

# Using the ELCA's Social Statement

## Freed in Christ: Race, Ethnicity, and Culture

### A Guide for Leading Conversations on Race, Ethnicity, and Culture In Your Congregation

Prepared by

the Church in Society and Multicultural Ministries Units  
of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America  
in Consultation with the Office of the Presiding Bishop

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**Freed in Christ:  
Race, Ethnicity and Culture  
A Guide for Leading Conversations on  
Race, Ethnicity, and Culture  
In Your Congregation**

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## Introduction

### WHAT IS IN THIS GUIDE?

This guide provides:

- General instructions to assist those who will plan and lead discussions on race using the ELCA's social statement, *Freed in Christ: Race, Ethnicity and Culture*.
- Detailed directions for leading a series of discussions for adults, youth, or adults with youth. Suggestions to help in adapting the model to special settings and circumstances.
- Listings of resources for assisting and furthering study and action.
- Handout sheets that may be photocopied for distribution to participants.

### WHO WILL WANT TO USE THIS GUIDE?

The audience for this guide is congregations of primarily, though not exclusively, white member and leadership. This guide offers a beginning point of conversation in theologically exploring the concepts of race, ethnicity, and culture.

Pastors, associates in ministry, and lay leaders can use this guide to lead congregation members through a guided discussion on race using the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America's social statement, *Freed in Christ: Race, Ethnicity, and Culture*. This discussion models how congregations can take seriously their involvement in social and political issues and begin to set out a plan for continued action in multicultural ministry and becoming the public church. The ELCA is called to "step forward as a public church" to "witness boldly to God's love for all that God has created."<sup>1</sup>

Each leader of this discussion should have a copy of this guide and a copy of the *Freed in Christ* statement. All other participants should have their own copies of the statement to study and mark. The ELCA grants permission to reproduce the social statement for studies, providing each copy displays the copyright found on the back page of the booklet.

### WHAT IS THE ELCA'S SOCIAL STATEMENT *Freed in Christ: Race, Ethnicity, and Culture* and Why is it Important for the Church?

*Freed in Christ* is a "social teaching statement" adopted by the Churchwide Assembly in 1993. The ELCA develops social statements as a means of focusing attention on pressing social issues and guiding this church's response. As Christians we believe our lives are lived in response to God's saving grace in Jesus Christ. An important aspect of our response to God's love is our faithful and responsible participation in society. Through a lengthy process of education and discussion, this church prepares study documents and, eventually, a social statement is adopted at a Churchwide Assembly. This social statement, like all others, is meant to encourage and guide debate and discussions within

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<sup>1</sup> ELCA, "Five Strategic Directions for the Churchwide Organization" ([www.elca.org/strategicdirections](http://www.elca.org/strategicdirections)).

this church, and between this church and the larger society, and to help the people of God find ways to be in mission in the world.<sup>2</sup>

Since the time of its founding the ELCA has made a strong commitment to cultural diversity. Historically, American Lutheranism saw immigrants from other cultures struggling to maintain the best of their cultural heritage. More recently, Lutherans have recognized that faithful proclamation of the gospel and witness for justice requires that Lutherans respect and learn from other cultures. This church, at its Constituting Convention in 1988, adopted the goal, “that within 10 years of its establishment its membership shall include at least 10% people of color and/or primary language other than English.” In order to act on that commitment the ELCA has taken a number of steps which are listed on pages 2 and 3 of *Freed in Christ*.

This church also affirmed the “Multicultural Mission Strategy” at its 1991 Churchwide Assembly. Beginning in 1997, Churchwide Assemblies adopted a series of ethnic-specific mission strategies for persons of African descent, Arab and Middle Easterners, American Indian and Alaska Natives, Asians and Pacific Islanders, and Latinos..<sup>3[2]</sup>

In 1990 the steering committees for the Commission for Multicultural Ministries (now Multicultural Ministries program unit) and for the Commission for Church in Society (now Church in Society program unit) called for the appointment of a task force to prepare a social statement on race, ethnicity, and culture. This group, in 1991, published a study booklet, *From All That Dwell Below the Skies*, and a first draft of its social statement was made available in 1992. Both documents called for and received responses from individuals, congregations, and other groups of this church.

After lengthy discussion at the 1993 Churchwide Assembly in Kansas City, *Freed in Christ* was adopted by a vote of 870 to 60 (92.5 percent).

Since *Freed in Christ* was adopted in 1993, the ELCA has also taken the following actions:

- In 1999, 54 of the 65 synods memorialized the Churchwide Assembly asking for assistance in dealing with hate crimes and racism in their synods.
- Following the adoption of the resolutions in 1999 a director for racial justice ministries position was created in the Commission for Multicultural Ministries. A more comprehensive anti-racism education and training program with synods and the churchwide expression was put in place and still continues to be shaped.

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<sup>2</sup> See *Social Statements in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America: Policies and Procedures*, 2007, ISBN 978-6-0002-1888-1 and *The Church in Society: A Lutheran Perspective*, 2006 ISBN 978-6-0002-0869-1.

<sup>3[2]</sup> Links to these ethnic-specific strategies are found at the Web site of the Multicultural Ministries program unit at: [www.elca.org/multicultural](http://www.elca.org/multicultural). The report to the 2007 Churchwide Assembly of the Multicultural Ministries program unit on plans for these strategies and accomplishments may be read at: <http://archive.elca.org/assembly/votingmatters/MulticulturalMinistriesStrategy.pdf>. It was printed as Section V, pp 43-51 of the 2007 Churchwide Assembly Pre-Assembly Report, which may be available in some regional resource centers.

- The ELCA contracted with Project Equality in the fall of 2003 to conduct its first Diversity Audit of the churchwide staff. At the end of the audit process the results were released to staff, the ELCA Church Council and Conference of Bishops with recommendations from the auditors.
- In 2004, a training event, “Talking Together as Christians Cross-culturally” was held for synodical leadership teams in cross-cultural moral deliberation and conversation. These teams were trained both to train congregations in cross-cultural conversation and to lead such conversation themselves.
- The churchwide office underwent a restructuring and reorganizing process. In 2005, the ELCA Churchwide Organization created a part-time coordinator staff position dedicated to anti-racism education and training, primarily with white people. In the fall of 2006, the ELCA Church Council approved the coordinator position to be increased from part-time to full-time and placed it in the Office of the Presiding Bishop. This action acknowledged that comprehensive ELCA structural and cultural change requires the full commitment and participation of top leadership. The work of racial justice is now being carried out through the desks of both the director for racial justice ministries and the coordinator for anti-racism education and training.
- Church in Society and Multicultural Ministries resources were produced:
  - God’s People Building Bridges* (1994)
  - Even the Stones Will Cry Out for Justice* (1998)
  - Breaking the Bonds: A Workshop on Internalized Racial Oppression* (2003)
  - No Hate Allowed* English (2003) / *No Se Permite Odiar* (Spanish, 2003)
  - Troubling the Waters for the Healing of the Church: A Journey for White Christians from Privilege to Partnership* (2004)
  - Talking Together as Christians Cross-culturally* (2004)
  - Lazarus at the Gate: Writings and Reflections on Poverty and Wealth* (2007)
- 2008 Events
  - “At the Intersection of Race and Poverty,” September 10-13, 2008, Baltimore, Maryland
  - “Talking Together as Christians Cross-culturally—Africans and Asians,” November 7-9, 2008 Orlando, Florida
  - “Lazarus is Still Waiting at the Gate” November 21-23, 2008, Atlanta, Georgia

Please study the social statement *Freed in Christ* carefully before you plan your discussion. Note the following about the document:

- It is primarily a call for the Church to be a leading force in society against racism and for tolerance, understanding, and cooperation between cultural communities.
- It outlines the ways social, political, and economic injustice is rooted in the spiritual crisis of racism, and it suggests both strategies and theological resources for the Church’s response.
- It calls upon leaders and others in this church to “persevere” and “live up to” commitments to be an inclusive church witnessing and working for justice.

## **STEPS TO PLANNING AND LEADING A DISCUSSION**

1. Carefully read *Freed in Christ: Race, Ethnicity, and Culture* and then review this guide. Change and adapt the plans suggested in this guide to suit your local condition and needs.
2. Work closely with your parish education committee, director of Christian education or others responsible for leading the discussions on race education in your congregation so that this study will fit with the purpose and plan of the parish.
3. By addressing race relations in your community, this study may be a first step in your congregation toward building racial and cultural diversity and the promotion of justice. It is recommended that you invite participants that reflect diversity: men, women, youth, and the elderly, of different ages from different cultures, racial backgrounds, and social classes.
4. Ask capable and committed people to plan the discussion program, lead large and small group discussions, publicize the event, register participants, prepare the meeting place, provide equipment and materials when needed, and provide and prepare refreshments if appropriate.
5. Seek additional resources such as: *Talking Together as Christians about Tough Social Issues*; *Troubling the Waters for the Healing of the Church: A Journey for White Christians from Privilege to Partnership*, *Talking Together As Christians Cross-culturally* (see listing on see previous page) and other resources at the end of this guide.

## **PREPARATION**

The study model presented in this guide suggests four 60-90 minute sessions. These sessions might meet weekly or even monthly. Other options include:

- A five hour “workshop” event on one day. Begin and end with worship. Include breaks and/or meals.
- Two three-hour sessions on a Saturday or Sunday a week apart.
- One or two days at a retreat location.
- A series of five to eight Sunday sessions.

## **AIMS OF THIS GUIDED DISCUSSION**

- To utilize the contents of the ELCA’s social statement *Freed in Christ: Race, Ethnicity, and Culture* as a tool to guide conversations on race relations, ethnicity, and culture; and what it means to be a public church that values all people.
- To confront the cost of narrowness, racism, and exclusivity with repentance and appreciate and celebrate the benefits of racial and cultural diversity in the Church.
- To seek ways to help the congregation commit to a celebration of racial and cultural diversity, a valuing of all people and an action on behalf of and in support of social justice for all.

## **GUIDEPOSTS TO DISCUSSIONS**

### **Encourage Active Listening and Moral Deliberation**

Effective leaders will listen and encourage others to listen actively as well. Prejudice is deep-seated in all of us. Repentance is key to dismantling racism and opening people to other cultures. By encouraging active listening, leaders affirm that congregations can learn to be places of reconciliation and healing. Encourage participants to pray and not be judgmental; to seek an understanding of God's judgment and to be open to God's grace that enables repentance and positive change to take place.

Listening sensitively to others is a key to positive change. As a leader you can model acceptance and valuing of all, and encourage all to share their voices and listen to each other actively and carefully.

It is important in discussions about ethnical and social issues that leaders do not impose a solution. There is no single path to eliminating racism and intolerance. Through God's grace, however, people learn to accept and value one another as they find various ways to do justice that are appropriate for themselves and others.

Active listening leads to a heightened awareness of ourselves and those with whom we are engaged in conversation. It opens the window to our learning about a society and world that is very diverse, both generationally and multiculturally. Learning to hear and respect another's deeply held values encourages affirmation of the richness of human diversity itself. When participants work together to care for one another in spite of differences, they grow in their ability to move toward openness. In doing so, they will recognize that though they may not always see eye-to-eye, agreeing to disagree is an authentic, honest, and mature stance for the Church at work in the world. Keep in mind this is only one outcome and that there are others that are possible.

### **Utilize Feelings as Signposts to New Learning**

In church discussion groups, as well as many other settings, we have often attempted to "level" strong expressions of feelings. We treat both the joyful outburst and tears of anguish as "out of place" or a threat to harmony. Expressions of feelings may expose the real joys or the fundamental pain of others. Such feelings are not to be ignored or glossed over. Expressing these feelings is often appropriate and is the reality of the individual. Leaders should make their places of discussion inviting for people so they are free to express their feelings about these matters. Sharing of one's innermost self often makes a person more vulnerable than they would like to be and causes them to resist exposing the inner truth which may cause a great deal of pain to the individual. By ignoring these feelings and the vulnerability of people who express them, the Church shows that it is not able to deal with real lives and the real world. When we force a discussion to remain coldly intellectual we say that we are unable or unwilling to work toward healing and reconciliation. As you lead this learning experience, try the following:

- Acknowledge feelings. Remind people that emotions, by themselves, are neither right nor wrong; they are simply signs of our humanity.
- Encourage people to learn from feelings. Invite them to reflect and put their emotions into words. Note that feelings can signal new learning or a gift of insight from God. Always thank participants by name for expressing their feelings in a way that builds community strength.
- Avoid using words that seem to be judgmental in nature. Use words, questions or expressions that will encourage further conversation or explanations. Remember that facial expressions and body language also communicate acceptance and rejection.
- Give feed-back. As a leader you need not agree with people's ideas, but you can offer feed-back so they know what feelings you heard them express. They then know they have been understood. (Note the process of "Feeling Checks" explained in the first session of the model.)

### **ENCOURAGE ACTIVE LEARNING BY ALL PARTICIPANTS**

Remind all participants that successful discussions depend on all participants sharing themselves and their ideas with others. These hints may help:

- Suggest that participants take notes about what they disagree with or don't understand and about what they feel is important to share with the group.
- Some may want to keep a "learning journal" in which they record such thoughts along with personal feelings they are beginning to recognize and better understand.

# A FOUR-SESSION DISCUSSION PLAN

## PREPARING TO LEAD

*This four-session plan can be used with a mixed group of adult/youth or an all adult group. Be sure to review and adapt the model to fit your group or congregation's needs. Select the activity options that seem to fit your participants and setting.*

### Pre-session Assignment

To make best use of your time together, if possible, before your first session ask each participant to prepare by doing the following (Leader may prepare and distribute a written set of questions for reflection as preparation work prior to the meeting date):

- Suggest or invite participants to keep a journal or log sheet.
- Read through the entire social statement, *Freed in Christ: Race, Ethnicity, and Culture*.
- In the journal, have them write their first impressions and thoughts immediately following the reading of the statement.

### Prepare a Setting that will Facilitate Learning and Discussion

- Meet in a room large enough for whole-group sessions and small-group break-outs. Some activities will require seating at tables.
- For the whole-group sessions arrange chairs in a circle. The leader is a part of this circle.
- If possible, emphasize the contribution of various cultures by decorating your meeting area with the art of different cultures. Hymns and prayers suggested for use in this series have been chosen by topic. You may substitute those which originated in diverse cultures. *Evangelical Lutheran Worship*, as well as a number of other hymnals and song books, note the origins of both texts and tunes.

### Gather Resources

- Have on hand Bibles, hymnals or song books, extra copies of *Freed in Christ*, handouts, pencils, writing paper, easel with newsprint tablet and markers or blackboard with chalk.
- Place newspaper and magazine clippings on issues related to race and culture on the bulletin boards. Consider taping an enlarged copy of the discussion guidelines for this study on the wall or mounting it on the bulletin board.
- If possible gather other learning resources (see p.16) on a table for participants to borrow and read between sessions.

# **SESSION ONE: All Suffer Together—All Rejoice Together**

## **AIMS FOR THIS SESSION**

- To introduce participants to the ELCA’s Social Statement: *Freed in Christ: Race, Ethnicity, and Culture*;
- To build mutual trust and respect as a foundation for discussion;
- To introduce concepts (i.e., culture) that are basic to dealing with diversity in the light of God’s will to unite all people.

## **Resources for this Session**

- Materials mentioned above (on page 10) under “Gather Resources”
- Letter-sized writing paper—a sheet for each participant plus several extra.
- Several dictionaries.
- A drawing on newsprint or a blackboard showing two groups of people separated by blank space.
- (If you use the first learning option) Pieces of colored construction paper, scissors, markers.

## **GETTING ACQUAINTED**

If participants do not know each other well, provide name tags and allow time for all to get acquainted. Ask people to pair up with those they know the least about, allow some time to talk over families, jobs and favorite pastimes and then allow each person to introduce their partner to the group.

## **OPENING WORSHIP**

Ask a volunteer to read Ephesians 2:11-20 aloud. As the text is read, suggest that participants jot down several words from the passage that strike them or seem important.

After the reading, in small groups or in the whole group:

- Write on newsprint some of the words participants suggest.  
Ask participants: *Why do you think these words are important? What did you think of when you heard them? Do they speak to anything in your own experience of people different from you? How do they make you feel? How do you imagine you might live if Paul is right that Christ has created one humanity in place of all human divisions? What do Paul’s words make you want to do to live like you imagine?*

- Remind participants of the longstanding hostility between Jews and Gentiles (non-Jews).
- Ask participants to suggest from their experience some of the barriers between people that exist in the church today.  
*In your experience, what separates people in the Church today? What comes between groups? Where do you see God active in how these differences play themselves out in the Church? How does what Paul writes in this passage help you imagine a remedy for such divisions or differences?*

Ask a volunteer to read again verses 13-18. Another volunteer may read either version of the prayer “The Human Family” on p.79 of *Evangelical Lutheran Worship*. Conclude by singing one or more verses of “Lord of All Nations,” (ELW # 716).

## **INTRODUCE AIMS**

List on newsprint the aims of the study listed above (p. 7). Ask for comments, questions, or suggestions for additional aims the participants may want to pursue. The aims may become clearer as the discussion progresses, so don’t dwell too much on discussing the aims at this point.

## **HANDOUT: Learning That Heals and Helps**

Distribute the handout *Learning That Heals and Helps* that you have reproduced from the back of this guide. Read through the handout a paragraph at a time (*do not force anyone to read aloud*). Discuss the guidelines until participants have a clear understanding of them. Allow participants to suggest changes to the guidelines. These changes can be made by a consensus of the group.

## **INTRODUCING FREED IN CHRIST**

1. If you have not already done so, distribute copies of the social statement, *Freed in Christ: Race, Ethnicity and Culture*. Write the words “Race,” “Ethnicity,” “Culture” on the board or on newsprint. Allow space under each. Ask participants to suggest words or phrases that each brings to mind. Jot some of these on the board. Don’t attempt to correct concepts at this point. Leave your listings posted, if possible.

2. Call attention to the first page of the *Freed in Christ* document. Briefly review the purpose and status of a social statement passed by assembly action. It is:

- a. A church “theological position paper” on an important social issue.
- b. Done as a biblically based, gospel-centered response by the whole church to an issue facing both church and society.
- c. Builds on the confessions of the church, but is not a “new confession.”
- d. A starting place from which the church can speak out, seeking God’s will and God’s justice for all.
- e. Developed cooperatively—with study and input from many throughout the church.

3. Allow time for participants to read through (or read aloud) the first four sections of the document under the heading “Facing God.” As they read, suggest that they circle or mark things that: (1) They agree with. (2) They disagree with. (3) They don’t understand. (4) They think particularly important. (5) They want to see happen soon.

After the reading, discuss first impressions.

*In your own words, what is the document trying to say? What seems to be the goal of the statement?*

Restate the goal in your own words.

*How do you feel about this goal? What are your hopes and fears as you reflect on this goal? What do you imagine reaching this goal would be like? What does this goal call you to do in your own setting or congregation?*

4. Ask several people to mention items that they have circled and discuss their reasons for their markings. Don’t attempt to answer all questions at this time. Use the time to clarify first impressions and to celebrate agreement and note any disagreement around the vision and goal of the statement.

## **THINKING ABOUT CULTURE**

1. Refer again to the word *culture* as you have written it on the board or newsprint.

Put participants into groups of three. Ask each group to write their own definition of culture. Suggest that they think of their own culture as they write.

2. When all groups have had about 10 minutes to work, ask each to share their definition and some of their thinking that went into their definition with others. You might post some of these for reference. Talk together about the following questions
- *What has your culture given to you? What attitudes and ways of acting can you trace to your cultural heritage?*
  - *What do you like about your culture? What do you wish you could change about it?*
  - *What has your culture told you about people who are “in” and “out”?*
  - *How do you demonstrate or celebrate your cultural heritage?*

3. Share (in writing if possible) this definition of culture:

“Culture is a system of knowledge and behavior that belongs to a human social group. That system of knowledge tells how things are, how things get done and by whom, and what we should accept and avoid.”

Ask people to discuss this definition of culture. What does it share with the definitions of culture they made themselves? What about this definition is different from their own definitions of culture? What, if anything, do they think is helpful about this one in the understanding of culture?

- *How does the definition on page 3 of the statement (second paragraph from bottom of page) fit with your definition?*
- *The statement faults “assimilation.” Why? How do you feel about what the statement says about assimilation and the Church? How does the approach to assimilate those who are different affect the Church? How do you imagine it affects each of us, including those who are assimilated in this way? What might some of the costs of this approach be to those in the dominant culture, and to those who are not members of it?*

## **SHARING OUR STORIES**

1. Divide into pairs. Allow time for each to share their cultural “story” (or art work) with another. [If anyone doesn’t feel they have a cultural story, ask them to share a story about their background as they experience it.] After each has had time to share, ask each pair to join another pair to form a group of four. Each person should introduce their previous partner by sharing in brief fashion the part of their partner’s story they found to be most compelling.

2. Return to a single large circle. List some commonalities and differences on the board or on newsprint. Then share and discuss:

- *What did you learn about each other?*
- *What is the value of hearing others’ cultural stories?*
- *How can these differences cause tension or division?*
- *What pain did you hear? How is that pain similar for others?*
- *What joys did you hear? How does our own background or culture bring us joy?*
- *What did you learn about various cultures from these stories? What do these cultures seem to have in common?*
- *What seems to be the role of culture in our faith life? In our life together?*

## **Active Learning Option**

To underscore the value of our backgrounds, ask each participant to make either a large name tag (hung with yarn around the neck) or name card (folded like a tent and placed before them at a place at a table). Suggest that they decorate and add to their tag or card

with drawings, symbols or words depicting diverse traditions, mottos, or proud accomplishments that have come to them from their own family background and traditions.

### **FEELING AND LEARNING CHECK**

*(See “Utilize Feelings as Signposts to New Learning” in the Introduction)*

Ask each person in turn (*all have the right to pass*) to share a word that describes how they are feeling. They might also share one thing they have learned about the value of various cultures. The learning can be a new bit of knowledge or a new awareness of something that they already knew but did not fully appreciate.

### **ASSIGNMENT: TO DO AT HOME**

Write the following on the board or on newsprint. Draw attention to the list of activities before you close. Ask participants to choose one or more of the activities to do before the next session.

1. Write or create a piece of art work that tells:
  - a. How you have personally experienced the pain of being excluded from power or social circles, or the pain of having your own worth as a human being discounted.
  - b. What gifts would you offer to others if they would be more open to you?
2. Collect news clippings about issues of racism and culture. (Maintain a bulletin board display with material from secular and Lutheran press.)
3. Do research on how this church locally and nationally confronted racism in the past. See “Resource” section of this guide for publications and agencies that can help provide information. Be ready to report for next session.
4. In preparation for Sessions Three and Four, participants may begin some of the following:
  - If there is a current member, recent visitor, or someone outside your congregation who is knowledgeable enough about it to form an opinion, ask this person to assess how inviting your congregation seems to them. Do they see your congregation as hospitable to people of diverse racial, ethnic or cultural backgrounds? If possible, ask the same questions of a person of an ethnic group or race different from your own or that of most people in the congregation.
  - Collect data on the numbers of persons of color, or whose primary language is other than English a) who attend worship in your congregation, b) who are members, c) who are members of congregational fellowship, youth or music groups, d) who are in leadership positions in your congregation. Have the numbers of these categories increased or decreased over the past ten years or so? Is there an intentional effort for outreach to these categories of people in your

- community? Is there a special plan to include these people in worship, fellowship, and leadership in your congregation?
- Talk to the pastor(s) and lay leaders who are involved with social action and justice programming in your congregation. Using the HANDOUT: “Elements of Doing Justice” from the back of this guide, compile from the leaders information about any programming for justice issues relating to race, culture, and ethnicity. Prepare a report to be shared during Session Four.
  - Visit your local chamber of commerce and collect some basic demographic information about the racial and ethnic composition of the neighborhood and wider community your congregation serves. Have the number of people of various racial and ethnic categories increased or decreased over the past ten years or so? Ask for information about agencies and programs that serve the needs of these groups.
  - Contact a key social service agency in your community, such as Lutheran Social Services, the local department of human resources, or the director of the council of churches. Ask them whether there are any particular challenges for racial and ethnic communities that are not currently being met. (*Ask those who undertake these tasks to outline or chart the information they gather on newsprint or on a transparency for overhead projection for Session Four.*)

## **CLOSING**

Allow a moment for people to think of news stories of recent tragic results of racism and ethnic strife. Ask volunteers to mention those in prayer and to ask for God’s Spirit to lead all people to understanding and tolerance, and to repentance and new life in the forgiveness of God.

## **SESSION TWO: LIVING TOWARD A VISION**

### **AIMS FOR THIS SESSION**

- To confront God’s Word regarding race, culture, and our need for one another;
- To deepen understanding of culture and the complexity and pervasiveness of today’s racism.

*PLEASE NOTE: There may be more material in this session plan than you can adequately cover in one session. Especially if you intend to discuss racism in some detail, you may want to divide this session into two or more.*

### **PREPARING TO TEACH**

1. Ask a pastor or other person with training in the interpretation of Scripture to work through the Bible study and prepare as thoroughly as possible to speak to the kinds of issues raised in the “Bible Study” section below.
2. Encourage participants to place the news clippings about issues of racism they have collected on the bulletin board as they arrive.

### **Resources for this Session**

- Materials mentioned in “Gather Resources” in the Introduction
- Copies of Bible dictionaries and commentaries for reference
- Hoop or rope for opening exercise

### **OPENING WORSHIP**

Ask a volunteer to read 1 Corinthians 12:12-27 aloud. Move participants into groups of six. Ask each person in each group to “become” a part of a body: head, torso, arms, legs. As a single body, each group discusses:

1. *How are we dependent on one another?*
2. *What do you imagine the loss of any of us would mean to the others?*
3. *How do you see God’s design in our interdependence?*

Close with the petition “Grace to Receive the Word” on p. 72 of *Evangelical Lutheran Worship* and sing a verse or two of either a hymn from the “Word of God” section of *ELW* (hymns 503-519) or “Thy Word is a Lamp Unto My Feet” by Amy Grant and Michael Smith in *Songs of the People*.

### **OPTION: FEELING CHECK**

*(See Session One for directions.)*

## ENCOUNTERING *FREED IN CHRIST*...

Refer to your copies of *Freed in Christ: Race, Ethnicity, and Culture*. Ask someone to read aloud (while others follow) sections 1 and 2 under FACING OBSTACLES on pages 3-4 of the publication. Suggest that participants again mark items of agreement, disagreement, question, importance, or action as they listen. As a group or in small groups:

1. Write the words “race” and “ethnicity” on the board or newsprint. Divide the group into smaller groups of three. Ask each person to write their own definitions of these words, and to share them. Then ask them to talk about their definitions and some of their thinking that went into them. Then discuss these questions:

- What has been your own experience of and feelings about ethnicity, such as an ethnic group you grew up in, or friends you have who were or are members of an ethnic group?
- What has been your own experiences of and feelings about race? Do you have friends, acquaintances, or co-workers of another racial background than you? Or, have you had such relationships in the past? How have these experiences affected your feelings about race today?
- How do your experiences of and feelings about ethnicity and race influence the definitions you wrote?
- What are the differences and similarities of these terms, “race” and “ethnicity”?

2. Write the word “racism” on the board or newsprint. Field words or phrases that the word brings to mind. In small groups, ask the groups how they would define the word, “racism.” Then, ask them to share:

- *Personal experiences (personal or social) of racism.*
- *Experiences (either personal or society’s) in which racism has been defeated or overcome.*
- *Your understanding of the cost of racism for the Church and for society as a whole.*

3. Write the following definition of “racism” on the board or newsprint:

“**Racism** is race prejudice combined with the deliberate and systematic misuse of power and privilege against a particular social group.”

Ask the group or small groups to discuss the following questions:

- *How does this definition of racism compare to the ones you came up with?*
- *This definition of racism is based on the statement that begins the second paragraph of the sub-section, 2. A Time to Confront Racism, on page 4 in the social statement. What does this definition of racism try to emphasize about racism?*

- *How does this definition of racism either reflect or illuminate the racism you may have observed or personally experienced?*

Then, write the following description of “structural racism”:

“**Structural racism** refers to the reinforcing pattern (or system) of personal attitudes, individual behavior, cultural beliefs, historical memory, customs of social groups, working of institutions in society, and the policies of governments that has allowed the privilege associated with ‘whiteness’ and the disadvantage of ‘color’ to endure and adapt over time.”

As this description suggests, structural racism has three dimensions:

- *Institutional* – ways in which institutional policies and practices create different outcomes for different racial groups, creating advantages for whites and oppression and disadvantage for people from groups classified as non-white
- *Cultural* – behaviors that reflect a worldview that both explicitly and implicitly attributes value and normalcy to white people and whiteness, but devalues, stereotypes, and labels people of color as “other,” different, less than, or renders them invisible
- *Individual* – beliefs, attitudes, and actions of individuals that support or perpetuate racism

Discuss the following questions:

1. *Does this understanding of “Structural Racism” help you make any sense of the racism you have observed or experienced? How?*
2. *How have you seen the institutional dimension of racism at work in the racism that you have either observed or experienced?*
3. *How have you seen the cultural dimension of racism at work in the racism that you have either observed or experienced?*
4. *We usually think of racism as something expressed by individuals. How does this individual racism affect what happens at the institutional level? And how does this individual racism affect how some people experience those institutions? How do individuals or groups experience racism within your cultural context?*

If you worked in small groups, ask each group to share some of the insights and conclusions from their discussion.

### **OPTION: AN EXPERIENCE WITH INCLUDING**

1. Ask two volunteers to get inside a rope with its ends tied together to form a loop of three or four feet in diameter. Ask the two people inside the hoop:

*How does it feel to be inside?*

*Would you like to include others?*

*Why or why not?  
How would you include others if you wanted to?*

Suggest that the loop of rope represents a shared “culture.” Ask them to try to include others in their “culture loop.” Ask those outside what they think of joining the ones inside the loop.

2. Now explain that there is another way to belong. Consider the loop to be a “home base” rather than a perimeter. Ask the people inside the loop to step outside and simply hold onto it as they invite others to do the same, or as they reach out to take the hands of others. In this way the grace of God in Jesus Christ provides our belonging and our strength for meeting the challenges of a sometimes frightening world and for reaching out to extend our fellowship.

3. Return to a circle of chairs. Ask several volunteers to reflect on this experience. Ask volunteers to share what they wrote in their home assignment about their personal experiences of being excluded and the gifts they would share if they had the chance.

HANDOUT: Session 2

## **BIBLE STUDY**

This Bible study includes four parts. You may not have time to do all of the readings or discuss all of the questions. Make choices as your time allows. You might choose one part from each section. Encourage participants to read and study on their own the parts you omit.

### **BIBLE STUDY-PART I**

#### **Jesus and the Question of Belonging**

Remind participants of the tension between Jews and Gentiles. The Jews of the Palestine of Jesus’ day also lived among diverse peoples (the Gospels name several, calling them Syro-Phoenicians, Canaanites, and the people of the Decapolis region to the east of Gallilee) who were heavily influenced by both Greek and oriental cultures and religions. A great gulf separated pious Palestinian Jews from these various neighbors. You might note how common it has always been for religious intolerance to fortify racial animosity.

1. Ask someone to read aloud Mark 7:24-30. Have all participants read John 4:4-30, 39-42. Read aloud verses 19-24. Discuss the questions as a group or in small groups.

2. Read Luke 13:22-30. Discuss the questions. Note that in verse 24 Jesus says to “strive to enter through the narrow door,” but in verse 29 he says people will come from every corner of the earth to eat at the kingdom.

3. Read or summarize John 4:1-26. Discuss the questions. Note that the divisions between Jesus and the woman were very deep—both cultural (men did not speak to women) and religious (Jews did not associate with Samaritans). Emphasize the revolutionary nature of this encounter and how loudly it spoke inclusiveness to those who first read it.

## **BIBLE STUDY-PART 2**

### **Jesus Creates the Inclusive Banquet**

1. Read Luke 13:29 aloud. We have seen that Jesus has a vision of people coming from all over the world to eat in God's realm. Note that this was not only an ideal vision for Jesus, but also a program for social action. Ask the participants to mention aloud all of the ways they can that the Gospels mention Jesus eating with people. Write these on newsprint or on a blackboard. Read and discuss as many of the biblical texts in this section as you have time for.

- Matthew 14:13-21; John 6:1-15: Jesus taught and then fed crowds of people, both in Galilee with its mixture of Jews and Gentiles and in the Gentile region of the Decapolis. He instructed his close followers to do the same: "They need not go away; you give them something to eat."
- Matthew 9:11; 11:19; 15:23: Jesus incurred the great anger of pious Jews by eating with notorious sinners (he also ate with Pharisees) and by allowing his disciples to eat without washing their hands.
- Luke 22:15-20: Jesus ate the Passover meal with his disciples, instituting a "new covenant in his blood" for the forgiveness of sins.
- Luke 10:1-9: Note that during his ministry, Jesus sent his followers out on a special mission of healing and proclamation of the kingdom of God. In exchange for this great service to Galilean peasants the disciples were to accept only food and table fellowship.

2. You might summarize Jesus' actions with words like these:

*Jesus consciously broke down the walls that both Jews and Gentiles put up to make themselves feel safe. Indeed, he challenged humanity's persistent need to create a sense of belonging by shutting others out. To take the place of this system of hostility, Jesus preached, demonstrated, and handed on to his followers, a system based on religious, economic, and political openness and equality. Because they are dependent upon and obedient to a gracious God, people are to honor and care for all others, regardless of any human difference.*

## **BIBLE STUDY-PART 3**

### **Opening the New Testament Church**

1. Have two or more volunteers read aloud the story of Babel in Genesis 11:1-9, and the Pentecost story of Acts 2:1-21. Refer to the quote on page 1, paragraph 3 of *Freed in Christ*. Discuss the questions. It is human arrogance that scatters the people in Genesis. The Holy Spirit calls and gathers them at Pentecost.
2. Before you read over or summarize Acts 10, reflect again on the dispute in the early church over whether new converts to Christianity should adopt Jewish customs, including food laws and circumcision. All the original disciples were Jewish, as was Jesus. Acts 10 tells of how Peter learned that “God shows no partiality, but in every nation anyone who fears him and does what is right is acceptable to him (vv. 34-35).” Acts 15 is a continuation of the story. It shows that the church leaders in Jerusalem decided “we should not trouble those Gentiles who are turning to God,” except to ask them to refrain from those acts most abhorrent to Jews (vv. 19-20). Paul relaxed even these restrictions in his mission to the Gentiles.
3. Ask a volunteer to read aloud Galatians 3:27-29. Explain that this passage is part of Paul’s response to the same question of whether Gentiles could be accepted into the fellowship of the church without accepting Jewish customs such as circumcision. Also read aloud Ephesians 2:11-22. Explain that Paul himself, or possibly his followers writing in his name and the tradition of his thoughts, wrote this about what Christ’s death and resurrection mean for the great racial and cultural divide of the New Testament: the divide between Jews and Gentiles. Discuss the questions if time permits.

## **BIBLE STUDY-PART 4**

### **The Enduring Vision**

Read aloud the paragraph from the top of page 5 in *Freed in Christ*. Allow time for discussion. Ask several to share (on newsprint if possible) their rewriting of the vision. How might we, individually and together, act to bring that vision to reality.

### **THE HUMAN FACE OF RACISM**

Sit in a circle and ask participants to review *Freed in Christ*, page 4, section 2: “A Time to Confront Racism.”

1. HANDOUT: Racism—Voices
  - Ask volunteers (preferably those who have prepared ahead of time) to read sections from the HANDOUT: “Racism—Voices.” After each section, pause for question or comment.

## 2. HANDOUT: Key Understandings

- Ask volunteers to read, one at a time, the statements on the handout taken from *Freed in Christ*.
- As you have time, discuss the questions under each statement.

3. As a group or in small groups, discuss this statement: “Racism hurts everyone.” Do they think the statement is true or not? Why do they think that? How does this statement compare to their own experience? Have they been hurt by racism? How? What was their reaction to this hurt? Have they seen others hurt by it? How were they hurt? How did they respond to being hurt in this way?

In the large group, tell about ways that this church (locally and churchwide) is confronting racism. Allow those who have researched this topic to share. Suggest what other actions may be taken.

NOTE: See “Resources” at the end of this guide for helps in doing further study toward action on racism.

### Activity—Summary

1. On newsprint or a chalkboard draw a large circle in one place and a small circle at another—with space for lists of words under each circle.
2. Tell the group that the large circle represents the “walls of hostility”—the lines we draw to create a sense of belonging, but which wrongly exclude others. The smaller circle or dot represents the gospel of God’s grace in Christ—the “home base” we depart from and return to as we expand the fellowship of the Church.
  - Ask the group to reflect on the Bible study and list the kinds of things people do to wrongly build walls that exclude. List them on one side of the *large* circle.
  - Ask them to then list words that describe the “spiritual crisis” or bad faith that leads them to build those walls.
  - Turning then to the *small* circle or dot, ask the group to brainstorm about things they could do to build strong fellowship and a strong sense of peace between races and cultures in the world. List these on one side of the small circle or dot. Ask them to identify those actions they think are most important and effective. Also ask them which of these things they each have the most energy for.
  - Then ask people to call out words describing the kind of spirit or faith that enables them to extend their fellowship and to bring peace and tolerance to the world.

### Option: Learning Activities

1. If possible, instead of reading the Voices handout, invite people to your group who have experienced racism in ways similar to those reflected in the handout to share their experiences.
2. The meal table presents a wonderful laboratory for demonstrating how cultures work to

include some and exclude others. Religions also often focus on foods in rules governing membership, purity, and worth. Invite participants to bring to this session small samples of foods peculiar to their own cultural backgrounds. During your break time share these foods and casually discuss various customs, rules, points of etiquette, etc. that their families associate with eating (e.g., no elbows on the table, eat with mouth closed, place of elders and youth, saying of table grace, etc.) How important are these rules? How comfortable are guests at your table? Discuss the importance of Jesus' practice of sending missionaries to bring healing and the gospel in exchange for food and table fellowship. See John Dominic Crossan's *The Historical Jesus: The Life of a Mediterranean Jewish Peasant*, San Francisco: Harper Collins, 1991, especially pages xii, 303-353. The sharing of food customs could be a sign of the ways cultural sharing might enrich all peoples.

**FEELING AND LEARNING CHECK** (*see Session One for directions*)

**ASSIGNMENT: TO DO AT HOME**

Write the following on the board or on newsprint before the end of your session:

*For next session:*

1. Read or review pages 2-7 of *Freed in Christ*.
2. Investigate and report on social justice activities done by your congregation, alliances of congregations in your area or by the ELCA as a whole. Contact some of the agencies listed in on the first page of the "Resources" section of this publication.
3. Review assignments for Session Four that were made at the end of Session One.

**CLOSING DEVOTION**

Ask all to pray silently for a full minute, thanking God for the gift that the variety of people of different cultures, races, and backgrounds have brought to this country and to God's Church. Conclude by having someone pray aloud either version of the petition "The Human Family" at the top of page 79 in *Evangelical Lutheran Worship*.

## **SESSION THREE: Doing Justice—A Time for Public Leadership in the Church and in the World**

### **AIMS OF THIS SESSION**

- To understand God’s call of the Christian Church to the work of bringing justice to God’s world;
- To learn about current justice work being done through this church and how to get involved in planning effective personal and local involvement.

### **Resources for this Session**

See materials listed in the Introduction under “Gather Resources.”

### **OPENING**

Start the session with a song, if available, use the hymn “Jesu, Jesu,” (*With One Voice* #765) or choose “Lord, Whose Love in Humble Service” (*ELW* # 712). You may also invite participants to name a song that the group might be familiar with.

Ask participants to answer the following statement, “Name some of the social outreach efforts of your congregation and your community—especially those which bring people of different cultural backgrounds together.” As participants respond create a list of their responses on newsprint. Briefly discuss the benefit of these programs both for those being served and those who are serving.

Invite the group into a time of prayer to lift up prayers of thanks for such work, and petitions for God’s support of those who give of their time and resources. End with the prayer for “Social Justice” found on page 79 of *ELW*:

Grant, O God that your holy and life-giving Spirit may move every human heart; that the barriers dividing us may crumble, suspicions disappear, and hatreds cease; and that, with our divisions healed, we might live in justice and peace; through your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

### **FEELING CHECK** (*see Session One for directions*)

### **BIBLE STUDY: ADVOCACY**

Ask someone to read aloud John 14:16—a verse from Jesus’ comfort to his disciples shortly before his death.

- *Ask participants to define and give some characteristics of an advocate.*
- *Why is it important to have an advocate?*

- The Greek word applied to the Holy Spirit in the New Testament is “*paracklaetos*” (pronounced PARA-KLĀ-TOS)—translated advocate or comforter. The word literally means “one who comes and remains alongside another”—presumably another who is weak or ill or in need of help.
  - *Why is paraclete (the English form of the Greek word) a helpful image for us as we think of the work of the Holy Spirit and of our being an advocate?*
- In small groups, ask participants to share a time when they were “paracletes” (advocates) to someone else or when someone accepted that role for them.
  - *How did being or needing an “advocate” or “comforter” feel?*
  - *How did that relationship connect with your faith in Jesus?*
  - *How was the Spirit involved?*
- One of the important ways the Church carries out Christ’s command to love others and to seek justice is through “advocacy.”
  - *How does a congregation “advocate” for the weak, the needy, the helpless?*
  - *How does the whole Church “advocate” for the weak, the needy, the helpless?*

## **A MATTER OF LEADERSHIP**

Ask a volunteer to read aloud from *Freed in Christ*, the paragraphs under “3. A Time to Be the Church” on the top of page 5 in the document. Others may follow in their copy and mark important points or items in need of further clarification.

- *Freed in Christ* indicates that the Church’s action in relation to racism and injustice is largely a matter of leadership.
  - *How can the Church and its leaders provide leadership to address racism and injustice? What kind of leadership is needed?*
  - *How can your congregation lead efforts to address racism and injustice in your community?*
  - *How can these leadership efforts be shared among white people and people of color in your community and congregation?*
  - *How can you personally help lead efforts to address racism and injustice in your congregation and in your community?*

Also discuss these questions about leadership:

- *In your experience, why is leadership critical in the area of social justice and social ministry?*
- *How important do you think the partnership of advocacy between pastor and people is in this area?*
- *According to the document, what does “vision” have to do with such leadership? Do you agree? If so why?*

- *How have you heard the vision proclaimed?*
- Ask someone to read aloud the first section (“1. A Time For Public Leadership”) under DOING JUSTICE (p. 5) in *Freed in Christ*. Work with the group to list on newsprint exactly what the leaders of the Church are being called on to do in this section of the statement and the one above. (“3. A Time to Be the Church,” p.5) Look for the phrases:
  - “name the sin of racism and lead us in our repentance.”  
*How does this happen?*
  - “persevere in their challenge to us to be in mission and ministry in a multicultural society.” *What is hindering this challenge now? What can be done to make the challenge clear?*
  - “clarify why measures were taken.”  
*Why is it important to have intentional policies to help us become a more culturally diverse church?*
  - “announcing that the God who justifies expects all people to do justice.”  
*Where or how does that announcing happen? Who is doing the announcing? And who are they announcing to?*
  - “cry out for justice” “insist on justice” *How is that cry spoken and heard?*

## **ELEMENTS OF DOING JUSTICE**

Ask someone to read, or allow time for participants to read silently, the four parts under DOING JUSTICE (*Freed in Christ*, pages 5-7).

- If possible, divide the group into four smaller groups. Assign one of the sections on pages 5-7 to each group. Ask the groups to again read over the section they were assigned. Discuss these questions:
  - *What exactly is the Church being called on to do in this section?*
  - *How is this call related to our faith response to the gospel?*
  - *How is that call heard by the Church? And the community?*
  - *How is that call heard in this congregation?*

After about 10 minutes of discussion, small groups may share some of their insights with the whole group.

- Again in the four small groups, ask each group to make three lists on a sheet of newsprint:
  - *How is our congregation fulfilling this call?*
  - *In what ways is the Church as a whole fulfilling this call? (Those who have researched the topic will be helpful here.)*
  - *What new actions might our congregation and this church undertake to fulfill this call?*

After about 10 minutes, small groups might display and share what they have noted on their sheet of newsprint.

## **OPTION: ACTIVE LEARNING**

### **ON A CONTINUUM**

1. As a way of stimulating conversation let participants take a physical position on an imaginary continuum. Suggest that a wall you face as a group represents a continuum—from strong disagreement to strong agreement. Participants are to take a position along the continuum that reflects their response to certain statements that you will read aloud.

Use statements from *Freed in Christ* that will stimulate discussion:

- *The ELCA should strive for cultural diversity on all staffs, boards, and committees.*
- *The ELCA should advocate for quality education, health care and nutrition (see ELCA social statements, *Caring for Health: Our Shared Endeavor* and *Our Calling in Education* or use other items from page 7).*
- *This church (locally and churchwide) should be a place where parties in conflict can come together for deliberation.*

2. After each statement you may choose spokespersons at various points along the continuum to explain why they stand where they do. Or you may ask people standing together (or standing farther apart) to talk about their response.

3. Bring the group together after the exercise to share what they learned about themselves and others from the activity.

### **FEELING AND LEARNING CHECK** (See *Session One* for directions)

### **ASSIGNMENT TO DO AT HOME**

1. Note the interview and research assignments listed at the end of *Session One* that are due for *Session Four*.

2. Read or review all of pp. 5-7 of *Freed in Christ*.

3. Ask a volunteer to prepare an opening prayer of sorrow and repentance for recent acts of ethnic or racial violence or intimidation or to prepare to read the prayer listed as an option for the opening of *Session Four*.

### **CLOSING**

Sit in a circle. Explain that a volunteer or leader will start a prayer of thanks. Ask for others to continue the prayer by stating aloud activities of various expressions of this church in working toward justice and in working to be an inclusive church. Close with the Lord's Prayer or another appropriate prayer.

## **SESSION FOUR: Inclusiveness and Justice in Our Congregation**

### **AIMS OF THIS SESSION**

- To evaluate your congregation's multicultural and justice ministry
- To encourage a renewed individual and community commitment to a ministry that confronts racism, celebrates the benefits of racial and cultural diversity, and seeks to do justice in the world
- To encourage further steps in the congregation toward an effective ministry with people of all cultures, races, and economic conditions

### **Resources for this Session**

- See list under "Gather Resources" in the Introduction
- Blank pieces of letter-sized paper

### **OPENING**

Take a look at the clippings on your bulletin board. Point out news references to acts of racial and ethnic violence and injustice, especially those that may have happened in your own community. Ask participants to mention similar current events that are not noted in the clippings. If your congregation has not been posting clippings of events or activities occurring in your neighborhood this is a good opportunity to start.

Ask a volunteer in advance to find a clipping or two that reports on acts of racial ethnic violence and injustice and then ask them to prepare a prayer of sorrow and repentance for such acts, or share the following;

*Gracious God we yearn for wholeness as a people. You enrich our lives daily with wondrous gifts that each culture and each unique individual brings to our human family. Indeed, you stand at the door and knock, but we can only open to you if we are willing to welcome all those you call your own. By your grace give to your church and to each of us the faith and love to be welcoming, and the strength to open the door. Amen.*

Conclude with one or more verses of "In Christ There Is No East or West" (ELW #650) or "In a Lowly Manger Born" (ELW #718).

**FEELING CHECK** (see Session One for directions)

## WELCOMING THE GIFTS OF DIVERSITY IN OUR CONGREGATION

*Freed in Christ* reminds the Church that cultural differences are gifts from God. This exercise is meant to help participants assess the degree to which their congregation is welcoming those gifts and to plan future steps to foster more inclusiveness.

1. Ask the volunteers who did research into the demographics of your congregation, neighborhood, and wider community to report their findings (see assignment at the end of Session One). Urge all participants to ask questions of clarification. The following questions are some you might raise:

- *Does our congregation make up reflect the neighborhood or wider community in which we are located? Why or why not? How does the congregation reflect the culture of the area?*
- *How do we recognize the diverse gifts and cultures of people in the congregation?*
- *How do we encourage and use people's diverse gifts in creating a welcoming environment?*
- *In what ways are the doors opened or closed to people who are racially or culturally different than the majority of our members?*

2. Divide into groups of three for the following exercises.

- In your group take turns sharing your written assessments of your congregation's inclusiveness (see assignment at the end of Session One). Give time for others in the triad to ask questions of clarification.
- Share your reports on the interviews you may have completed with persons of a different background from your own (see assignment at the end of Session One).
- Discuss the following questions:
  - *What differences of opinion surfaced in your reports about how well your congregation welcomes and includes people of different races and cultures? What accounts for those differences?*
  - *In what ways has your assessment of your congregation's inclusiveness changed (or not changed) during the course of this study?*
  - *How do the demographic statistics about your congregation and your community support or call into question your own assessment of your congregation's inclusiveness?*
  - *How do you believe those who are racially or culturally "different" assess your congregation's hospitality? What evidence do you have for your conclusion?*

3. An Evaluation

- Distribute paper and encourage each person to do the following rating: On a scale of one to five (with one being little effort, three moderate, and five strong) rate your congregation's effort in the following (list these categories on newsprint or blackboard as you read them);

- a. Outreach to people of color and people whose primary language is other than English.
- b. Hospitality and inclusion of these people in worship.
- c. Hospitality and inclusion of these people in fellowship and service groups.
- d. Inclusion of these people in congregational policy-making and leadership.

Share your results. Then work out and write down a group consensus on the questions, with brief notes of explanation.

- Bring participants together into the large group. Ask someone from each group to share the group's consensus effort ratings and brief explanations. As they do this, ask a volunteer to write the small-group scores next to each category on the newsprint or blackboard. When all scores have been shared and explained, add them together to arrive at composite effort scores for each category. Indicate (with Roman numerals or letters) the ranking of each of the four categories.
- Discuss whether the sum of the group effort scores and the rankings give an accurate representation of how this group assesses the congregation's work at being a congregation that is open to diverse races and cultures.
- Remind participants that the purpose of this exercise is to create a report that you could pass on to your congregation's leadership and which could help to guide the congregation in further action. Ask for volunteers to present the group's report to your congregation's leadership.

## **DOING JUSTICE IN OUR CONGREGATION**

1. HANDOUT: Elements of Doing Justice. Provide copies of the handout. Indicate that the handout is a summary of the activities listed on pages 5-7 in *Freed in Christ*. Refer to the document and review, as you have time. Remind the group that not every congregation will do all these things well, but the Church as a whole should be involved in all of these activities to be doing justice, and each congregation is in partnership in this effort.

Explain that the purpose of this exercise is to work toward a report that will guide the congregation in further steps toward doing justice in the area of race, ethnicity, and culture.

- Ask the volunteer who did research with a local social service agency regarding unmet needs of racial and ethnic communities in your community to make a report. Allow time for questions of clarification.
- Ask the volunteer who did research on your congregation's justice-related activities on race, culture, and ethnicity to make a report. Again, allow time for questions of clarification.
- List on the blackboard or on newsprint those ELCA projects for doing justice in the area of race and ethnicity that were identified during Session Three that your

congregation should be more involved in.

2. Give the participants the following instructions: Take a blank piece of letter size paper. Draw a horizontal and vertical line, dividing the paper into equal sections. Label the sections “Public Leadership,” “Public Witness,” “Public Deliberation,” and “Advocacy.”

- In each of the four sections try to identify one or more things your congregation is now doing that fit in that category and which deserve support and thanksgiving. Label these “Affirmations.”
- In each of the four sections, identify the kinds of things your congregation is capable of doing by itself or in cooperation with others, and that would fit in that category. Label these “Recommendations.”
- After about 10 minutes for individual reflection, ask participants to return to their groups of three, share their own ideas, and work toward a small-group report of “Affirmations,” and “Recommendations.” One member of each group of three should prepare written notes for the large group.

3. Explain to the large group that the purpose of this exercise is to pass on a report to proper leadership people in your congregation that might guide further education and action regarding race, ethnicity, and culture. Ask a volunteer to use a sheet of newsprint for each of the four categories. Record each small group’s affirmations and recommendations, putting check marks for each time the same item or idea is mentioned by an additional group and combining ideas that are similar.

- Ask the group to discuss whether or not the report on the newsprint reflects the consensus of the participants present. Try to work out differences.
- Ask for volunteers to collect all of the notes, put them into usable form, and bring them to the attention of the pastor(s), and other appropriate congregational leaders.
- Consider agreeing on a date in six months or so to gather again and discuss congregational progress in addressing the issues of race, ethnicity, and culture.

### **EVALUATION OF DISCUSSION SERIES**

Ask participants to complete an evaluation form. See the handout sheet at the end of this guide for a form you may use.

### **FEELING AND LEARNING CHECK** (*see Session One for directions*)

### **CLOSING**

Use this worship to note the effort and progress of this time together and to build courage and inspiration for the hard work ahead. Remember that with God all things become possible (Matthew 17:20, 19:26; Luke 1:37). Firmly establish your commitment to being a congregation that celebrates the diversity of gifts among God’s people and helps lead the way in the world to greater justice for all. Consider using “A Prayer Attributed to St. Francis” on page 87 of the *ELW*, reading Ephesians 2:11-22, and singing a hymn such as “O God of Every Nation,” (*ELW* #713).

## **LEARNING THAT HEALS AND HELPS**

### **Ideas and Guidelines**

#### **USE THESE DISCUSSIONS AS PRACTICE IN CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY!**

The people of God have never had all of the answers to life's questions, but we proceed in worshipful trust and obedience toward God, depending on each other for care and comfort as we interpret God's will for us in the present situation.

#### **USE THIS GROUP AS A LABORATORY FOR RELATIONSHIPS!**

Try to use this discussion group to experiment with new ways of talking with others about ethical and social issues. Aim not only at convincing others, but aim just as much at gaining understanding and growing as a group. If you usually comply, give in, or become self-effacing, try saying no. If you usually resist suggestions and hold back, try taking a risk with a new idea. If you usually talk to fill the silence, try using the silence to get in touch with uncomfortable feelings and then share those feelings. If you are usually quiet or wait for others to speak and only then respond, try being assertive with your point of view or initiating ideas for others to respond to.

#### **GUIDELINES FOR DISCUSSION**

1. Come to each session prepared to contribute to the learning of the group. Do the homework assignment and be at peace through prayer so that you may relate to others in the love of God.
2. Listen! Listen carefully to better understand other people and the issue at hand.
3. When quoting Scripture or other authorities, do so to illuminate whatever you're discussing, not just to win arguments by playing Scripture as a trump card. Remember, we all need help to interpret and apply God's Word.
4. Show respect for others by your conduct in the group. Everyone should have an opportunity to speak. If several people get excited and want to talk all at once, take turns as directed by the discussion leader.
5. Use appropriate language. When referring to racial or ethnic groups, use the terms accepted by those groups (e.g., Native Americans, African Americans, Latinos). Avoid using politically charged labels that only serve to polarize.
6. Become involved in discussions. Share your point of view; don't be too shy. You may have something important to contribute to the discussion others need to hear.
7. Do not dominate the discussion. Share the time.
8. During "feeling checks" strive to be open and honest with your feelings. Pass if you cannot think of the right words at the time.
9. Express your anger warmly before it turns to cold resentment.
10. Give "I" messages. While making a point or expressing your evaluation of things

or of other people, always speak for yourself and not for others.

11.. After a speaker has shared feelings or experiences connected with strong emotions remember to say, “thank you,” and name the person who shared. To share emotions is a great blessing to all.

12. Always ask permission of a speaker before giving any feedback to feelings that person has shared.

## **GUIDELINES SPECIFIC TO THE DISCUSSION OF RACE AND CULTURAL DIVERSITY**

1. Focus on understanding the broader issues, on steps your congregation can take to become an inclusive community and a leading witness for inclusiveness in society, and on your partnership role with the ELCA in these matters. Limit discussion of specific ELCA policies on race and culture to the time set aside for this in session three.

2. Let your experience open you to listening to others, not close you off. Do get in touch with your own pain from being excluded or devalued because of prejudice, but do not say, “I overcame the hurt, why can’t they.” Remember each group and person faces their own unique set of circumstances!

3. Honor everyone’s story. Do not discount anyone’s experience by arguing about who is more oppressed or whose point of view is more legitimate. If someone declares a perception that differs from your own, ask them to tell of experiences that inform that perception.

4. Do not start by assessing blame. Work first to understand the sin of racism and the ways cultural narrowness is woven into our social and institutional systems.

5. Avoid any analysis that serves to polarize or stereotype people. Focus criticisms on actions, not people. The walls of race and culture are many and many bridges must be built.

6. Keep your discussion productive and practical. Do not waste time in trying to exactly define words like race or racism, culture or multiculturalism. Accept imprecision at first and gradually move toward workable clarity.

7. Honor the right of each person and group to retain the richness of their culture. Cultivate an appreciation for this richness. If people are to “assimilate” or “adapt” to life together, always ask “Who changes and how?” “What should be sacrificed and what may be retained?” “How and by whom are these decisions made?”

8. Return often to the gospel of God’s forgiveness in Christ so that you may have the courage to admit your sins and your wrongs and to change. The evils of racism will be overcome only through repentance. The “wall of hostility” will be breached through the power of the cross of Christ.

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## BIBLE STUDY

### JESUS AND THE QUESTION OF BELONGING

1. Read Mark 7:24-30 and John 4:4-30, 39-42.

*How does Jesus recognize the tension between Jews and Samaritans?*

*How does he deal with it?*

2. Read Luke 13:22-30.

*How does this dialog with Jesus (who is on his way to Jerusalem) deal with the subject of belonging? What does this event in the Gospel story say to us about racial and religious exclusiveness and inclusiveness today?*

3. Read John 4:1-26.

*How does Jesus' dialog with the Samaritan woman deal with the subject of belonging?*

*What does this event in the Gospel story say to us about racial and religious exclusiveness and inclusiveness today?*

### JESUS CREATES THE INCLUSIVE BANQUET

1. Read Luke 13:29. Jesus has a vision of people coming from all over the world to eat in God's realm. Share other examples you recall of Jesus eating with people. Also look up and discuss some of the following:

- Matthew 14:13-21; John 6:1-15. *What does Jesus show you by providing food in these stories? What do you imagine he meant by doing this?*
- Matthew 9:11; 11:19; 15:2. *What do Jesus' actions say to you about "rules that separate" people from each other?*
- Luke 22:15-20. *Who is included in this meal? Who do you think will be included in it the next time Jesus eats it?*
- Luke 10:1-9. *What do you imagine that eating with those who have received the gospel means?*

2. Discuss: *What do you believe Jesus meant to say about race and cultural-religious openness? What distinctions between people did Jesus ignore and which do you think he regarded as important or even crucial? How do you feel about the distinctions Jesus ignored, and about those he regarded as important? What distinctions between people should the Church ignore today, and which are important to recognize?*

### OPENING THE NEW TESTAMENT CHURCH

Read Genesis 11:1-9; Acts 2:1-21. *Freed in Christ* (page 1, paragraph 3) states, "If the story of Babel is of a people scattered, the story of Pentecost is of a people called and gathered."

*How are these stories parallel? What scatters the people in Genesis? What gathers people in Acts?*

2. Read or summarize Acts 10. Peter learned that “God shows no partiality, but in every nation anyone who fears him and does what is right is acceptable to him (vv. 34-35).”

*How did Peter’s experience affect the church?*

*What does Peter’s experience say to us as we confront a world of people from different races and cultures?*

*How do you imagine that you and your congregation might make the same response as Peter does in Acts 10 to the variety of people of different races and cultures who now live in your area?*

3. Read Galatians 3:27-29 and Ephesians 2:11-22.

*What do these two texts say to the question of the separation of Jew and Gentile?*

*What is the center of Paul’s message?*

*What does centering on Christ say to us as we encounter others of different races and cultures?*

*How can you and your congregation act on that message in the midst of people of different races and cultures around you? What specific things might you start doing?*

*What gifts has God given you for doing these things?*

## **THE ENDURING VISION**

Read aloud the first paragraph under “3. A Time to be the Church” on the top of page 5 in *Freed in Christ*.

*How does this Bible study fit with the statement?*

*What vision for the Church does God’s Word (and the statement) hold out for us?*

*How would you put that vision into your own words?*

*How do you react to that vision? Where in that vision do you see yourself and your congregation?*

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## RACISM—VOICES

1. Black professional woman from Chicago says: “No conversation with whites is easy. The fun is over for me when I tell people I am a lawyer and they smile and say how wonderful that is. Maybe I should feel complimented, but I can’t help remembering the story I heard about a rich little white child with her mommy at the mall. She sees an African-American infant in a stroller and says, ‘Look mommy, a baby maid.’ When I see people going overboard with smiles and praise I know they saw my skin and expected to see a servant girl.”
2. A sheep rancher from Georgia: “Racism hurts me. I just have trouble understanding it. A couple of my closest friends can’t find anything good to say about Blacks. They keep talking about how lazy and sneaky they are. It doesn’t seem to matter to them that Jake at the crop service, who is pushing 65 works two full-time jobs to help put his granddaughter through college, or that the strongest models of what it is to be Christian in our county are Black. They can’t answer me, but they go on talking that way. It hurts me, I tell you.”
3. A Japanese woman married a white man who is a member of the ELCA. “My husband and I find cultural diversity beautiful and exciting. We have learned things from each other and from people of different nationalities that we could never learn from schools or books or movies. We are so much in love with this diversity that we searched for a community to settle in that was racially and culturally mixed. It took a long time. Almost all of the neighborhoods were either all white, or all Latino or Mexican, or all Black. The one we live in now is wonderful because of its stable mixture. Then my husband and I read that the ELCA is only 3.2 percent people of color. If we thought a neighborhood was poorer because of a lack of diversity, what does that say about this church? I must say that, as an Asian I am accepted in this congregation, but that is about all. Everyone expects me to learn Scandinavian, Lutheran ways. No one in the congregation seems that interested in learning mine.”
4. A seminarian from Central America: “At this time I am studying to be a pastor in the United States, but I am not sure what denomination to be in. You see, in my home we all share in the study of the Bible and we all help with the music and the preaching and with everything with worship. We play guitars and we sing loud and we can clap our hands. It is a very happy and very meaningful experience for us. There is nothing wrong with the worship at the seminary, but I do not always feel at home there.”
5. A Black Lutheran pastor: “Last summer I visited Africa for the first time. Walking down a street in \_\_\_\_\_ an African came up and asked me what tribe I belonged

to. It was a very natural thing for him—a question possibly asked whenever two Africans who are strangers to each other meet. But I could not answer. And that suddenly and painfully brought to my consciousness the truth that slavery and the ways Blacks have been treated in this country have robbed me of my identity.”

6. A teacher in an inner city school. “My sister teaches in the suburbs. Her school has two indoor swimming pools. The only pools we have are from leaking roofs. Her students have a computer in every room. Kids in our school have to fight to get their hands on a typewriter that works in typing class. Is it an accident that my kids are all poor? Would people be outraged if these were white kids going to class in boiler rooms? As I see it, it is all a terrible game of race and social class. I’ve given up hoping that the powers that be will give city kids an even break because it’s the right thing to do. Now I’m hoping they will wake up and smell the coffee, because if my kids don’t learn how to make a living by contributing something good to society you can bet your life they will find a way to make a buck doing something bad. If we don’t pay now, we’ll pay later. We will be their victims when they turn to crime and violence.”
7. A seventeen-year-old boy of mixed Middle Eastern background: “I’m not Black, but my skin is dark and I run with guys of all kinds of skin color. Some white, some Black, some Asian. I borrow my dad’s car. It’s a *few* years old, but he takes real good care of it and it looks new. It’s like *every* time we drive around, the cops pull us over. They stop us and make us get out of the car. They say, ‘Hey boys, where did you get that car?’ Then we see on their cars that it says ‘to serve and protect.’ Who are they protecting? Not us. If your skin looks a little dark you are *automatically* a criminal to guys like that.”
8. A Black woman who moved from the inner city to the suburbs with her three daughters. “I moved here to save my children’s lives. I know some people would like me to go back to where they keep all the people who are poor and have no jobs and no hope. Other people think it’s easy for folks like me to move to where things are better. But it was hard. The doctors don’t want to take me because I’m on Medicaid. My neighbors send me notes with cruel things in them. Just the other day my daughter ran home crying because the kids at her school chased her home and called her names. I miss my friends back in town. Sometimes I feel awfully low, but moving here is the best thing that has happened to me, and I’m *not* going back.”

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## KEY UNDERSTANDINGS

Reflect on the following understandings from *Freed in Christ* using your own experiences, observations, feelings, and imagination.

**1. Racism is a mixture of power, privilege, and prejudice.** It is more than a matter of personal attitudes...it spreads like an infection through the whole social system.

*What are your reactions to this understanding of racism?*

*How do you see yourself, your community, your congregation caught up in racism?*

**2. In our society, white people have been favored and hold unequal power to implement their prejudices—socially, politically, and economically. What has been the case is still the case: Skin color makes a difference and white people benefit from a privileged position.**

*Do you agree with this understanding? Why or why not?*

*What examples from your own experience can you share?*

*How do you see this understanding reflected in what you heard from “Voices”?*

**3. Racism infects and affects everyone with an impact that varies according to race, ethnicity, or culture, and other factors such as gender or economic situation.**

*How do you see or experience these differences?*

*What do you think about them?*

*How do you feel about these differences?*

**4. Racism deforms relationships. It robs white people of the possibility of authentic relationships with people of color, and people of color the possibility of authentic relationships with white people.**

*What are your relationships like with people who are culturally or racially different from you?*

*Do you think racism has affected any of these relationships? If so, how?*

**5. Racism can also lead to the rejection of self. It hinders us from becoming who God calls us to be.** As a violation of God’s intention for humanity, **racism is sin.**

*How do you think racism has affected you?*

*Why is racism a key issue for us as we live out our Christian life?*

HANDOUT

**ELEMENTS OF DOING JUSTICE**  
**A Summary Outline of pp. 5-7 of *Freed in Christ***

**PUBLIC LEADERSHIP**

- Proclaim the gospel of Christ as the hope for an end to walls of hostility
- Teach the law of God which calls for all to do justice
- Cry out for justice for all
- Persist in addressing difficult and complex problems of race and culture

**PUBLIC WITNESS**

- Become involved in local and global public life
- Take care of people who are disenfranchised and actively promote public forums open to all people

**PUBLIC DELIBERATION**

- Be a model community of diversity and deliberation about things that matter in the community
- Educate the young for multicultural life
- Bring together parties in conflict
- Form alliances for justice

**ADVOCACY**

- Promote justice and oppose racial and ethnic discrimination in specific ways in the media, corporate world, and government
- Promote equality for all citizens
- Advocate for just immigration policies and fair treatment of newcomers
- Promote human rights internationally

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## EVALUATION

*Evaluate the course using this form. Draw a circle around the number that most closely describes your assessment of each:*

5 = strongly approve  
4 = approve  
3 = neutral  
2 = disapprove  
1 = strongly disapprove

1. Prayers and worship	5	4	3	2	1
2. Feeling checks	5	4	3	2	1
3. The overall way strong feelings were handled	5	4	3	2	1
4. The way the biblical and theological material was handled	5	4	3	2	1
5. The way people were allowed and encouraged to think for themselves and form their own conclusions	5	4	3	2	1
6. The way leadership was exercised	5	4	3	2	1
7. Clarification of the ELCA statement and policies	5	4	3	2	1
8. The degree to which I was helped to understand others	5	4	3	2	1
9. The degree to which I was helped to think and decide about race, ethnicity, and culture	5	4	3	2	1
10. Discussion and planning of our congregation's ministry of inclusiveness and justice	5	4	3	2	1
11. Treatment of this church's public policy advocacy	5	4	3	2	1

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