

# Dear Church: A Love Letter from a Black Preacher to the Whitest Denomination in the US

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Lenny Duncan is the unlikeliest of pastors. Formerly incarcerated, he is now a black preacher in the whitest denomination in the United States: the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA). Shifting demographics and shrinking congregations make all the headlines, but Duncan sees something else at work--drawing a direct line between the church's lack of diversity and the church's lack of vitality. The problems the ELCA faces are theological, not sociological. But so are the answers.

Part manifesto, part confession, and all love letter, *Dear Church* offers a bold new vision for the future of Duncan's denomination and the broader mainline Christian community of faith. *Dear Church* rejects the narrative of church decline and calls everyone--leaders and laity alike--to the front lines of the church's renewal through racial equality and justice.

It is time for the church to rise up, dust itself off, and take on forces of this world that act against God: whiteness, misogyny, nationalism, homophobia, and economic injustice. Duncan gives a blueprint for the way forward and urges us to follow in the revolutionary path of Jesus.

*Dear Church* also features a discussion guide at the back--perfect for church groups, book clubs, and other group discussion.

Lenny Duncan is pastor of Jehu's Table, a church in the heart of Brooklyn. Formerly incarcerated, formerly homeless, and formerly unchurched, Duncan is now a sought-after speaker and writer on topics of racial justice and the role of the church in the twenty-first century. His documentary film, *Do Black Churches Matter in the ELCA*, was released in 2017.

"Rev. Lenny Duncan is a voice calling in the wilderness. I am deeply grateful for the comfort and the discomfort his book brought me. I dare you to read this book, church. I dare you to be open to the repentance it calls for, to the grace it manifests, to the pain it witnesses to. I dare you to be changed by the truth in its pages. I dare you to not look away. It's time." --Nadia Bolz-Weber, Pastor and New York Times bestselling author of *Shameless: A Sexual Revolution*

"Our brother Lenny Duncan has crafted a masterful and heartbroken indictment of where the Lutheran Church could be and where it is instead. He stands fiercely grounded in the Lutheran tradition of revealing our own brokenness, proclaiming our hope in Christ, and challenging us to live into love of neighbor. His individual experiences and our churchwide practices are woven together in an unsettling illustration of how the American idol of white supremacy has laid the foundation for a wide array of vitriol, from Dylann Roof to transphobia to the election of the forty-fifth president. Prepare yourself, church. This is a love letter you have to read--and a proclamation that will leave you convicted." --Emmy Kegler ELCA Pastor and author of *One Coin Found*

"May we love the church as much as Duncan does so that we cannot just take his words to

heart but also engage to dismantle the powers and principalities that keep us from being siblings in Christ with one another. His words about the whitest denomination in the United States and its relationship to white supremacy are the truths that we need to acknowledge. Duncan's love letter to the church is the modern day epistle we all need to read." --The Reverend Tuhina Verma Rasche

"Marrying stunning, reverberant personal stories with little-known Lutheran history, Duncan makes readers laugh out loud in grim recognition. His critiques of our beloved church strike a tender spot in the heart, not because they are harsh, but because they are true. I pray we will engage in truth-telling with the same rigor Duncan does, because only truth will open the path to justice." --Emily Scott, ELCA Mission Developer and Dinner Church Movement

"Lenny Duncan has given us a bold and fearless book filled with unsettling but indispensable insights into the stranglehold white supremacy inflicts upon our churches. At the same time, we feel a holy, ferocious love radiating from every page. This book should be required reading for all who love our church and lament our failures. If you don't come away breathless, hope-struck, and fired up for revolution, check your pulse." --Heidi Neumark, Trinity Lutheran Church Manhattan

"The Reverend Lenny Duncan writes with a searing message urgently rooted in true love. His deep commitment to speak the truth to his white siblings in the church reads as a desperately clarion call. Dear Church isn't just a good idea for a book study--the grace-filled ferocity that overwhelms its pages reminds one of early writings from the Latin American base communities that formed liberation theology as we know it today. Duncan has written a necessary addition to the corpus of Christian writings in the twenty-first century. We ignore his plea at our own peril." --Jason Chesnutt ANKOS Films, The Slate Project and #slatespeak and #slatereads

Other Books

Dia Melihatmu Selagi Kau Tidur, "Sterling Brooks finds himself in Manhattan, at the skating rink in Rockefeller Center. Among the skaters is a heartbroken seven-year-old named Marissa, and as Sterling soon realizes, it is she he has been sent to help. Marissa's sadness comes from her separation from the father she adores, a talented young singer, and her sparkling grandmother, owner of a popular restaurant. Both have been forced into the Witness Protection Program because two mobsters, the Badgett brothers, have put a price on their heads to prevent their testifying against them in an arson case." "Sterling, able to move back and fourth in time and place, masterminds a plan to eliminate the threat from the Badgett brothers and reunite Marissa with her loved ones."

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