

Submitted by Caitlyn Reinders on behalf of the Anti-Racism Working Group.

In June 202, the Synod Council made a statement in response to the killing of George Floyd and the ongoing racial injustice that is infecting our country. In the statement, the synod council made a list of commitments for themselves and the synod to continue the fight against racism.

One of those commitments to was to create “an anti-racism working group in our synod to hold us accountable in living out the commitments stated above; developing and/or lifting up resources for anti-racism training, education, and advocacy across our synod; and seeking ways to engage our synod in positive action toward systemic change.”

The Synod Council went to work to create criteria for the members of this Anti-Racism Working Group. They chose to invite our current members: Pastor Mauricio Vieira, Northeast Conference (St. Paul, Chatsworth), Amie Hester, Northern Conference (First English, Peoria), Arlis Dittmer, Northwest Conference (Trinity, Carthage), Pastor Paul Waterman, Southern Conference (Epiphany, Carbondale), Dr. Doris Robinson, West Central Conference (Faith, Jacksonville), and also included Cynthia Davis as Synod Council Liaison (American, Gibson City), Bishop John Roth, Central/Southern Illinois Synod, Pastor Ken Tegmeier, and myself.

This committee has a lot of hard work ahead of us. The group started building our foundation by learning about what the synod has already done, and what the ELCA has done churchwide. This included researching and discussing the ELCA Social Statement - Freed In Christ: Race Ethnicity and Culture, as well the accompanying documents. Since it was adopted at Churchwide Assembly in 1993, we noted that there were things that would apply to our congregations today, but also noticed how much the church and society has changed since then so there were many areas that were missing or could be updated to match the ongoing discussions we are having now.

We are now working on our next steps. Our hope is that we can help this synod be a welcoming community for all people, no matter their race or ethnicity, while also supporting and equipping congregations for the meaningful, but difficult, discussions that lie ahead.

One of the first things we are working on is assembling resources for the commemoration of the Emanuel Nine. In 2015, these members of Emanuel AMC Church were murdered by Dylann Roof, and baptised and confirmed member of the ELCA. As ELCA congregations, we have the opportunity to mourn the lives that were lost that day, confess the sins of racism and white supremacy, and repent as a whole church body to work towards anti-racism.

I will say I am very thankful to have such a dedicated and passionate group to work with, and that the synod leadership is really taking this issue seriously. I have already learned so much from this group, and am excited to see how this group will support the whole synod moving forward.