

Presentation 40 years of the BLCI

Theme: "Who do you (African Americans) say I AM? Living Waters and the Reimagining of the Black Lutheran Future."

Part 1 - Selenir

Seeds Sown, Hopes for the Harvest: Lutheranism in Brazil and

Afro-descendant people in the IECLB.

I begin by asking permission from our elders, from our ancestors, especially men and women from CIBL who paved the way for our arrival here. We thank you for the invitation to be here, through Dr. Beverly Wallace and Dr. Richard Perry. May God be supporting you in this moment you are living.

Also, it is important to identify the place we are talking about: I am in the south of Brazil, in the city of São Leopoldo, state of Rio Grande do Sul and Pastor Dr. Gunter Padilha is in the city of Colatina in the southeast of Brazil, in the state of Espírito Santo.

We are a multiethnic country, the country of diversities. In 2025, Brazil's population reached more than 213 million inhabitants. A country composed of around 48.2% men and 51.8% **women**, according to 2025 data from the Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics/IBGE.

The percentage of people who declare themselves black in Brazil reaches more than 55.5% (sum of black and brown), being the country with the largest black population, outside Africa. (second to Nigeria in quantity)

From this perspective, there is no possibility of making invisible the participation of these black people in the development of the country and the contribution of these people who were trafficked from Africa, bringing technical-scientific knowledge in the use of tools and knowledge.

Just as there is no possibility of making the presence of black people in Brazilian society invisible. This is present in a large part of Brazilian culture, in language, music, cuisine and, of course, in religiosity.

It is interesting to identify the place where we are talking about, the School of Theology that trains ministers for the IECLB, located in Rio Grande do Sul, in a region recognized as the Cradle of German Colonization in Brazil.

The reflections from the previous Conferences since 1986 have inspired us, in particular, as Afro-Brazilians, to continue to be influenced by African-American Lutheran brothers and sisters.

The theme asks us: "Who do you (African-Americans) say that I AM? paraphrasing the biblical passage of Matthew 16:15 "And you who say that I am". Living Waters and the Reimagining of the Black Lutheran Future, living waters that renew us, strengthen us and nourish hope for the continuity of the search for justice and recognition that, even today, the anti-racist struggle is still necessary in the Church and in Society.

The theme instigates us to occupy a place of commitments and choices in the face of opportunities to identify ourselves, to recognize ourselves, to recover our essence, our dignity as human beings, brothers and sisters of faith. It is good to be here, participating in this very important moment for the people participating in the first conference of the CIBL in 1986, and also an important moment for groups such as the Identity Group with Afro-Brazilian people, who continued the legacy that was built and is being resignified through the rescue of history since the first Conference held in 1986.

And here we are, Pastor Dr. Gunter Padilha and I, representing Brazil, the Identity Group of Faculdades EST and the Evangelical Church of the Lutheran Confession in Brazil, being part of this beautiful story that we want to share with you, a little piece of the story of how it all started until we got here to participate in the celebrations of 40 years of CIBL.

Ten years after the first Conference of the BLCI, in 1996, when we received our late professor Dr. Peter Nash in Brazil, we received a blessing and many challenges. The blessing of living with a person of great theological knowledge, especially in the biblical area, a person who is very sensitive when looking at our black Brazilian community and asking: "How do you identify yourself?" "Where do you, an Afro-descendant person, recognize yourself in this space of communities so rooted in Germanic traditions and with people predominantly of German descent? And in the stories of the Bible, where are black people? What is their place in the Christian Church?" and so many other questions to young people who are students of the undergraduate course at the School of Theology/Faculdades EST.

Over the years, the coexistence with Dr. Peter Nash was increasingly moments of learning and strengthening the identity of black people in the Brazilian Lutheran church. His experiences and participation in CIBL events were important for him to bring new

perspectives from the experiences of black American and African Lutheran people, as sources of light and hope for studies and training on the place of black people in the Lutheran church in all parts of the world.

In 1996, the first meeting of the Identity Group began. In addition to the classroom meetings, the meetings of the group of Black men and women of the EST, as he was known, took place on weekends at Dr. Nash's house. Always with a sharing of lunch, dinner or a tasty coffee to give more energy to the work and maintain the tradition of table communion that unites and brings together people for the same purpose.

Identity Group in 1996 - Living at Dr. Peter Nash's House



One of the questions that Dr. Peter Nash asked the black students of the EST, was the same that members of the BLCC asked in the first Conference: *"Can we be black and Lutheran?"* (Harare, 1986). As we can see, historically, the BLCC conferences evolved from this question that continues to guide the work to this day. But Dr. Peter Nash did not stop there...

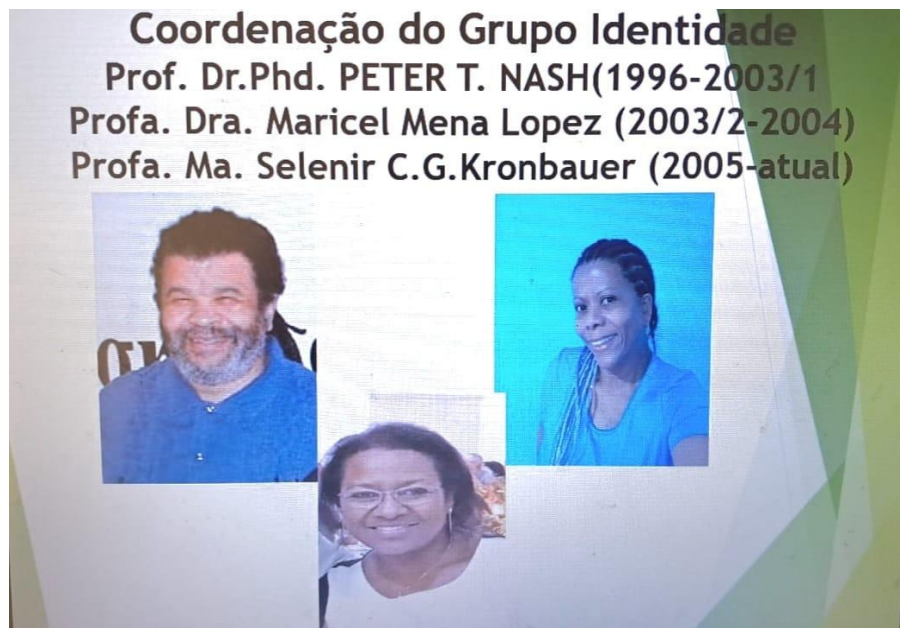
Dr. Peter Nash's interventions were also gradually increasing and challenging the spaces so Germanized, especially in the EST and the IECLB. Then, the need for a closer dialogue with the leaders of the Christian churches, especially the Protestant churches and, in particular, the Lutheran church, was born. The first meeting entitled "I Opening the doors of the Church" was born in 2001, the II in 2003 and the III Opening the doors of the Churches in 2005



Despite the efforts, not all the attempts in favor of anti-racist actions had the expected support, but **the seeds were sown and many expectations for the harvest**. Being Lutheran in Brazil was also and continues to be a challenge to this day.

The leadership of the Identity Group, represented by Dr. Peter Nash, ended in August 2004 and the Colombian professor Dr. Maricel Mena Lopez, a biblical theologian, coordinated the group until the end of 2024. From 2005, I Selenir C. Gonçalves Kronbauer took over the coordination of the Identity Group until the present day.

- Dr. Peter – Dr. Maricel and Ma. Selenir – Group Coordination



In addition to the commitment to continue the work of Dr. Peter Nash and Prof. Dr. Maricel Mena Lopez, my first challenge was to participate in the work together with our late Dr. Lee Wesley, Dr. Rudolph Featherstone and their team for the preparation of the 4th Conference of the CIBL that was held at Faculdades EST/ Brasil, from October 17 to 21, 2005. **It was the first link between the Identity Group and the CIBL.**

CIBL 2005 . Dr. Lee Wesley .



Under the general coordination of Dr. Lee Wesley, the conference brought together representatives and theologians from various parts of the world to debate essential issues, such as the reconciliation between black identity and the Lutheran confessional heritage.

Group of participants of the 4th CIBL 2005, in São Leopoldo - Brazil



The opening of the 4th Conference featured an important panel of leaders who discussed the world ecumenical and interreligious scenario. Figures of great relevance participated, such as Bishop Mark Hanson (then president of the Lutheran World Federation) and Dr. Walter Altmann (president pastor of the IECLB).

At the end of the 4th Conference of the BLCI, in Brazil, we received a pendant from Reverend Harvard Stephenson. The pendant is a symbol of the Black Movement of Minneapolis, USA. On the wooden piece, a heart in the shape of the African continent and a cross are carved; the piece is suspended by a beautiful Jamaican silver chain. There are five identical pendants in the world, and one of them is here in Brazil.

Pendant



In continuity, we want to share from the contributions of Pastor Dr. Gunter Bayer Padilha, who will present an overview from his place as a black Lutheran, a theologian who lived with and was a student of Dr. Peter Nash and is now a pastor, Synodal Vice Pastor of the IECLB and one of the leaders who coordinates the activities of the Identity Group.....

2nd Part - Pastor Dr. Gunter Padilha .. 15min

Photo by the Coordination of the Identity Group – Current



Talking about the meaning of being a black person who lives his faith in a Lutheran church has many variants. This is because in the world there are several experiences of community living. In Brazil, being Lutheran is synonymous with being of German descent, or at least, of Europeans. This is so evident that the item "color" is not to be filled in the membership forms.

I do not intend to commit injustices with the historical process of being a Lutheran Church in Brazil, but I consider that the initiatives of the more distant past were insufficient to include black people in community spaces.

Therefore, I choose to consider the year 1996 as the date that IECLB began a reflection and intentional action on its missionary action with black people with the arrival of Pastor Dr. Peter Nash, at Faculdades Est, in São Leopoldo-RS. He organized the Group of Black Men and Women of EST and in the year 2000 the first issue of *Identidade* was published, which became what is currently known as the *IDENTIDADE* Magazine!

Periodic identity!



In the first issue of Identity, Peter Nash wrote: **"Being black in a church that has such deep German roots offers joys and sorrows shared by us."** He goes on to state that the goal of the Identity Group is to focus on joys and, therefore, presents its participation in the conferences of the BLCI:

"I have been privileged to participate in the congresses of the BLCC (International Conference of Black Lutherans) three times. Each time we deal with issues that affect us. 1986 in Harrare, Zimbabwe we asked, Can we be Black and Lutheran? In Bulawayo, Zimbabwe in 1996 we imagined. What is our Lutheran and Black Response to a World that is so divided between Rich and Poor? More currently, in 1999 in Wittenberg, Germany, we try to think, Justification-a Black and Lutheran Look. These are the questions that black theologians are dealing with. Come, let's find our Brazilian and Lutheran blackness?"

After 30 years of the opening of the furrows about being a black and Lutheran person in Brazil, the challenge is sowing. The number of black people who have joined the EST in recent years is minimal. Black people who assume the ministry succumb to structural racism by ceasing to actively participate in the Identity Group, do not get involved in the activities of the Black Consciousness Day celebrations and do not participate in discussions regarding being a black Lutheran person.

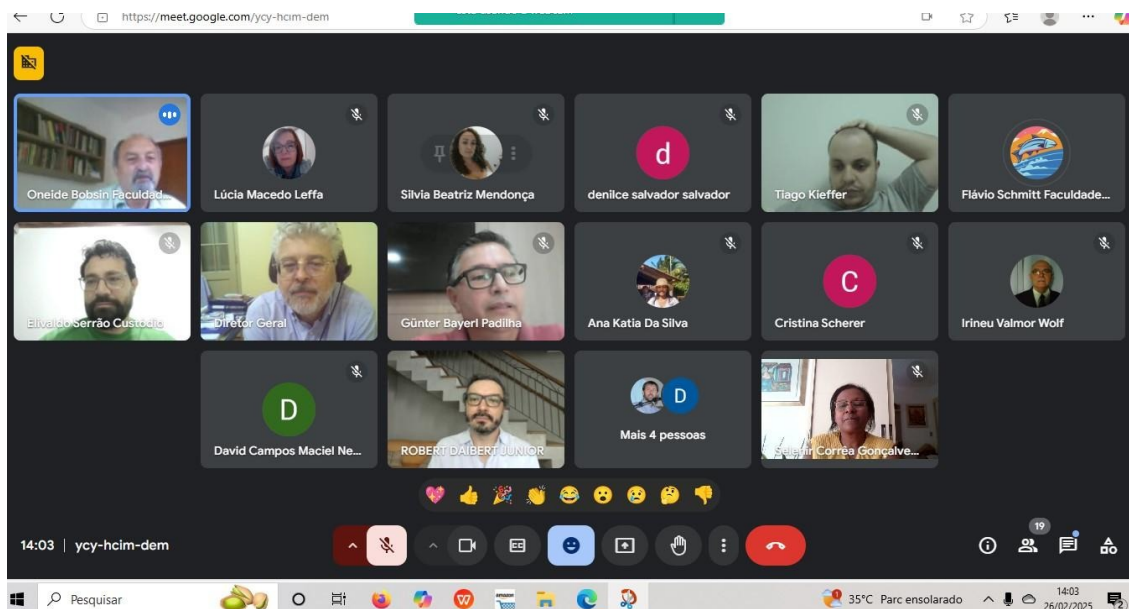
IECLB Negr@s people group



Following Peter Nash's thought, I don't want to talk only about the sorrows, but I want to talk about the joys. The few people who remain in the Identity Group continue to promote the debate on the issues of Lutheran blackness. Last year, the IECLB Black People Group was organized. Every third Thursday of the month, black people meet online to address issues related to being black Lutheran people. We are organizing, for the year 2027, the first national meeting of black people.

I believe that the inclusion of racial justice in the missionary goals of the IECLB is the result of the sowing carried out over these 30 years of existence of the Identity Group (black men and women of the EST). To fulfill this missionary goal, the IECLB, through the Secretary of Community Action and Coordination of Gender, Generation and Ethnicity, is organizing workshops to be offered in the IECLB formations.

Defense of the Doctoral Thesis of Dr. Gunter B. Padilha



The challenge is to continue having research on blackness and Lutheranism at EST. I had the opportunity to complete, in 2025, my doctorate defending the thesis: **(IN)VISIBILITY OF BLACK BODIES: RACISM, WHITENESS AND INTERETHNIC RELATIONS IN THE COMMUNITIES OF THE EVANGELICAL CHURCH OF LUTHERAN CONFESSION IN BRAZIL (IECLB).**

Therefore, the challenge of sowing the future of black people in the IECLB continues to be similar to the one identified by Peter Nash 26 years ago: **to find our Brazilian and Lutheran blackness.** The difference from that time is that the land is already prepared to receive the seeds.

Wrapping up....

We thank God for all this and we thank our brothers and sisters of CIBL who are already in ancestry, the others who are here for believing that we have a commitment in the face of the historical struggles for equal rights, reparations and human dignity for all people, especially our black Lutheran community.

PRESENTATION OF THE PHOTOS