



Central States Synod
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America
God's work. Our hands.



One Body, Many Members

Conversations & Study About Racism

In preparation for the Central States Synod Assembly, 2021

INTRODUCTION:

Why does one need Anti-Racist work? Why do we need to talk about race? Especially if we do not identify as a racist and we have family and friends of color. Why do we need to be bombarded with it and have it be made a "thing"? These are the questions that are asked continuously, rather it is pondered silently or verbalized. For the last couple of years, race has been a hot-button topic and brought up in different formats throughout our life. Race is a "thing" because there are still people marginalized and persecuted by their skin color. Racial injustice is deeply embedded in our culture, causing people to be othered and easily discriminated against. There are even systems in place that are made up to disenfranchise our melanin siblings in Christ. So, as a person made up of this beautiful body of Christ, we are called to stand hand and hand and combat the world's sins. We are called to embrace people from all margins and edges of life and be a witness. To be a Christian is to be a person that does not allow our own bias, judgment, and preconceived notions to get in the way of how we see people because Christ is in the eyes of the people we love, in the eyes of the people we pass in the streets, and in the unknown faces.



I. FISHBOWL ACTIVITY

ONE BODY MANY MEMBERS

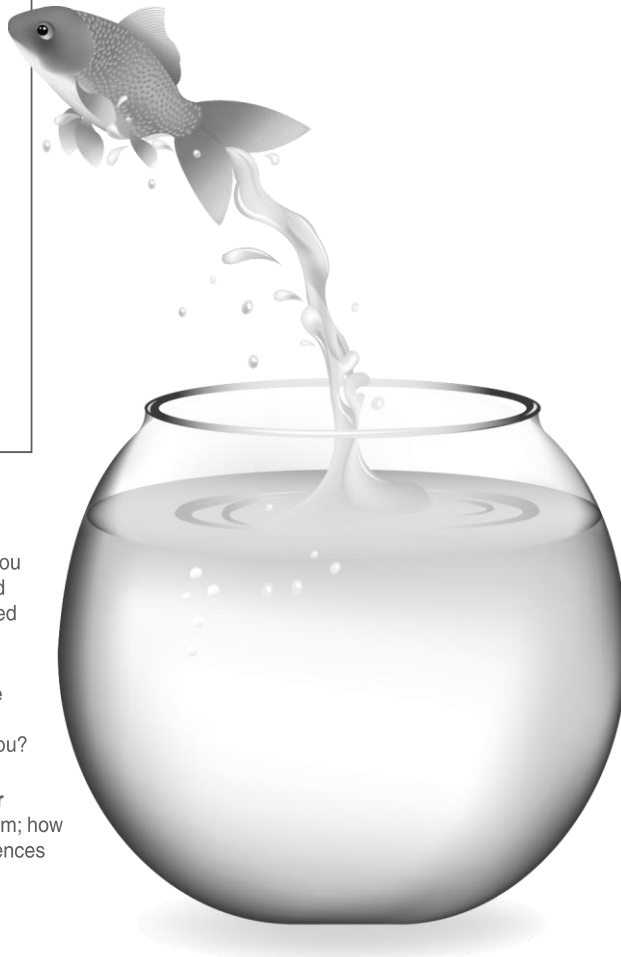
What's in your bowl?

Instructions

- Gather in groups of two or three people
- One person begins to answer questions below
- The other person summarizes what he or she heard the first person say
- Repeat the process until all people have had a chance to tell their story and hear what another heard

Questions

- **Describe your culture** (in whatever way you define that) as it shaped your life and world view in your early years. What values guided your life?
- **Who were "your people" when you were growing up?** How did being a part of your family/group/community shape and form you?
- **Who were people on the outside of your group?** How did you become aware of them; how did you feel toward them; and what experiences influenced your feelings?





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II. COMMON GROUND: ROOTED IN THE GOSPEL

Talking about race can be difficult. We all come with unique experiences and perspectives, yet most of us are embedded in the common cultural waters of the present-day United States. This is a culture that feels quite divided. It can be a culture that often values convincing over curiosity and speaking over listening. When we open ourselves up to listen to one another, to seek understanding and to approach difficult conversations with humility, vulnerability, and empathy, we discover that we have far more in common that we may have thought.

For those in the Church, we all share the common ground of the Gospel. This biblical foundation roots us not in our own plans for the human community, but in God's dream of the ***beloved community***.

As we begin the conversation, can we all agree on these five Gospel tenets?

FIVE GOSPEL TENETS

1. All people are created in the image of God; therefore, the image of God is found in all people.

God created humanity in God's own image, in the divine image God created them. - Genesis 1:27a

2. Racism is sin and opposes God's will for human community.

As many of you as were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus. - Galatians 3:27-28

3. In the Church, we all want God's dream of abundant life, the beloved community, to become a reality for all people.

I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly. - John 10:10b



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4. Where barriers and divisions exist, God wants us to be reconciled.

But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. For he is our peace; in his flesh he has made both groups into one and has broken down the dividing wall, that is, the hostility between us. He has abolished the law with its commandments and ordinances, that he might create in himself one new humanity in place of the two, thus making peace, and might reconcile both groups to God in one body through the cross, thus putting to death that hostility through it. -

Ephesians 2:13-15

All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation; that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting the message of reconciliation to us. - 2 Corinthians 5:18-19

5. When the Church is composed of only similar people, we are not at our best and we are missing the fullness of the gifts of the Holy Spirit.

Indeed, the body does not consist of one member but of many. If the foot would say, "Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body," that would not make it any less a part of the body. And if the ear would say, "Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body," that would not make it any less a part of the body. If the whole body were an eye, where would the hearing be? If the whole body were hearing, where would the sense of smell be? But as it is, God arranged the members in the body, each one of them, as he chose.

- 1 Corinthians 12:14-18

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. Does everyone agree with these five tenets? Discuss any areas of disagreement or questions.
 2. Notice where any of these may evoke strong emotion or reaction in you. Do any particularly resonate with you? Do any make you uncomfortable? Why do you think that is?
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III. DEFINING RACISM

DISCUSS:

How do you define “racism?” How is this similar or different from “prejudice?”

READ:

Racism is an indoctrinated system that places one group of people under another based on race. It is a social construct that creates a space for people of color to be oppressed and marginalized and underserved from their white counterparts. We sometimes think of *racism* in terms of individual attitudes or actions, but individual attitudes and actions would more accurately be called *prejudice*. Racism is what happens when prejudice meets power.

Racism = Prejudice + Power

Racism = Prejudice + Power

Any group or individual can hold prejudice, but without power, the scope of that prejudice may be limited. When one group has authority over the oppressed and influences their peers, they can easily accept bias, or even hatred based on a person's color, resulting in systemic racism.

The ELCA Social Statement: Freed In Christ: Race, Ethnicity, and Culture, 1993, states:

“Racism—a mix of power, privilege, and prejudice—is sin, a violation of God’s intention for humanity. The resulting racial, ethnic, or cultural barriers deny the truth that all people are God’s creatures and, therefore, persons of dignity. Racism fractures and fragments both church and society.

When we speak of racism as though it were a matter of personal attitudes only, we underestimate it. We have only begun to realize the complexity of the sin, which spreads like an infection through the entire social system. Racism infects and affects everyone, with an impact that varies according to race, ethnicity, or culture, and other factors such as gender or economic situation.”

The Guide to the Social Statement further expounds on the definition of racism:

“**Structural racism** refers to the reinforcing pattern (or system) of personal attitudes, individual behavior, cultural beliefs, historical memory, customs of social groups, working of institutions in



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society, and the policies of governments that has allowed the privilege associated with 'whiteness' and the disadvantage of 'color' to endure and adapt over time.”

As this description suggests, structural racism has three dimensions:

- **Institutional** – ways in which institutional policies and practices create different outcomes for different racial groups, creating advantages for whites and oppression and disadvantage for people from groups classified as non-white
- **Cultural** – behaviors that reflect a worldview that both explicitly and implicitly attributes value and normalcy to white people and whiteness, but devalues, stereotypes, and labels people of color as “other,” different, less than, or renders them invisible
- **Individual** – beliefs, attitudes, and actions of individuals that support or perpetuate racism”

IV. Discussion Questions

- How does our understanding of, and work of dismantling racism change when we see racism not only on an individual level, but as structural racism?
- Can you think of and share examples of structural racism?
- How does society affect the way you see people?
- How are you able to see your own bias in the world in which you live?
- What steps will you take to enhance your awareness of systemic racism in your daily life?

FURTHER LEARNING & GROWTH

Short Videos:

- [Racism has a cost for everyone – Heather McGhee](#)
- [What is Systemic Racism – Dr. Tony Evans](#)
- [Let's get to the root of racial injustice – Megan Ming](#)
- [Uncomfortable conversations with a black man – Emmanuel Acho](#)
- [Explained: white privilege, systemic racism, and implicit bias – Dr. Peggy McIntosh on NBC10 Philadelphia](#)

Podcast:

- [NPR Code Switch](#)
- [Nice White Parents](#) (Episode 3 in particular)
- [Scene on Radio, Series “Seeing White”](#)
- [1619, The New York Times](#)
- [Small Doses with Amanda Seales](#)



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- [For Collard Girls](#) (narrated by Black Female Pastors in the ELCA)
- [Black People with Too Many White Friends](#)
- [Silence is Not an Option CNN](#)
- [Yo, is this Racist](#)
- [The United States of Anxiety](#)
- [Black History Year](#)
- [NPR Throughline](#)
- [Black History for White People](#)

Film:

- **13th** - Documentary on the 13th Amendment and mass incarceration
- **Just Mercy** - True story of Bryon Stephenson, lawyer who founded Equal Justice Initiative
- **Selma** - Story of Dr. Martin Luther King's march from Selma to Montgomery.
- I am Not Your Negro
- The Black Power Mixtape 1967-1975
- Black Panther
- The Butler
- 12 Years of Slave
- Becoming
- 4 Little Girls
- Get Out
- BlacKkKlansman
- King in the Wilderness
- Olympic Pride, American Prejudice
- Dance Dreams: Hot Chocolate Nutcracker
- A Ballerina's Tale
- Dark Girls
- Dark Girls 2

Book:

- *Stamped*, Ibram X. Kendi
- *What's Faith Got to Do With It?: Black Bodies/Christian Souls*, Kelly Brown Douglas
- *Dear Church: A Love Letter from a Black Preacher to the Whitest Denomination*, Lenny Duncan
- *The Cross and the Lynching Tree*, James Cohn



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- *Womanist Ethics and the Cultural Production of Evil*, Emilie M. Townes
- *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness*, Michelle Alexander
- *Just Mercy: A Story of Justice and Redemption*, Bryan Stevenson
- *Waking Up White, and Finding Myself in the Story of Race*, Debby Irving
- *The Black Christ*, Kelly Brown Douglas
- *Bonhoeffer's Black Jesus*, Reggie Williams
- *White Women's Christ and Black Women's Jesus: Feminist Christology and Womanist Response*, Jacquelyn Grant
- *A Troubling in My Soul: Womanist Perspectives on Evil and Suffering*, Emilie Townes
- *Black Theology & Black Power*, James Cohn
- *Blacks in the Bible*, James H. Warden Jr.
- *The Curse of Ham: Race and Slavery in Early Judaism, Christianity, and Islam*, David M. Goldenberg
- *The Black Presence in The Bible*, Walter Arthur McCray
- *The Color of Law: A Forgotten History of How Our Government Segregated America*, Richard Rothstein