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NORTHEASTERN PENNSYLVANIA SYNOD
MONTHLY NEWSLETTER

Engaging the Stranger Within: The Northeastern PA Synod's Racial Justice Work

Growing up in the American South, much of what was taught about racism dealt with history- slavery, annexation, Jim Crow, and integration. What (and how) we were taught in school, and the ways our community and churches remained unofficially segregated were "just the way things were." There was a disconnect between the way things were and *why*. Racism was something that had happened, and we were living in the status quo of the Civil Rights Movement. And with that history focused so heavily in the South, it was like racism was somehow localized and intensified in that region, and we were more directly impacted by its legacy.

The privilege of my seminary formation and exposure to different contexts have shown just how limited my awareness of racism's pervasiveness extends. Racism is a part of every community, congregation, home, and heart. It isn't localized more intensely in one place or another. Our communities, workplaces, and churches in Northeastern Pennsylvania face the same legacy and challenges of confronting racist prejudices and practices, even if they expose themselves in different ways.

Cultural isolationism, unawareness of our past and current exploitation of the Lenni Lenape and Delaware peoples, emphasis on the immigrant heritage of our congregations while dismissing immigrant communities across the street, and an apathy to acts of violence against persons of color permeates our pews. Confronting personal, local, regional, and national instances of racial prejudice is as important now as ever. The gospel gives us the assurance that the way things are is not how God calls us to be. To get from here to there, we need help learning what we don't know, and hearing firsthand from our neighbors how we can work together to resist racism.

Through your Mission Support generosity, our Synod has the opportunity to walk together in more intentional ways as we learn about our communities' and congregations' complicity in racial prejudice and work for racial justice. Loving the land we steward in Northeastern Pennsylvania Synod and the people who occupy it, and healing the hurt of our ancestral and contemporary practices, begins with engaging the stranger we do not wish to see in ourselves so that we can better engage the stranger we do not currently see in our neighbors.

Pastor Jennifer Hall and Pastor Samantha Drennan at the 2024 youth pre-gathering event representing the Racial Justice Team

Racial Justice Boundary Training for rostered leaders, Synod Council and Staff, and congregational lay leaders has been an invaluable resource for beginning this work in our Synod. In January, we collaborated with Metropolitan Community Church of the Lehigh Valley and our own Synod's LGBTQ Task Force at the Lutheran Center for a day of worship and action called MLK Jr. Day of Prayer and Service. Partnership with Lutheran Advocacy Ministry of Pennsylvania (LAMPa), Liberty Lutheran's MLK Day of Service, and local ecumenical and interfaith agencies committed to the course of justice in our neighborhood are but a few crucial ways we are already naming and confronting racism together as Christ's church, along with our support of the ELCA's Truth and Healing Movement. All of these endeavors are bolstered by your Mission Support giving, and reflect our shared commitment to growing together as disciples of Jesus who are gospel filled and Spirit led.

Just as the Lord works righteousness and justice for all who are oppressed (Psalm 103:6), so too does God charge the people with upholding the cause of justice for those most vulnerable (Deuteronomy 16:19-20; 24:17). To get involved in our shared work of racial justice and reconciliation, reach out to a member of our Synod's Racial Justice Team, participate in local or regional educational opportunities with partnering colleges and universities, confront practices that reinforce barriers based on race and ethnicity, and have conversations with other disciples in your congregation about how your baptized community can work for justice and peace in in the world.

Submitted by: The Rev. Brandon M. Heavner, Weisenberg- New Tripoli, NEPA Synod Racial Justice Team

DID YOU KNOW that your Mission Support helps fund areas of the synod like this one and many other important initiatives? Your contributions are making a significant impact and helping others grow in faith, supporting the synod's directions of Growing Young, Gaining Strength, and Going Beyond Death to Life, along with the values of Loving, Healing, and Engaging like Jesus. To learn more, visit godslove.org/missionsupport.

All Northeastern PA Synod rostered leaders (pastors, deacons, and synodically-authorized lay leaders) are required to have Anti-Racism at least once every three years.

Training will be presented by The Rev. Carla Christopher.

9:30AM TO 3:00PM
LUTHERAN CENTER
2354 GROVE ROAD, ALLENTOWN
For more information & how to register, visit
godslove.org/racial-justice-training