

## Approved by the Racial Justice Task Force – 9/15/2020

### Upstate NY Synod Resolution on Racism

The murders of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, and Tony McDade have called us to a renewed reckoning with our complicity in the evils of systemic racism and white body supremacy. We must acknowledge as a Church that these deaths are, sadly, only the most recent chapters in the ongoing story of our centuries old personal and communal complicity. The time is long past for the Church to proactively reckon with the spiritual disease of racism that has long infected its witness and mission - not just in words, but also with concrete acts of repentance and reparation.

#### **+WHEREAS-**

1.CREATION: In the Beginning, God said, “let us make human beings according to our likeness” - declaring that human worth and dignity is determined by God alone, and not by any human ideology, culture or system; and

2.SIN: Racism in all its forms, hereafter referred to as “white supremacy,” violates Jesus’ great commandment to love God (by making whiteness, rather than God’s grace, the source of human value) and to love neighbor (by promoting and enabling discrimination and violence against BIPOC (Black, Indigenous and People of Culture) persons);

3.COVENANT: The ELCA (and indeed, the entire Lutheran tradition since its inception and in its various forms) has been disobedient in its call to be the Body of Christ through its past and ongoing complicity in the false Gospel of White Supremacy through its active and passive participation in the oppression of BIPOC persons both within the communion and throughout the world;

4.PROPHETS: Jesus’ ministry in the Gospels, the Hebrew prophets, the 95 theses of Martin Luther and our liturgical tradition all place the call to “metanoia” - confession, repentance, continual conversion and active reparation for past wrongs - at the start of, and at the heart of, the Christian life;

5.MISSION: Our baptismal vows call us individually and as a church to “live among God’s faithful people; hear the word of God and share in the Lord’s Supper; proclaim the good news of God in Christ through word and deed; serve all people following the example of Jesus; and strive for justice and peace in all the earth.”

Therefore, we the Synod Council, representing all congregations, ministries and constituent members of the Upstate NY Synod of the ELCA, therefore commits to the following resolutions:

#### **+RESOLVED...**

GOSPEL: We unequivocally proclaim that BIPOC persons have always been a part of Christ’s Body, and in addition to standing with them in their pain, we also commit to celebrating and cultivating the particular gifts, joys and concerns that only they can provide to the thriving of the Church and its mission.

1.TRUTH: We condemn racism and white supremacy in all forms as a heresy and false gospel and declare that they have no place in any ELCA congregation or ministry - or, indeed, in any Christian congregation or ministry;

2.CONFESSION: We confess our own personal and communal complicity in the heresy of white supremacy, and ask the forgiveness both of God in Jesus Christ, and of the peoples of the African and Asian Diaspora and Indigenous Peoples, whom we have gravely harmed;

3.METANOIA:: We call all Christian Churches, and especially those of our Synodical communion, to immediate public confession and repentance of our complicity in the systemic oppression and murder of our fellow human beings;

4.DISCIPLESHIP: We confess and insist anti-racism work is simply part of the life-long work of discipleship, and not merely a separate (and therefore optional) social or political interest, requiring immediate action and sustained commitment throughout our entire lives as Christians living in the United States of America;

5.REFORMATION: We immediately (re)commit as a synod to the following actions and practices, acknowledging that they are a starting point for life-long conversion, not merely a check-list of remedies:

- Triennial Synod Council and Staff anti-racism training

- Supporting the work the of the UNYS Racial Justice Task Force
- rePentance: as mentioned above, participate both in the confession and the action of repentance
- Prayer - weaving not only the concerns, but also the gifts and joys of BIPOC persons, into our liturgical and formational life
- Proclamation, we preach the Gospel truth as mentioned above; we develop and/or make possible for training in the theology of anti-racism for ordained and lay leaders; listening to *BIPOC* theologians and teachers
- reParation - we, as the UNYS, pro-actively investigate how this Synod in particular has harmed BIPOC, and realign resources, policies and discipline, accordingly
- Preparation - training, formation, education in our life of faith; incorporation of anti-racism curriculum into Confirmation, youth and adult formation, as well as leadership training and candidacy
- Partnership - ally ship with traditionally BIPOC religious communities and organizations
- Public Witness - we will advocate for policies in local communities, New York State and our country that work to dismantle racism and help to make possible the flourishing of life for BIPOC persons
- Polity - seeking to place BIPOC into places of leadership, authority and formation in our synod

We acknowledge this work is ongoing, life-long, and multi-faceted. It will take time, intentional efforts and the movement of the Holy Spirit to see it permeate the culture of our church and the diverse contexts of our communion. We know it will not be easy. And, we accept with humility and hope the joyful work of joining with Christ in the restoration of the Kin-dom, and ask for the grace and the love to see it through. It will not be easy. But it is faithful, and thus, will restore all of us, together, to the fullness of the Gospel which is our only salvation.

Sola Dei Gloria.

## **ETHOS SESSIONS\* (can and will be revised, especially under direction of BIPOC and Womanist voices)**

*The Synodical Statement on Anti-Racism is meant to be a starting point, not a fait accompli. Like the Catechisms of Martin Luther, we hope it will provide a framework for thinking through what it means to do the hard but joyful work of actively repenting of white supremacy, both individually and communally. We also hope it will serve as a roadmap for preachers and teachers to begin forming congregations into a new "ethos" of anti-racism, thus equipping membership to likewise go and become more theologically informed and spiritually transformed agents of anti-Racism in their contexts.*

*The Ethos theology will seek to show those skeptical of "social justice" that in fact, the concerns and ideas of BIPOC and Womanist voices are not only consummate with Lutheran tradition, but in fact, necessary correctives and in some cases, even more foundational than a limited, contextual tradition like the German-Scandinavian tradition we assume is normative. We need to privilege Womanist and BIPOC voices, with Lutheran concepts serving as a Rosetta stone for translation. In no way should we*

*Each Ethos video will be around 10 minutes, fleshing out the scriptural and theological movements behind each of the "Whereas" statements. They will use a creative, collaborative and easy-to-digest clarifying approach with a congregational audience in mind. These videos could be shown in a Zoom meeting or before a congregation to help members understand how deeply anti-racism work is woven into the fabric of scripture and tradition. These videos will incorporate the insights of BIPOC and Womanist theologians and be led by members of the Task Force for Racial Justice. We hope they will serve as a mini course on the theology and practice of embracing our calls to be prophetic anti-Racists in the midst of a deeply racialized world.*

### **PROPOSED ETHOS VIDEOS**

**0.Intro:** Race as Theological Issue

**1.Creation:** Communal, Collaborative, Diverse

**2.Sin Against God:** Racism as Systemic Idolatry and False Justification

**2.5. Sin Against Neighbor:** Racism as Systemic Evil

**3.Covenant Broken:** Brief History of Lutheran/Christian Complicity in White Supremacy

**4.Confession/Prophets:** Repentance as Continual, Holistic Conversion

**5.Mission:** The Church's Call to "Tikkun Olam" - Repairers of the Breach

**6.Joy:** *I also suggest several additional videos celebrating the gifts, joys, resources and centrality of BIPOC persons to the Christian tradition - Adrienne Maree Brown and Barbara Holmes as main inspirations for me here*

### **ETHOS VIDEO SYNOPSES:**

**E-0. "Intro: Race as Theological Issue:"** Racism is too often portrayed as "getting political," as something that happens outside the church, or as "social theory" imported in. This session will help set out some basic terms and show how Christianity helped create "racism," but also why we need to care about it as those called to Love God and Neighbor. Lutheran/Germanic/Scandinavian is also a "contextual theology," not normative or superior in any way.  
**DE-CENTERING WHITENESS - J Cameron Karter - Race: A Theological Issue**

**E-1 - Creation and Origins:** Following Rev Kwame Pitts, we'll look at the Genesis account of creation as the foundation of human dignity and of anti-racism work. Creation in Genesis is a collaborative act built on, celebrating and upholding difference and diversity, greater than the white cis-heteronormative construct its been reduced to by the hierarchy. We will also lay out what "BIPOC" means. We need a bigger vision of the cosmos than our idols provide!- **Barbara Holmes - Race and the Cosmos**

**E-2. - Sin Pt 1 - Against God:** Far from overly focusing on "the Fall," we will use the two-fold love commandment to show the corrupting nature of White Supremacy. Part One will focus on "Love God," and how justification by faith/grace in Lutheran tradition focuses us on receiving value from God alone, not from any work, including race, class, ethnicity. Our justification comes from the Lynched One, Jesus, who identifies with the oppressed. **James Come - Cross and the Lynching Tree**

**E-2 - Sin Pt 2 - Against Neighbor:** A white God leads us to harm non-white persons. This video will further unpack the term "White Supremacy" in its various nefarious forms, beyond "I'm not a racist!" by highlighting systemic nature

of the evil of racism and the ways White persons in particular benefit from it at the expense of BIPOC persons. So basically, the “privilege/white fragility” convo. **Source?**

**E-3: Covenant:** As the people of God, Church is called to be a witness to the nations. Instead, we have actively participate and led the world INTO white supremacy. Starting with the anti-Semitism of Luther and the Doctrine of Discovery, Slave-Holder Religion in America, and current ELCA conditions, we’ll show how the church needs to own its history in order to repent and change. It’s not just Nazi Germany 100 years ago. It’s today too. **White Too Long**

**E-4: REPENTANCE/PROPHETS-** Jesus started his ministry with a call to metanoia. So did Martin Luther. It’s an inescapable part of our heritage and is central to Sunday liturgy. But it means more than a quick communal confession. It means a whole-life transformation, including reparations and systemic change for the sake of restoring relationships and faithfully witnessing to the Kin-dom of God. Rom12, 2Cor5 **Scripture and Liturgy**

**E-5: Mission “Repairers of the Breach:”** Isaiah 55/etc and Rev 21-22 show the church’s mission to be the same as the Jewish sense of calling - to a restoration and healing of the brokenness in the world. It is central to our baptismal call and our identity as church. We’ll need to engage this work around White Supremacy especially - which means, yes, getting involved in political and policy matters, social justice and protesting, and church reform. **Poor Peoples’ Campaign, others**

**E-6: BIPOC Joy!** - BIPOC people are not an add-on or a mission. They have always been part of the collaborative shaping of God’s people, even and in spite of systemic exclusion. Highlights ways that BIPOC practices, music, theology, liturgy, challenges and insights have made the Church what it is - de-center Whiteness and discover the joy of being de-centered! **Adrienne Maree Brown, Pleasure Activism, Barbara Holes Joy Unspeakable**