

## **From Bishop Jim Gonia: An Introduction to our October 8 Webinar:**

Thanks for registering for our webinar. Some background may be helpful. In July of this year I invited Office of the Bishop staff members and leaders of key synod ministry initiatives into intentional, ongoing conversation about the work of anti-racism in our synod. To begin that conversation, I shared several resources I had been reviewing, including:

- How Strategic and Authentic is Our Diversity; A Call for Confession, Reflection and Healing Action (ELCA document approved by the Churchwide Assembly, August 2019)
- Racial Justice Assessment Tool (Western States Center, April 2015)
- Creating Socially Just Organizations: Dismantling Institutionalized Racism and White Supremacy (Bailey Jackson and Rita Hardiman)
- Me and My White Supremacy (Layla Saad)

I also shared my understanding of two distinct but related goals in our work:

- Naming, uncovering, dismantling systemic racism in our life as church/synod
- Welcoming, supporting, fostering, authentic diversity in our life as church/synod

Based on those goals, I invited staff and leaders to reflect on the following questions with respect to their particular areas of ministry:

### ***Within the context of our mission and ministry as the RMS:***

- ***How does this particular ministry/program contribute – consciously or unconsciously – to perpetuating systemic racism and white privilege/supremacy in the church?***
- ***How does this particular ministry/program help dismantle systemic racism and white privilege/supremacy in the church?***
- ***How does this particular ministry/program help foster authentic diversity in the church?***
- ***What changes could help this ministry/program more effectively dismantle systemic racism and white privilege/supremacy and foster authentic diversity in the church?***

To date, I have concluded initial conversations with staff and leaders of our ministry initiatives. I'm now in the process of receiving written responses to the questions and will be holding a series of follow-up conversations with staff and leaders. My next step is to compile some key insights for our Synod Council as we work to develop a synod strategy for engagement in combatting racism and fostering diversity.

Following our recent Theological Conference, your participation as rostered ministers and church professionals in this webinar is an important opportunity for you to contribute directly to our synod's anti-racism work and is a sign of our life as Church Better Together. On October 8, we'll have two small group breakout sessions. Each will invite your insights and input into the areas of ministry identified below. I've offered some questions or thoughts gleaned from initial conversations, knowing that your input will also shape the ongoing process.

#### Breakout Session One: Ministry areas stewarded by Office of the Bishop staff

- Advocacy – Knowing that our ELCA advocacy ministry existed to address systemic issues in our society such as hunger, poverty and marginalization – issues in which systemic racism is a contributing factor –how might this ministry serve as a catalyst to our capacity to address systemic issues in our own church? How might the ministry grow in its capacity to identify voices who have lived experience and can contribute that perspective to policy-making measures?
- Candidacy – Are we creating space to talk about the barriers that keep more candidates of color from entering into rostered ministry in the ELCA? Realizing that the candidacy system is currently larger than any one synod, what are the changes we CAN make at a synod level to address the systemic issues for people of color or leaders from other marginalized groups in our church?
- Congregational transition/mobility – How can we be sure that our synod is intentionally making call possibilities available to diverse candidates within our church? How can we help lay the groundwork so congregations are more aware of inherent bias when it comes to candidates they consider? How do we sow seeds of awareness that help congregations offer calls to candidates from historically marginalized groups within our church?

- Synod communication – How do we intentionally feature diverse voices in our communications? In what ways does presumed whiteness show up as we communicate the story of who we are as church?
- Synod events: Assembly and Theological Conferences – Knowing that we have used some of our recent synod events to intentionally engage in issues of racial justice, how do we continue to utilize our events as opportunities to challenge our assumed whiteness as a church, featuring speakers and leaders of color? How do we assure that participation is not limited by privilege? How do we think about the types of vendors we engage in hosting our events?
- Congregations and Diversity – Given that many of our RMS congregations reflect our denominational reputation for being “more than 95% white”, how do we engage in conversation and action to become anti-racist congregations, to become better partners within our communities? What does authentic diversity look like in our contexts? What purpose do terms like “multi-cultural” or “ethnic specific” play in either perpetuating whiteness as a norm in our church or challenging it? What is the relationship between a commitment to active anti-racism activity and a commitment to increased diversity in a congregational setting?

#### Breakout Session Two: RMS Ministry Initiatives

- Educate, Equip, Enact (3E) – The work of 3E includes engagement with both rostered ministers and congregations with the overall goal of changing our church’s culture with respect to money. Areas for exploration include looking at the racial justice commitments and practices of our 3E partners (Lilly Endowment and stewardship consultant GSB), making explicit efforts to assure that 3E resources are available in Spanish, and evaluating the various components of 3E programming for the impact of unconscious bias.
- Excellence in Leadership (EIL) – Knowing that EIL’s work of forming courageous, faithful and resilient leaders is built on the foundation of increasing self-awareness and the role of emotional intelligence, how do we apply the tools/theories of EIL explicitly to the work of dismantling racism in the church? In what ways can EIL reflect and promote a commitment to authentic diversity in the church and in our world?

- Messiah Mountain Retreat Center – Given that Messiah Mountain is in its early stages of creating a new identity and vision for mission, how might an explicit commitment to anti-racism and authentic diversity shape the future of this retreat center?
- The Lutheran Center – How might the Lutheran Center explicitly contribute to the work of anti-racism and building diversity in our life as a synod and in its local neighborhood?

In these breakout sessions you'll have the opportunity to offer questions or name issues you hope we will address related to these various areas of our synod's ministry and work. You'll also have opportunity to name areas of synod life that you wish for us to address with respect to dismantling racism or fostering authentic diversity. You may wish to offer input into our process itself. I am well aware that this work is ongoing and always unfolding, part and parcel of our life as ***church becoming***.

Thank you for offering your time and energy to participate in this webinar. I look forward to what the Spirit reveals in our time together.

Yours in Faith,  
Bishop Jim Gonia