- e. read together a civil rights history, or a novel, or articles from newspapers or periodicals; it doesn't have to be Oprah's book club, but converse over a text
- f. consider the possibility of an inter-faith Bible study or VCS or community project to structure time together for conversation, planning, relationship
- g. Please, be sensitive:  
Consider what it said to the African American population of N. Philadelphia when a congregation, whose members commute back to their “beloved old church,” unveiled their new church sign in German?