

St. John Lutheran Church Social Justice Ministry Racial Justice Statement

Members of our congregation have been on a journey of listening, learning and discovery since July 2020. Through reading, discussion, and guest lecture, we have learned more about how our country and its economic system were built. We have learned more about how our country's institutions have for decades both intentionally and unwittingly discriminated against Black, Indigenous, Asian American and Pacific Islander, Latinx, and all people of color (POC). We understand the source of anger and frustration among people of color that stems from the ways in which our country systematically, through institutions and policies, has denied them the opportunity to succeed socially and economically.

As faith communities, we feel called to articulate this historical record. We believe that without a clear understanding of the sources of racial economic disparities among the majority of our country's people, there is little hope of change.

- We believe that our economic system has been designed and/or implemented to build wealth and economic success for white households, to the exclusion of families of color.
- We believe that this was largely accomplished through government policies and institutions, over many decades.
- The result is vast disparities in economic outcomes for whites versus people of color. Those include:
 - A. Markedly lower wealth among POC families —one-tenth of white wealth or less;¹
 - B. These disparities in wealth are not explained by differences in educational attainment, homeownership, income, etc.²
 - C. Instead, they are the result of generations of discriminatory wealth-building policy implementation that overwhelmingly benefited whites, including but not limited to
 - The GI bill³
 - Social security and unemployment insurance⁴
 - Failed promises for reparations after the Civil War⁵

¹ See the [Survey of Consumer Finances](https://www.federalreserve.gov/econres/scfindex.htm), Federal Reserve Board of Governors, Washington, DC. <https://www.federalreserve.gov/econres/scfindex.htm>, and Muñoz, Kim, Chang, Jackson, Hamilton and Darity, "The Color of Wealth in Boston," Federal Reserve Bank of Boston, 2015. <https://www.bostonfed.org/publications/one-time-pubs/color-of-wealth.aspx>

² See Darity, Hamilton, Paul, Aja, Price, Moore, and Chiopris, "What we get wrong about closing the racial wealth gap," Samuel DuBois Cook Center on Social Equity Insight Center for Community Economic Development April 2018

³ See Katznelson and Mettler, *Perspectives on Politics*, vol. 6 no. 3, 2008 for a discussion of the unequal distribution of VA loans from the GI bill.

⁴ See Anderson, Carol, [White Rage](#).

⁵ Ibid.

- The criminal justice system⁶
 - Unequal spending and quality of education across school systems.⁷
 - Denial of access to credit and wealth-building tools by financial institutions, in part through redlining and other race-based discrimination in mortgage markets.⁸
 - Poor job characteristics in the lowest paid jobs, which are held disproportionately by POC—low wages, poor or no health benefits, unstable work schedules, lack of child care, lack of affordable transportation to workplaces, etc.⁹
 - Unequal access to employer-provided healthcare has resulted in disparate health outcomes. These in turn have directly contributed to the disproportionate losses in POC communities during the pandemic.¹⁰
- Because these disparities are the result of intentional policies of our nation’s government, we jointly bear responsibility for
 - A. Making clear to the public the history of institutional discrimination;
 - B. Working together to find remedies that will close these gaps within our lifetimes.
 - As Christians who believe that the Creator has made all humans equal and loves them equally, we are called to do the same. Jesus consistently stood with the oppressed and marginalized, and we are inspired to live by his example.
 - It is inconsistent with our beliefs that such discriminatory and racially biased conditions, which crush individuals and families economically and socially, should exist, let alone persist, in our country.
 - We believe it is our duty as a community of faith to take action to remedy these vast disparities.
 - We lament for this country’s history of violence, enslavement, and disenfranchisement against people of color, and the continued discrimination and injustices against communities of color today.

⁶ See especially Alexander, Michelle, *The New Jim Crow*.

⁷ These issues are more nuanced. For an excellent analysis of educational spending, see Shores and Ejdemyr, “Do school districts spend less money on poor and minority students?”, Brookings Institutions, 2017. <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/brown-center-chalkboard/2017/05/25/do-school-districts-spend-less-money-on-poor-and-minority-students/> It is not true that spending is less on all minority students. The authors suggest “in districts with greater income inequality and segregation, poor and minority students would receive a smaller share of school resources.” In many districts that are majority-minority, spending is greater than their white counterparts. Patterns of quality of education, which is multi-faceted and more difficult to measure are somewhat clearer; see for example Rueben and Murray, “Racial Disparities in Education Finance: Going Beyond Unequal Revenues,” Urban-Brookings Tax Policy Center, Discussion paper No. 29, 2008.

⁸ See, among many others, Munnell, Tootell, Browne and McEneaney, “Mortgage Lending in Boston: Interpreting HMDA Data,” *American Economic Review*, March 1996.

⁹ See Chakrabarti, P. and J. Fuhrer, *Investing in America's Workforce: Improving Outcomes for Workers and Employers*, Federal Reserve Bank of Atlanta, 2020. <https://www.investinwork.org/book>

¹⁰ See the many CDC resources on this issue, including <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/covid-data/investigations-discovery/hospitalization-death-by-race-et-hnicity.html>.

- We lament for the Christian and ELCA communities complicity in racism, racist policies, and hindrance to speak out against injustice that is long overdue.¹¹
- We denounce white supremacy and strive to embody a community of acceptance and understanding that Jesus envisions for all God's children.

This statement is the first step in publicly calling attention to the history of systemic racism and denouncing white supremacy in the United States. We hope to draw attention to this statement and the history so that most of our citizens will become aware of the role that our governmental and private institutions play in causing economic and social disparities. Our hope is that knowledge will lay the groundwork for change. Without that groundwork, we believe it will be difficult if not impossible to bring about change in our country.

To move towards a society with equity, opportunity, and justice for all, the St. John Social Justice Ministry team will work to 1) educate our Congregation on racial injustice and systemic racism 2) connect with community and faith leaders of color and support ongoing community work for justice and 3) advocate for anti-racist policies and practices.

¹¹ See Lenny Duncan's [Dear Church: A Love Letter from a Black Preacher to the Whitest Denomination in the US](#)