



Minneapolis Area Synod  
of the ELCA

# Faithful Steps

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A Step-by-Step Guide for  
Congregations starting to engage  
in Racial Justice

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# What is *Faithful Steps*?

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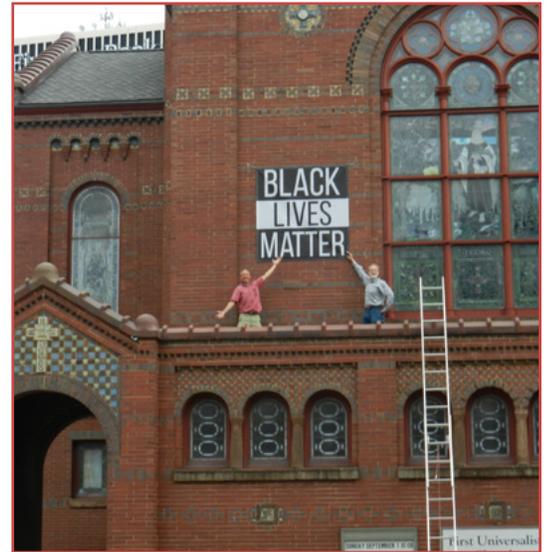
Have you and/or your congregation recently felt called to dedicate some amount of time, energy, and resources to the cause of racial justice? Have you been asking yourself, what does that even look like in a congregational setting? How do we get started?

This guide was developed with the purpose of answering some of those questions and to provide a general process for Minneapolis Area Synod congregations in the early stages of racial justice work.

## And this is what *Faithful Steps* is NOT

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- One-size-fits-all - Each congregation has a different context. These steps, which have worked in other settings may not work as they are with your congregation.
- A Time Saver - Racism is adaptable and how it looks and behaves changes all the time. Which means the work is continuous and ongoing. The only time you've potentially saved is the time it took to do all the research yourself.
- Easy - Racial justice work is hard. It takes a lot of time and energy and commitment. It can cause conflict and be very emotionally taxing for individuals and communities. It will be hard.
- The Solution - If you go through this process completing every step mentioned, the problem of racism will not be resolved, in your congregation or in the broader community. Your congregation will not suddenly be more diverse, nor will it instantly be a more welcoming place to our BIPOC neighbors. It is a step in the right direction.



## Things to Remember

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- As Lutherans, we are called into the work of racial justice:

*“Little children, let us love, not in word or speech, but in truth and action.”*

- 1 John 3:18

*“We expect our leadership to name the sin of racism and lead us in repentance of it.”*

- ELCA Social Statement,  
*Freed in Christ: Race,  
Ethnicity, and Culture*

- You are never alone in your process. There are synod staff, community leaders, pastors, organizations, and other congregations to help you along.

# Step One:

## Build Your Team

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Building a solid team of leaders is the key to doing meaningful racial justice work in a congregation. Racial justice work—especially in majority white congregations—is very taxing. The load is too heavy for only one or two individuals to carry alone. Below are some tips for starting a functional team.

- Remember that **this is a team**; choose folks who will work well with others.
- **Team size:** minimum 3 lay leaders.
- **Invite** Black, Indigenous, and/or POC (BIPOC) leaders, but allow them to say no! (Note: it is difficult to do RJ work in a majority white congregation as a BIPOC leader). If your team is majority white, or all white, that's okay! The system of racism was built by and for white folks; it is the job of white folks to dismantle it.
- Make sure that there are at least a few leaders who are **consistent and dedicated** to keep the group working.
- **Get the support** of church leadership; the pastor(s) should be on board, even if they don't regularly participate. Church Council should also be informed and generally supportive of the team.
- In addition to getting support from leadership, this team will be more functional **with a budget**. A church committed to racial justice will invest in their team!



Calvary Lutheran Church's Racial Justice Team. Shared with permission.

- The team should have a **concrete mission and set goals** early on. It will set the course for the group and inform who you invite in. It is good to know what you are inviting or being invited people into.



## Step Two: Choose Your Liaison

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In 2016 the Minneapolis Area Synod passed a resolution on racial injustice. The resolution had several requests for congregations in it: 1) talk about racial justice, 2) write a racial justice mission statement, and 3) choose a member to be the congregational racial justice liaison.



### What is a Liaison?

One member of the racial justice team should be the designated Liaison. This person adds their name to the [synod's list](#). The Liaison will receive communications from the synod regarding events and resources that can be shared with rest of the team and/or the wider congregation. The main information they will be receiving is invitations to Liaison Gatherings.

### What are Liaison Gatherings?

Liaison Gatherings are bi-monthly 1.5 hour sessions hosted by the synod's Unite Table. These events have different racial justice topics, resources, guest speakers, leadership development activities, etc. that empower the Liaisons and can be translated back into their congregations. It is also an opportunity to connect with other RJ

teams around the synod. This is not a closed meeting. The Liaison will be the touch point for the synod, but the whole team (anyone really!) is invited to attend and participate.

### Who should be our Liaison?

The best Liaisons are individuals who:

- are passionate about Racial Justice,
- are open to learning and growing,
- are respected leaders in the congregation,
- have good communication skills (i.e. will promptly forward event details to the rest of the team), and
- can commit to being present and participating as often as possible.

A more detailed "job description" can be found on the [synod website](#).





## Step Three: Identify Your Goals

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As with any team, having shared goals is really important for doing effective work. The team should decide what their function will be by identifying their goals.

Each racial justice team is unique to a specific congregation and community context. The goals of the team should be defined keeping that in mind.

The main areas that a team focuses on falls into three areas: internal team goals, congregational goals, and community goals.

### Internal Team Goals

Team goals are generally focused on one or more of the following:

- leadership development of team members - trainings, etc.
- cultural competency work as individuals and a team
- intentionally examining personal unconscious biases

### Congregational Goals

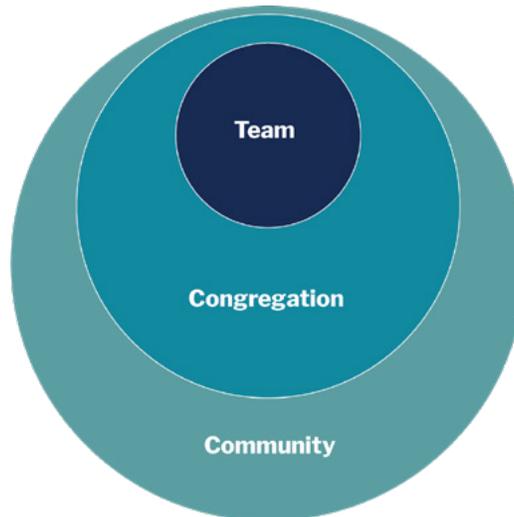
Congregational goals involve the whole congregation and is usually focused on one or more of the following:

- hosting educational events (i.e. movie nights and discussions, book studies, etc.)
- Writing (and then getting the congregation to pass) a Racial Justice Mission Statement

### Community Goals

Community goals put the internal pieces into action with goals like:

- connecting with local diverse community organizations or congregations in partnership
- engaging in local organizing and advocacy work that is meaningful to racially marginalized communities
- simply being present, active listeners to the voices of leaders of color in your context





## Step Four: Internal Work

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Every congregational Racial Justice Team should spend some time on internal work. *Internal Work* is the work the team members put in to become good anti-racists and help the congregation be better at cultural competency. This work is essential because it helps prepare individuals and the congregation to be in healthy relationship with their racially and culturally diverse neighbors.

### **The Intercultural Development Inventory (IDI)**

The IDI is a helpful tool in learning about our own understanding of culture and how we can grow in our cultural competency. The synod has several Qualified Administrators of the IDI. Want to learn more? Contact Steve Bonesho: [pastor@livingjoylutheran.org](mailto:pastor@livingjoylutheran.org).

### **Cultural Audit**

Some congregations have paid professional auditors to come and examine the inner workings of their congregation to determine where and how the congregation is culturally exclusive. Everything from the constitution to the art hanging on the walls could be included.

### **ELCA Social Statements**

The ELCA has social statements on a diverse array of Racial Justice topics and they all have study guides to go with them. These are helpful because it gives folks a better understanding of how the broader church is talking about these issues. They are also free and can all be found on the [ELCA website](#).

### **Engaging with Media**

Giving people a chance to learn about others' experience in the world and reflect together is a powerful tool. There is a plethora of material out there and they come in many different mediums: books, movies, podcasts, field trips, serieses, and more. Try this [resource list](#) for lots of ideas!





# Step Five: Racial Justice Mission Statement

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## Steps of the Process

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1. The RJ team (or a committee formed for that purpose) writes the first draft of the statement.
2. Have intentional conversations within the congregation and the neighboring community: What is needed? What is appropriate? What is people's understanding of the draft mission statement?
3. Take into consideration how people responded in the conversations as the team makes edits.
4. Present the final draft to the church council.
5. Council and the team takes it to a congregational vote.
6. Update it every few years as the congregation grows in understanding and mission.

## Components of a RJ Mission Statement

- An acknowledgement of racial injustice
- An acknowledgement that the congregation and/or its members have played a role in racial injustice
- A recognition that our faith calls us to respond to racial injustice
- An action to be taken - this includes who will do it and how they will do it

## Uses for a RJ Mission Statement

- Use it to shape new ideas for ministry and adjust long-standing ministries
- Use it when considering community partnerships and examining long-standing ones
- Use it as a touchstone in conversations about the culture of the congregation and visions for the future
- Use it to hold church members and leaders accountable in their actions, decisions, and words
- Read it aloud often (especially before meetings where big decisions will be made) and make it front and center on bulletins, webpages, etc.

Visit [this resource](#) for more details on Racial Justice Mission Statements and their uses!



## Step Six: Get Involved!

We're all better, individually and collectively, for doing the discussing, learning, healing, and growing involved in racial justice work.

*And*, we need to consider how we can use the power we have to create real and lasting change in the lives of our neighbors. Ask yourself, what is all this discussing, learning, healing, and growing moving us toward?



### What can we do?

- **Listen!** Within your communities and congregations there is a diverse population of people. Pay attention to what your BIPOC neighbors are saying needs to be done.
- **Research!** Each congregation has a unique context, which means unique problems. Learn what is going on in your own community so you can stand in solidarity and show up when needed.
- **Partner!** Build meaningful relationships with community organizations doing racial justice work.
- **Show up!** Attend community meetings or candidate forums and ask hard questions. Attend protests and demonstrations where it is appropriate.
- **Use your power!** Call legislators and elected officials and let them know how you feel about certain issues or bills related to racial justice.
- **Connect!** The Minneapolis Area Synod has organizers and teams working on an array of justice issues. Connect with them and learn about the issues they are championing and how you and your congregation can help create change!

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