

LUTHERAN MEMOIR

BISHOP NELSON W. TROUT

First African American Bishop of the American Lutheran Church (ALC)

Nelson W. Trout, an ordained pastor, became the first African American Lutheran bishop in 1983. A mentor, teacher and preacher to many, he was also recognized for providing those services in the African American community. Trout was renowned as a vibrant preacher and commitment to social ministry. He inspired hundreds of seminary students while touching the lives of thousands of people in many communities.

Born in Columbus, Ohio, in 1921. Trout was a member of and ordained at St. Philip Evangelical Lutheran in Columbus. He graduated from Capital University and Trinity Lutheran Seminary in Bexley, Ohio. He was also awarded a doctor of divinity degree from Wartburg College in Waverly, Iowa.

Reverend Trout served as a pastor for several congregations in Wisconsin, Alabama and California. Trout was a very inspiring and powerful preacher. While serving in Montgomery, Alabama, he became friends with Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., with whom he used to joke about being a Lutheran.

Trout is a significant figure in ELCA history as he was a dynamic leader in the church and the first African American bishop of the church. He was passionate, intelligent and powerful in both preaching and teaching.

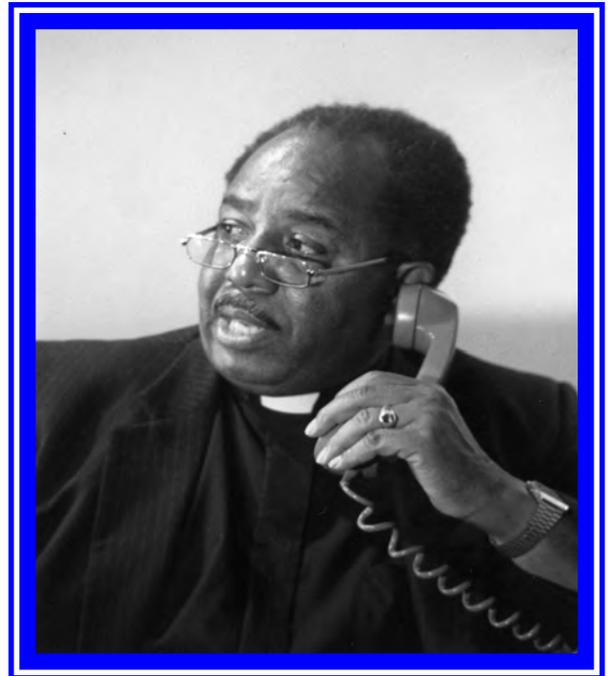
For a time Pastor Trout served as a professor and Director of Minority Ministry Studies at Trinity Lutheran Seminary in Bexley, Ohio. In 1991, Trinity Seminary established the Nelson W. Trout Lectureship Series in Preaching in his honor.

On Sept. 20, 1996, the Rev. Nelson W. Trout, 75, passed away in Inglewood, California.

Sources:

ELCA Archives: African American Lutheran Giants - Living Lutheran <https://www.livinglutheran.org/2021/02/african-american-giants/>

Photo Image of Bishop Trout Rev. Nelson Trout ELCA Archives image. <http://www.elca.org/archives>



A quote from Rev. Dr. Nelson Trout

"When I suggest that the solution to our ever increasing racial problem be found in our ability to generate goodwill, I would not want such a suggestion to be discarded as the council of weakness. Granted, we do not normally think of such a quality of human experience as being in the same league with our military power, or with our scientific resources; yet, it is not to be discarded as utter sentimentality or some impotent form of effeminacy. I submit to you that human goodwill is the greatest power available to humanity."

Lutheran Quarterly, May 1968

NorthEastern Iowa SYNOD



Racial Justice Web page

PROFESSIONAL HIGHLIGHTS

- Served as a pastor for several congregations in Wisconsin, Alabama and California.
- Trout was known as a very inspiring and powerful preacher.
- Became friends with Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. while serving in Montgomery, Ala.
- Served as Associate Youth Director for the American Lutheran Church in 1960 to 1967
- Director for Urban Evangelism.
- Executive Director of Lutheran Social Services in Ohio
- Professor and Director for Minority Ministry Studies at Trinity Lutheran Seminary, Columbus, Ohio
- Bishop of the South Pacific District of the American Lutheran Church, elected June 17, 1983
- Bishop of the Southwest California Synod following the merger of the ALC into the ELCA.



REFERENCES

African American Lutheran Giants - Living Lutheran
<https://www.livinglutheran.org/2021/02/african-american-giants/>

Wikipedia article
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nelson_Wesley_Trout

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- It was written that Trout played a large part in creating an identity for African Americans and other minorities through all of his roles in the church. Is it reasonable for people who are racially minoritized to feel responsible creating an identity for the race they were associated? Why or why not?
- Lutheranism has traditionally been structured on the national and local level based on selected northern European countries' cultures (i.e. German, Swedish, Norwegian and Danish.) How is this structure beneficial to the life of our churches historically and in the future? How is it detrimental?
- In an article published in August of 2020 by Living Lutheran titled "Meeting the Challenge of Urban Unrest", Bishop Trout's writings after the Detroit Riots of the late 1960s were reprinted. Pastor Trout wrote "Every ghetto in America is a solemn sign of the cumulative, yet, deliberate sins of flesh against flesh; of [sibling] against [sibling]; of humanity against humanity; yes, of Americans against Americans." Why might this statement by Bishop Trout still be relevant to race based communities? How is this statement by Bishop Trout relevant to all communities?
- Another quote of the Bishop from the same article: "When I suggest that the solution to our ever increasing racial problem [can] be found in our ability to generate goodwill, I would not want such a suggestion to be discarded as the council of weakness. Granted, we do not normally think of such a quality of human experience as being in the same league with our military power, or with our scientific resources; yet, it is not to be discarded as utter sentimentality or some impotent form of effeminacy. I submit to you that human goodwill is the greatest power available to [humanity]." What are your thoughts on how goodwill can effect what Bishop Trout refers to as the race problem?
- What legacy do you think people like Bishop Trout have on the church and how can it be nurtured?