

Talking About Racism

A November 2015 news release from the ELCA stated, "As racism remains an enduring crisis in the United States, the Rev. Elizabeth A. Eaton, presiding bishop of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA), is continuing her call to the 3.7 million member church to address the complexity and implications..." The following resources are just a few of the many helpful resources available for congregations, small groups, and youth groups to examine more closely these complexities and implications. What resources are you using? Please share them on the synod Facebook page ([Northeastern Pennsylvania Synod of the ELCA](#)).

1. [ELCA SOCIAL STATEMENT](#)

As a starting place for conversations about racism, check out the ELCA social statement [Freed in Christ: Race, Ethnicity, and Culture](#). This statement expresses the ELCA's calling to celebrate culture and ethnicity. This calling commits the ELCA to confront racism, to engage in public leadership, witness and deliberation on these matters, and to advocate for justice and fairness for all people. The statement is grounded in the conviction that the church has been gathered together in the joyful freedom of the reign of God as announced by and embodied in Jesus. That reign has not come in its fullness, but the message of God's yes to the world breaks down all dividing walls as we live into that promise. A study guide accompanies the social statement.

2. **BOOK STUDY - WAKING UP WHITE (Debby Irving)**

The synod staff recently studied Debby Irving's book, *Waking Up White*. This book is Irving's personal story of awakening to her own racism, how racism has been built into our societal structures, and how she has benefited from it. Her book is a helpful resource for white people to understand the insidiousness of racism and their complicity in it. Discussion questions follow each chapter. This resource is appropriate for senior high youth as well as adults.

3. **BOOK STUDY – AMERICA'S ORIGINAL SIN: RACISM, WHITE PRIVILEGE, AND THE BRIDGE TO A NEW AMERICA (Jim Wallis)**

From the book jacket: "In *America's Original Sin*, Wallis offers a prophetic and deeply personal call to action in overcoming the racism so ingrained in American society. He speaks candidly to Christians--particularly white Christians--urging them to cross a new bridge toward racial justice and healing.

Whenever divided cultures and gridlocked power structures fail to end systemic sin, faith communities can help lead the way to grassroots change. Probing yet positive, biblically rooted yet highly practical, this book shows people of faith how they can work together to overcome the embedded racism in America, galvanizing a movement to cross the bridge to a multiracial church and a new America.”

**4. DOCUMENT – [WHITE PRIVILEGE:UNPACKING THE INVISIBLE KNAPSACK](#)
(Peggy McIntosh)**

This helpful document written by Peggy McIntosh in 1989 is still relevant today. It provides a way of thinking about the meaning of “white privilege” and is a good conversation starter for groups.

5. MOVIE – *13th*

A description from Wikipedia: “*13th* is a 2016 American documentary by director [Ava DuVernay](#). The film explores the ‘intersection of race, justice and mass incarceration in the United States;’ it is titled after the [Thirteenth Amendment to the United States Constitution](#), which freed the slaves and prohibited slavery (unless as punishment for a crime).”

This is a thought-provoking and disturbing film suitable for senior high youth and adults. A helpful [study guide](#) is available online.

6. VARIOUS – [ELCA RESOURCES](#)

The ELCA website has a variety of resources for addressing racism. One of the resources, *Troubling the Waters for Healing of the Church*, was developed to assist white congregational members to understand the role of white privilege and internalized white superiority. Check out the other resources listed on this website as well.

7. EVENT – [The White Privilege Conference](#)

In 2016 the Youth, Young Adult, and Family Ministry Team of the Synod received a grant to help young people learn about racism and how they could help heal the wounds of racism. Several of them attended the “White Privilege Conference” which was held in Philadelphia. The next conference will be held in Grand Rapids, Michigan from April 4-April 7, 2018. Take a team of folks from your congregation.

8. ORGANIZATION – [Race Forward](#)

From the website: "Race Forward's mission is to build awareness, solutions, and leadership for racial justice by generating transformative ideas, information, and experiences. We define racial justice as the systematic fair treatment of people of all races, resulting in equitable opportunities and outcomes for all and we work to advance racial justice through media, research, and leadership development."

The vision statement: "Race Forward envisions a vibrant world in which people of all races create, share and enjoy resources and relationships equitably, unleashing individual potential, embracing collective responsibility and generating global prosperity. We strive to be a leading values-driven social justice enterprise where the culture and commitment created by our multi-racial and diverse staff supports individual and organizational excellence and sustainability."

Check out the [website](#) for all kinds of resources including links to training. A small group of youth and adults from our synod attended a training event in 2016 and found it helpful.

9. EDUCATION – Women of the ELCA: [The Level Playing Field](#)

Women of the ELCA have done some good work addressing racism. *The Level Playing Field* is a helpful program that uses an activity called The Level Playing Field to help people make the connection between racism and real life. Hopefully it will make people see that to be anti-(against) racism is a good thing!

10. BOOK - *The Church Enslaved: A Spirituality of Racial Reconciliation* (Tony Campolo and Michael Battle)

This book is available through the [Northeastern PA Synod Resource Center](#). It exposes the sad history and present realities of racism in the church and then lifts up a vision of church and society without racism. The writers directly challenge Christians to a deeper spirituality, enabling them to resume leadership in overcoming America's legacy of racial division.

11. BIBLE STUDY - *The Story of Peter & Cornelius: An Anti-Racism Bible Study*

This booklet (a Bible study) was published by the Women of the ELCA is based on Acts 10. The resource consists of an introduction, five sessions with questions for reflection on a passage of Scripture, and a closing prayer. This resource is available through the [Northeastern Pa Synod Resource Center](#).