

A Look at the Virginia Synod of the ELCA: One of the Whitest Christian Denominations in the
United States

Lily Pingel

Dr. Melanie Trexler, Dr. Marit Berntson, & Dr. Kristen Rapp

Roanoke College

Introduction

When the ELCA formed in 1988, its members decided that they would strive for at least ten percent of the religious body to include people of color or with English as a second (or third, etc.) language; however, the ELCA has failed to accomplish its goal.¹ Again in 1993, the ELCA published a document re-stating its commitment to racial justice, calling for change on three levels: religiously and spiritually, culturally, and institutionally.² Though a commitment, the document lacked a concrete plan. Numbers of diversity stayed marginally the same, and in 2019, the ELCA gave a formal apology to the African Descent Lutheran Association (ADLA), acknowledging the ELCA's complicity in slavery and America's legacy of racism.³ The ELCA declared racism a sin and recommitted to racial justice and racial reconciliation in the church.⁴ The ELCA's plan shows a desire to advocate for racial justice at the national level, but it lacks policy and concrete strategies to bring about such a change.

The Virginia Synod of the ELCA is made up of 145 congregations, 143 within the state of Virginia, one in North Carolina, and one in West Virginia.⁵ The current bishop is Bob Humphrey, who has served since 2017.⁶ As of 2020, the Virginia Synod is about 95% white in race, with the next highest ethnic groups being African Americans and Hispanic people, these groups making up around 1.3% each of the membership.⁷ As I have connections within the Synod, I have formed relationships with pastors who work in the Synod office, and they support my

research and have assisted me through the process. They also showed a desire to work with me and make the findings of this research available to share with the rest of the Synod.

This report shows, through interviews with clergy, as well as a survey sent to members of congregations in the Virginia Synod, that many people express dissatisfaction with how the ELCA has addressed racial justice on a national level. While the ELCA leadership releases annual statements (usually on issues pertaining to social justice), follow-up strategies or concrete actions to promote visible change are lacking. For many different reasons, the ELCA remained one of the whitest Christian denominations in the United States since its formation.⁸ Within the Virginia Synod, internal groups such as Tapestry, which advocates for social justice, exist to help address the lack of diversity. However, a lack of motivation from people on all levels of leadership and involvement remains prevalent.⁹

Different statistical information exists on the racial composition of ELCA membership, making it difficult to determine just how "white" the denominational membership is.¹⁰ The statistic most often referenced when discussing race in the ELCA is from a Pew Research study that states the denomination is 96% white.¹¹ Additionally, the Association of Religion Data Archives (ARDA) reports that as of 2014, the ELCA was 95.3% white.¹² However, the National Congregations Study (NCS) done by Duke University found that from their survey of ELCA clergy, an estimated 72.3% of

members were white.¹³ Whatever the accuracy of these datasets may be, each still shows that ELCA is overwhelmingly white.¹⁴ Although not many people of color are members of the ELCA, many leaders and members of the church want it to be a safe and accepting place for people of other ethnicities to come to, if and when they so choose to join. This research attempts to answer two key questions: (1) Why is the ELCA so overwhelmingly white in race? and (2) Why has the ELCA failed to meet its goal of 10% diverse membership?

Executive Summary

The ELCA is one of the whitest Christian denominations in the United States, even though it declared its commitment to racial justice work and becoming more diverse in the 1990s. My goal was to figure out why this is the case. In doing so, I interviewed pastors in the Virginia Synod about this topic. Afterwards, I sent out a survey to members of Virginia Synod congregations, asking them similar questions.

Pastors largely said that the ELCA's whiteness comes from historical forces such as ethnic heritage, language barriers, and the period of slavery in the United States. They also attributed this to the ELCA's worship style and how the culture of these services is very white. They also stated that in terms of racial justice efforts, the church on the national level has fallen short of their original goals, while the Virginia Synod is doing racial justice work with the Tapestry, and many congregations are having conversations on race as well. Dividedness

in congregations, the COVID-19 pandemic, and the fear from pastors of losing members have generally kept concrete change from happening, however.

Most parishioners who filled out the survey said that their congregations have had conversations about race at least a few times over the past few years. They also attributed the whiteness of the ELCA largely to the history of Lutherans in America, the style of worship that is largely present in these churches, and systemic forces that keep white supremacy in place. Most respondents also expressed a willingness to integrate other cultures into the worship space. With these results in mind, I have created some recommendations for the Church.

Moving forward, I would recommend that churches do integrate other cultures into worship, specifically with the musical aspects of services. I would also recommend giving ELCA members authentic, diverse experiences by inviting people of color to speak in the worship space on community issues, having people of color serve in leadership roles in the church, and creating a state-level affiliation between the Virginia Synod and a denomination whose membership is primarily people of color. Finally, I recommend that congregations get more involved in community outreach and service projects within their city or county.

Methodology

I, the primary researcher, conducted 20 interviews with Virginia Synod clergy members from February to July 2022. I sent

out recruitment emails and conducted interviews over Zoom. Questions focused on the ELCA's involvement with racial justice, as well as the current whiteness of the denomination. After congregational background questions, I asked about the current state of whiteness in the ELCA, as well as efforts that are currently enacted to promote racial justice. Lastly, I asked participants how to best improve in the ELCA's racial justice plan, as well as what the future of the ELCA might look like. To see the full interview guide, view Appendix A.

After the interviews, I collected 147 responses from Virginia Synod parishioners, 83 of these being fully completed responses. The online survey was active from June 20 to July 23, 2022. Clergy sent the link to parishioners, and the Virginia Synod also sent the link in a weekly newsletter on July 11 and 18, as well as in the *Do Justice* newsletter on July 21, which is sent out to those in the Synod who are interested in social justice. As of 2019, there are about 20,000 members of the Virginia Synod, with around 10,000 of them attending weekly worship services.¹⁵ The online survey, done through Qualtrics, asked twenty-eight questions similar to those discussed with pastors. To see the full questionnaire, view Appendix B.

I conducted my research by interviewing 20 pastors in the Virginia Synod of the ELCA. Of these pastors, two were Black and eighteen were white. Seven of the pastors identified as women, and thirteen identified as men. The pastors' ages ranged from 30 to 75 years old, and they lived in

different places all across the state of Virginia. I collected the sample by purposive and snowball sampling. I am familiar with the Virginia Synod, so previous knowledge helped me to identify individuals with insights into the particular topic. I located additional participants by asking this initial list of people for names of others who might express interest in discussing this topic.

Results

Interviews With Pastors

History

There are many historical forces that impact the racial makeup of the ELCA. The primary ones are ethnic heritage, language barriers, and lack of enslaved Lutherans during the period of slavery. Of the twenty pastors I interviewed, seventeen of them attributed the ELCA's overwhelming whiteness to the history of Lutheranism in the United States, whether that be through ethnic heritage, language barriers, or the period of slavery.

Ethnic Heritage

The ELCA is an ethnically based congregation that is attached to its German and Scandinavian roots. Lutherans came to the American colonies from Germany and Scandinavia starting in the seventeenth century, but they did not settle in large numbers until well into the eighteenth century.¹⁶ As time went on and more people immigrated to America, there was a schism in the church that led to the formation of different branches of Lutheranism. More

conservative branches formed into the Missouri Synod (LCMS) and the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod (WELS), while the more progressive ELCA formed later on.¹⁷ The ELCA, the largest Lutheran denomination in the United States, “was the result of countless mergers between separate ethnic denominations over the course of the twentieth century,” the main denominations being the Lutheran Church in America (LCA) and the American Lutheran Church (ALC).¹⁸ Although the Lutheran church went through many different changes and transitions over the last centuries, they are still tightly bound to their ethnic heritage, and the ELCA branch is no exception. Because German and Scandinavian immigrants are overwhelmingly white, so are members of the ELCA.

Language Barriers

This also led to language barriers, which many pastors discussed as well. Many congregations didn’t stop using German or Scandinavian languages in worship until the twentieth century, which meant that people who only spoke English or other languages could not take part.¹⁹ Additionally, even now, those whose primary language is not English may prefer to worship in a church that speaks that language, which ELCA congregations are not as likely to worship in. These factors unintentionally create a less inclusive and welcoming environment for people of other races or ethnicities.

Period of Slavery

During the period of slavery in the United States, few Lutherans owned enslaved people. More commonly, Baptists and Methodists owned enslaved people and converted them to Christianity. In turn, a larger population of people of color belonged to Baptist and Methodist denominations.²⁰

Worship Style

Another reason that many pastors attributed to the whiteness of the ELCA is that the style of worship is very different from that in churches that are multiethnic or otherwise not white. Seven pastors attributed the ELCA’s whiteness to this.

Strict Adherence to Liturgy

The way that Lutheran congregations worship is very Eurocentric, with a strict adherence to the traditional liturgy and not much room for movement or expression. Lutheran congregational worship consists of gathering, word, meal, and sending. According to the bishop of the ELCA, “It’s a discipline Lutherans willingly undertake because it helps individuals and the entire community express [their] connection with other Christians throughout the world and across the ages.”²¹ The traditionally and liturgically focused worship contrasts with worship cultures in congregations less white.²²

Despite the rigidity of how most churches practice Lutheran liturgy, pastors would prefer liturgical flexibility, which they

emphasize is possible, because it allows for cultural interpretation. However, many pastors fear changing worship styles because of reactions from congregation members. It may be easier to keep the order of worship the same that it has always been, even when the style does not create a welcoming environment for others.

Racial Justice Efforts

There have been various racial justice efforts from all levels of leadership in the ELCA—from the national level, to the synodical level, to the congregational level. There is clear, expressed interest on the subject, but many pastors are still unsure about how best to take action.

National Efforts

The ELCA will often release statements on the national level regarding racial justice, sometimes in response to events around the United States, and sometimes of their own accord. For instance, in 2019, the ELCA published a formal apology to ADLA and other Black Americans for their complicity in white supremacy and racism, which was presented by Bishop Eaton, the churchwide Bishop of the ELCA, and ELCA Church Council Members. The national church also has released documents in the past stating their commitment to racial justice. However, frustration from lower ranks in the ELCA often ensues after such statements are made because there is usually no action plan that comes after it. The statements are just statements, they say, and nothing more.

Virginia Synod

Perhaps the biggest accomplishment in the Virginia Synod on a synodical level in terms of racial justice efforts is the creation of the Tapestry team made up of pastors and other leaders committed to social justice. In 2003, a team to address social justice was created, called the African American Outreach Team (AAOT).²³ The group went through two name changes, becoming the All-Inclusive Outreach Team (AIOT) about a decade later, and then in 2016 to Tapestry.²⁴ Their mission statement says that their goal “is to empower congregations in the Virginia Synod to be boldly inclusive in matters of diversity and inclusion, walking with God, and guided by the Holy Spirit to bring healing, reconciliation, and justice.”²⁵ Tapestry provides resources for congregations, helps members have conversations about social justice, and creates networks for the purpose of advocacy.²⁶ In 2022, the Tapestry team decided to break social justice issues into groups that would be addressed individually for a period of time over the course of the year. The first quarter of the year is spent on racial justice issues, the next quarter is spent focusing on LGBTQIA+ issues, the third focuses on environmental issues, and then the last quarter involves discussing gender equality.²⁷ The team has done a lot of work to equip congregations with resources to get them talking about social justice issues by working directly with congregations and pastors and providing links and other sources on their website, and racial justice has always been a large part of the ongoing conversations that they have.

Congregations

Many congregations have gotten involved in racial justice work. Pastors who started this work most commonly do this in the form of book studies and discussion groups to educate members about race and inequality and push them to have difficult conversations. Of the twenty pastors I interviewed, thirteen said that they've had conversations with their congregations about racial justice work, and six specified that the conversations are often in the form of book studies or discussion groups. Some congregations have also formed relationships with congregations that have a large presence of people of color, typically majority-Black congregations. Two pastors stated that they had experience doing this work, and a few others, although they did not personally have this experience, knew pastors who did. Additionally, many churches are involved with service projects and outreach work to help marginalized groups in their communities. While uncommon, other churches participate in rallies within their communities or help settle refugee families in efforts to aid racial justice as well.

Barriers

Although many pastors and members are interested in racial justice work, there are some barriers, often at the congregational level, that keep people from getting involved.

Dividedness in Congregations

One big issue that keeps congregations from having conversations about race is

dividedness in political opinions within membership. Some see racial justice work as necessary, while others do not. Some regard it as a political issue that causes division, while others treat it as a human rights issue that they have an obligation to address. Pastors often want to make everyone happy, so congregations that are involved in racial justice work usually struggle with members who are divided on whether the process is going too slowly or too quickly. Therefore, the work is often slow-going and met with some conflict from certain members.

COVID-19

There are pastors who are interested in racial justice work, but the COVID-19 pandemic has caused certain issues in congregations to fall to the wayside, this topic sometimes being one of them. As congregations adapt more to the pandemic, and as cases dwindle, it is likely that there will be more conversations among members about race and racial justice.

Fear of Losing Members

Pastors can often be hesitant to discuss racial justice action, especially if they know that they will be met with opposition from some of their members, because they are afraid of losing membership, and therefore losing funds for the church.

Rural vs. Urban

Pastors in smaller or more rural areas were generally just as interested in racial justice

work as those who led churches in more suburban and urban areas. Of the twenty pastors I interviewed, seven were pastors in smaller, more rural areas, but they expressed the same enthusiasm for social justice as pastors in more urban areas. It is true, though, that members of these smaller congregations were less interested in racial justice work than their pastors. However, pastors all over the state seem to be fairly interested in advocacy work, and those who are less interested do not necessarily come from more rural areas.

Education

Lutherans value education as the best method of fostering racial justice. The ELCA on a national level sends out many statements on race for members across the country to read, and the Virginia Synod and many of its congregations encourage discussion groups, book studies, Bible studies, and more. However, this is not enough. While education is good, there is usually not much action that follows, especially on the national level of the ELCA. Pastors believe that it is a good place to start and a good place to get people interested and involved, but it needs to go beyond the academic side, and out into the community.

Clergy-Driven Action

Those who are most interested in racial justice work are clergy members, and not as

much the members of congregations. More often than not, clergy are the ones starting book groups, sending out statements, and doing other things to help raise awareness of issues like racism in their communities.

Theology vs. Culture

Members seem to have lost sight of the ELCA's theology. Many people treat their Lutheran community and culture as more important to their religious identity than the theology associated with the denomination. Therefore, they are less open to the idea of welcoming in people from other cultures, because it would disrupt the community that they have, one that has been fostered by the bonds of ethnic heritage and culture. Pastors want their members to embrace a more inclusive theology, because then, they may be more inclined to be welcoming and accepting of those who are different from them, and to share their beliefs with others who may be interested in joining the church.

Survey to Virginia Synod Members

Demographic Information

Of the 83 respondents that completed the survey in full, 94% of them reported that they were white. 31% reported that they were men, while 66% said they were women. Additionally, 4.8% were ages 18-29 years, 6% within 30-49 years, 28.9% were 50-64 years, and 60.2% were at least 65 years old.

The respondents also lived all around the state of Virginia. 34.9% reported that they lived in Southwest Virginia, 28.9% said that

they were from in the Tidewater area, 15.7% were from the Shenandoah Valley, 4.8% were from the Richmond area, 4.8% were from Northern Virginia, 3.6% were from central Virginia, and 7.2% did not report which region they were from.

53% identified as liberal, 33.7% as moderate, and 8.4% as conservative.

Congregations that Discuss Race

78.3% of respondents said that their pastor had started discussions of race with their congregations; 13.3% said no, and 8.4% said they were not sure. For those who said they had these discussions, 26.2% said this happened once or twice, 30.8% reported this happening three or four times, and 43.1% said it happened six or more times. Over three-fourths of surveyed congregations are having conversations about race, and for many, they seem to be happening fairly frequently, with almost half of the congregations having discussed race at least six times within the last two years. There is definite interest in the topic of race in the Virginia Synod, so many congregations have begun their journey towards discussing and advocating for racial justice.

Similar to the results from the interviews with pastors, there was no major difference in the number of congregations having these discussions based on the landscape. There are about just as many rural congregations having discussions about race as suburban and urban congregations.²⁸

Why the ELCA is so White

I asked respondents why they believed the ELCA is such a white denomination. About 75% of them said that it was due to the history of the Lutheran church in the United States, especially its strong ethnic heritage.

About 45% of respondents also believed that today's society and the systemic and cultural forces in place are keeping the ELCA white. Only around 16% of them believed that this was partially due to the ELCA's theology, however.

Finally, about 74% attributed this whiteness to the ELCA's style of worship, that it may be keeping people of color from joining the church.

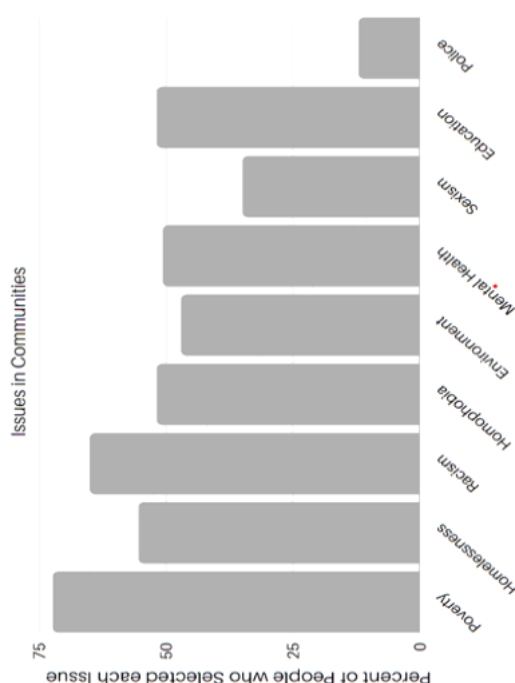
The percentage of people who attributed these factors to the ELCA's whiteness did correspond to what pastors said. Most pastors discussed the history of the Lutheran church and worship style, about half talked about systemic oppression, and only a few talked about theological factors.

Reasons	Yes	No
History	75%	25%
Society	45%	55%
Theology	16%	84%
Worship Style	74%	26%

Issues in Communities

Respondents indicated what challenges were present in their communities. The most common of these were poverty (60 people), racism (54 people), and homelessness (46 people). The other issues that could have been selected were environmental issues,

sexism, homophobia, and police-community relations. Most people also stated that there were intersections between these issues, naming a number of issues in their response. For instance, many people stated that both racism and poverty were issues in their communities. This example is important because people of color are disproportionately affected by poverty, and many participants have acknowledged this in their responses.²⁹



Willingness to Welcome Diversity

I asked people how willing they were to accept people from other cultures into their congregations. 80.5% of respondents stated that they would go to great lengths to learn about the cultures of such new members and

integrate them into congregational practices. 12.2% said that they would be welcoming to people of other cultures, but it would be easier if they adapted to the existing culture of the congregation. Finally, 7.3% believed that their congregation should be culturally homogeneous. There are plenty of people in the Virginia Synod who are willing to explore other cultures within the context of a worship experience, especially in order to make their congregation a more welcoming place. The results show that the majority of people in the Synod embrace inclusivity as they seek guidance on how to put it into practice. By these statistics, many people would welcome their pastor's decision to create more culturally diverse experiences within the church if they chose to do so.

Congregants seem to have the same lines of thinking as pastors when it comes to what has caused the ELCA to be so white in race. Many congregations have already had conversations about racial justice, and participants appear to be enthusiastic about the work that they have been doing. Pastors are anxious to take next steps on their path towards advocating for racial justice, and their parishioners are ready to go on this journey with them.

Recommendations

After analyzing the results from the interviews and survey responses, one thing I would suggest is to implement more culturally diverse worship styles into church services. One way to do this is through music. Right now, music in ELCA worship services comprises mostly of hymns written before the 1700s, which were made by and for white

people.³⁰ In the Evangelical Lutheran Worship hymnal (ELW), the latest song and liturgy book for the ELCA, there are some songs that were written by Hispanic or African people, but these are few and far between. Often times, when white organists play these hymns, they play them in the style of their own traditional worship hymns, rather than the cultural style intended. I want churches to integrate more cultures into their worship services, and music is the easiest way to do that, but so far, it hasn't been done very well in most churches.

I propose that at least every two weeks, there is a hymn sung during worship that comes from a non-European culture. The music director, choir, and all those involved in worship and music will need to make sure the hymns accurately reflect and pay homage to the culture they represent. Some churches have already started projects in this realm: Deaconess Sandra Rhein, an international hymnal consultant, has helped Lutherans all over the world to create hymnals for their churches that accurately reflect other cultures and worship practices.³¹ Additionally, Amber O'Neal Johnston, who runs a blog called *Heritage Mom*, created a collection of hymns called "Heritage Hymns" that contains multiple cultural versions of hymns with background information and learning videos to help those who want to branch out culturally through music during worship.³² Resources such as these will help ELCA churches create a more inclusive worship space that represents multiple different cultures. It will help people of color visiting an ELCA congregation see that it is not tied down to strict European liturgy that only reflects the experiences of white people. To

hold congregations accountable, the music director of the church will send a list of hymns being used in services for each month to their Synod office.

Additionally, congregants should experience more authentically diverse discussions during the worship service. One way to start this is to invite people of color to speak during awareness months, fundraisers, etc. For example, during February, churches must bring in at least one Black person to give a talk for Black History Month. All churches are encouraged to do this, but it is required for congregations whose membership is over 90% white.

People of color should not do all the educating, however. White leaders in the church must also push for racial justice in their congregations, and they should start book groups, lead discussions, and more, to educate their white peers. If not already implemented, pastors should start a discussion group at their church for the purpose of discussing racial justice. Some books that may be good places to start are *Dear Church: A Love Letter from a Black Preacher to the Whitest Denomination in the US* by Lenny Duncan, *How to be an Antiracist* by Ibram X. Kendi, and *I'm Still Here: Black Dignity in a World Made for Whiteness* by Austin Channing Brown.

People of color who are a part of these churches should also be given the opportunity to participate in church leadership, such as to serve on church council, be an assisting minister, or lead the church in other ways. Seeing people of color in leadership roles in the church will help

others see that they can do the same and be an authentic member of the congregation.

Another helpful racial justice tool is for ELCA congregations to form relationships with churches that have a majority membership of people of color, such as African Methodist Episcopal (AME) or Church of God in Christ (COGIC) congregations. From those I interviewed that said they had done this, they said it was a really good thing for their members because they got to discuss issues of racial justice with people who live different lives than them and learn from people of color who had the opportunity to share their personal experiences. The ELCA will not become more diverse automatically—members need to first have authentically diverse experiences outside of their congregation, and having these kinds of relationships is one way to do this.

I suggest that the Virginia Synod make a state-level affiliation with a denomination such as the Church of God in Christ (COGIC) or the African Methodist Episcopal (AME) Church, so a significant commitment is made. This will make it easier for smaller congregations to make connections in their own community with people of another denomination, because they will have assistance from the Synod. The goal will be to interact with and develop a mutually respectful and beneficial relationship between the two denominations in which they can work together on projects and get to know one another. This can happen in a variety of ways, whether it be through discussion groups, service projects, joint

worship, or anything else relevant to the life of the church.

Many pastors commented on how the ELCA does a pretty good job of doing outreach and service work outside of the country, but they are not as strong domestically. Some individual congregations do community service work, but not all. Therefore, I'd propose that every congregation complete five hours of service per month. The service hours can be done in any way the congregation would like: housing projects, soup kitchens, clothing drives, or anything else that benefits their community. The hours will be counted by how long each event will last, and not how long individual people stay there. The pastor of the congregation needs to be present for at least two of the hours, however, and at least five people from the congregation should be involved with each event. So, maybe a congregation will do work on a house every other weekend, and each length of time is three hours, for example. They can mix and match in their projects; the point is to be creative and get out into the community, as this will do more than help those in need—it will help locals become more familiar with the community in which they already live. At the end of each month, pastors will report their events and hours to the office of their synod.

Outreach and service work in the community would benefit many different groups. People who are in need will receive help from their surrounding city or county, likely for a multitude of different things. The ELCA will also be able to make a name for itself. One concern among some of the

pastors I interviewed was that not many people seemed to know what the ELCA is and what their beliefs and practices are. More people may begin to learn these things if ELCA churches become more active in their communities. They will also be able to put themselves out there as a group that serves their community and advocates for those in need. By doing this, the ELCA would present itself as a much more welcoming place. Lots of churches already do service projects such as these, but they are often more infrequent. Many congregations do not do outreach work regularly at all. Requiring service hours would help many people and create a

mutually beneficial relationship between the congregation and their surrounding community. It would also potentially help members of congregations who are not very active in their church to get more involved. It could also be a good way for youth groups to get together, and for new friendships to be formed. Some even may discover a new passion for serving others, or for cultivating other skills, such as construction, cooking, or other tasks. Many people, when thinking about social justice, don't just want to put up a sign; they want to go out and help people. More communal involvement can meet this need.

Appendix A

Interview Guide

Introduction:

- For this interview, I will be recording our conversation on Zoom. This information may be included in publications and presentations, but only in a written format. Your name will not be included unless you explicitly ask for it to be. Your confidentiality will be protected to the best of my ability. You do not have to answer any questions that you do not want to, and you can withdraw from the interview and the study altogether at any time. Do I have your permission to record this conversation, and to proceed with the study?
- My name is Lily Pingel, and I am a junior at Roanoke College, studying sociology and religion. The purpose of the study is to gain information and opinions from pastors in the ELCA, more specifically the VA Synod, on race and racial justice efforts in the denomination. Thank you for agreeing to participate in this study!

Opening questions:

- How long have you been a pastor?
- Can you describe your call to ministry to me?
- Was there a perceived problem that led you to become a pastor?
- What are the demographics of your congregation?
- What challenges does your church congregation face?
- During your time as a minister, are there any ways in which you have personally witnessed the Lutheran Church interacting with anti-racist efforts? If so, would you please describe them?

Key questions:

- Where do you think the whiteness of the ELCA stems from?
- What kind of training have you received on how to build an anti-racist church, if any?
- Has your congregation had conversations about racial diversity or racial justice in the ELCA?
- If you could improve one thing about the ELCA's plan to promote racial justice in the Virginia Synod, what would it be and why?

Closing questions:

- How would you like to see the ELCA and/or the Virginia Synod change over time?
- If there anything else that you would like to mention about this topic that I did not ask you about?

Appendix B

Survey Questionnaire

1. What is the name of your congregation? _____
2. What is the average attendance for Sunday worship at your congregation?
 - a. Less than 30 people
 - b. 31-60 people
 - c. 61-90 people
 - d. 91+ people
3. What is the average age of the people in your congregation?
 - a. 18-29
 - b. 30-49
 - c. 50-64
 - d. 65+
4. How often do you attend Sunday worship at your congregation?
 - a. Almost every week
 - b. Every few weeks/once or twice a month
 - c. A few times a year
 - d. For major services (Christmas, Easter)
 - e. Never
5. How diverse is the community surrounding your congregation?
 Not diverse at all (vast majority white) Somewhat diverse Very diverse
6. How diverse is your congregation?
 Not diverse at all (vast majority white) Somewhat diverse Very diverse
7. In the last two years, has there been any discussion about any of the following topics?
 Check all that apply:
 - a. Finances
 - b. Changes in worship style
 - c. Changes in music styles
 - d. Changes in other programs of the congregation
 - e. Doctrines
 - f. Pastoral leadership style
 - g. Lay leadership style
 - h. Conflicts between staff and/or clergy
 - i. Sexual misconduct
 - j. Issues regarding homosexuality
 - k. Racial issues

- l. Issues about a new building or renovation of an existing building
 - m. None of the above
 - n. Other (specify): _____
8. What are some challenges that your surrounding community faces? Check all that apply:
- a. Poverty
 - b. Homelessness
 - c. Racism
 - d. Sexism
 - e. Homophobia
 - f. Education quality
 - g. Environmental concerns
 - h. Mental health issues
 - i. Other: _____
9. Is your congregation involved in outreach and/or service work in your surrounding community?
- Yes No
10. What are some of these projects? _____
11. The ELCA is the whitest Christian denomination in the United States, according to a report from 2015. Although some congregations are becoming more diverse, this statistic is still the same. Why do you think this is? Check all that apply:
- a. Historical heritage
 - b. Social forces
 - c. Theological forces
 - d. Liturgical differences between racially-defined denominations
 - e. Other: _____
12. What do you think about people from other racial or ethnic heritages joining your congregation?
- a. I think my congregation should be culturally homogeneous.
 - b. I would accept them, but it would be a lot easier if they adapted to the culture of my congregation.
 - c. I would go to great lengths to learn about their culture and integrate it into the congregation's practices.
13. Has your pastor ever discussed racial justice action with your congregation?
- Yes No
14. If yes, how often has this discussion occurred within the past two years?
- a. Once or twice

- b. 3-5 times
 - c. 6+ times
15. How aware are you of racial justice actions taking place in your congregation, the Virginia Synod, and/or the ELCA as a whole?
- a. I have no knowledge of this topic
 - b. I have a little knowledge on this topic
 - c. I have some knowledge on this topic
 - d. I have a lot of knowledge on this topic
16. Which of these racial justice initiatives in the ELCA are you aware of? Check all that apply:
- a. Racial justice training for seminary students
 - b. Apology to people of African Descent in 2019 and other documents from churchwide
 - c. Women of the ELCA organization
 - d. African Descent Lutheran Organization
 - e. Forums and/or book clubs focused on racial justice in specific congregations
 - f. Other: _____
17. Within the past 12 months, have there been any groups, meetings, classes, or events in your congregation to discuss issues related to race and race relations?
- Yes No
18. Within the past 12 months, have there been any groups, meetings, classes, or events in your congregation to discuss how best to preserve your congregation's own racial or ethnic heritage?
- Yes No
19. Within the past 12 months, have there been any groups, meetings, classes, or events in your congregation to discuss issues related to race and the police?
- Yes No
20. On a scale of 1-5, how would you rate the importance of racial justice action in the ELCA? 1 = not important; 5 = extremely important
- 1 2 3 4 5
21. On a scale of 1-5, how would you rate the effectiveness of current policies and actions in the ELCA surrounding racial justice action? 1 = not important; 5 = extremely important
- 1 2 3 4 5
22. What is your age?
- a. 18-29

- b. 30-49
- c. 50-64
- d. 65+

23. What is your gender?

- a. Man
- b. Woman
- c. Other: _____

24. What is your race/ethnicity?

- a. White
- b. Black
- c. Asian
- d. Latine
- e. Other/Mixed

25. What is the highest level of education that you have received?

- a. High school or less
- b. Some college
- c. Bachelor's degree
- d. Post-graduate degree

26. What is your political ideology?

Liberal

Moderate

Conservative

¹ "Freed in Christ: Race, Ethnicity, and Culture." 1994. *Evangelical Lutheran Church in America*. Retrieved August 16, 2022 (http://download.elca.org/ELCA%20Resource%20Repository/race_ethnicity_culture_statement.pdf).

² ELCA, "Freed in Christ: Race, Ethnicity, and Culture."

³ "Declaration of the ELCA to People of African Descent." 2019. *Evangelical Lutheran Church in America*. Retrieved August 16, 2022 (https://download.elca.org/ELCA%20Resource%20Repository/Slavery_Apology_Explanation.pdf).

⁴ ELCA, "Declaration to of the ELCA to People of African Descent."

⁵ "Virginia Synod Congregations." 2022. *VASynod*. Retrieved July 19, 2022 (<https://vasynod.org/about/our-congregations/>).

⁶ "Virginia Synod Staff." 2022. *VASynod*. Retrieved July 19, 2022 (<https://vasynod.org/about/staff/>).

⁷ "Summary of Congregational Statistics as of 12/31/2020." 2021. *Evangelical Lutheran Church in America*. Retrieved August 15, 2022 (https://download.elca.org/ELCA%20Resource%20Repository/Summary_of_Congregational_Statistics_as_of_12-31-2020.pdf?_ga=2.147828663.1482506643.1655591835-1000188784.1645393982). Page 298.

⁸ ELCA, "Freed in Christ: Race, Ethnicity, and Culture."

⁹ “Re-Formation in Action: 4 New Tapestry Team Focus Groups.” 2022. *VASynod*. Retrieved June 19, 2022 (<https://vasynod.org/ministries/tapestry/>).

¹⁰ There are many different definitions of whiteness that help to aid different perspectives. One definition is simply that one is of European descent. It is much more complex than that, however. Whiteness is a concept that is “the result of social and cultural processes, rooted in a global history of European colonialism, imperialism, and transatlantic slavery, and maintained today through various institutions, ideologies, and everyday social practices.”³³ Whiteness and white culture are seen as the cultural norm in the United States, and white people see nonwhite cultures as inferior. There have been many changes over time considering the definition of whiteness, however. There used to be more than one existing white race, and there was a hierarchy of whiteness; one example of this is the treatment of Irish Americans in the 19th century.³⁴ Now, the definition of the white race has been generally consolidated to mean those who are of European descent, but it is still used as a means to oppress those who do not align with this whiteness.

¹¹ Lipka, Michael. 2015. “The most and least racially diverse U.S. religious groups.” *Pew Research Center*. Retrieved March 24, 2021 (<https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2015/07/27/the-most-and-least-racially-diverse-u-s-religious-groups/>).

¹² “Demographics, Behaviors, Beliefs and Practices of Members.” 2014. *Association of Religion Data Archives*. Retrieved July 20, 2022 (https://www.thearda.com/landing/elca/D_1415_4.asp#Profile).

¹³ “National Congregations Study.” 2019. *National Congregations Survey*. Retrieved July 20, 2022 (<https://sites.duke.edu/ncsweb/explore-the-data/>).

¹⁴ These research centers gathered data by sending surveys out to ELCA members across the country. Several hundreds of people responded, but there are millions of people within the ELCA throughout the United States, so it is unclear how representative these samples are of the entire population. It is also unclear if some of the institutions doing these surveys may have certain agendas or goals that they would like to accomplish by obtaining these statistics.

¹⁵ ELCA, “Summary of Congregational Statistics as of 12/31/2020,” pages 296-98.

¹⁶ Splitter, Wolfgang. 2017. “Lutherans.” *Oxford Bibliographies*. Retrieved May 10, 2022 (<https://www.oxfordbibliographies.com/view/document/obo-9780199730414/obo-9780199730414-0172.xml>).

¹⁷ Noll, Mark. 2003. “American Lutherans Yesterday and Today.” Pp. 3-25 in *Lutherans Today: American Lutheran Identity in the 21st Century*, edited by Richard Cimino. Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co. Page 15.

¹⁸ Noll, “American Lutherans Yesterday and Today,” 14.

¹⁹ Boles, Richard J. 2019. “African Americans and Northern Lutherans during the Eighteenth Century.” *Lutheran Quarterly* 33(2):153-179. Retrieved November 4, 2021 from *Project MUSE* (<https://muse.jhu.edu/article/726646>). Page #166; Granquist, Mark. 2015. *Lutherans in America: A New History*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press. Page 239.

²⁰ Boles, “African Americans and Northern Lutherans during the Eighteenth Century,” 153.

²¹ Eaton, Elizabeth. 2021. “Gathering, Word, Meal, and Sending.” *Living Lutheran*. Retrieved August 15, 2022 (<https://www.livinglutheran.org/2019/06/gathering-word-meal-and-sending/>).

²² Edwards, Korie L. 2009. “Race, Religion, and Worship: Are Contemporary African-American Worship Practices Distinct?” *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 48(1). Retrieved July 25, 2022 from *Wiley Online Library* (<https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-5906.2009.01428.x>).

²³ “Tapestry Charter 2016.” 2016. *VA Synod, ELCA*. Page 1.

²⁴ VA Synod, “Tapestry Charter 2016,” 2-3.

²⁵ VA Synod, “Re-Formation in Action: 4 New Tapestry Team Focus Groups.”

²⁶ VA Synod, “Re-Formation in Action: 4 New Tapestry Team Focus Groups.”

²⁷ VA Synod, “Re-Formation in Action: 4 New Tapestry Team Focus Groups.”

²⁸ Of those who responded to the survey in full, 35 came from rural congregations, 25 were from more urban congregations, and 17 were from suburban congregations. Of those from rural congregations, 17 reported having discussions about race, while 18 said they had not. For urban congregations, 13 reported yes and 12 reported no. for suburban congregations, 8 reported yes and 9 reported no.

²⁹ Lin, Ann Chih, and David R. Harris. 2009. “The Colors of Poverty: Why Racial & Ethnic Disparities Persist.” *The Regents of the University of Michigan*. Retrieved September 16, 2022 (http://www.npc.umich.edu/publications/policy_briefs/brief16/).

³⁰ Granquist, Mark. 2012. “Red and green and black and blue: Lutheran hymnals and their impact.” *Metro Lutheran*. Retrieved August 15, 2022 (<https://metrolutheran.org/2012/01/red-and-green-and-black-and-blue/>).

³¹ Magness, Cheryl. 2018. “Let Every Tongue Praise the Lord.” *Lutherans Engage*. Retrieved August 5, 2022 (<https://engage.lcms.org/hymnal-project-spring-2018/>).

³² Johnston, Amber O. 2021. “Heritage Hymns: Curated Multicultural Hymns.” *HeritageMom*. Retrieved August 5, 2022 (<https://heritemom.com/2021/05/03/heritage-hymns-curated-multicultural-hymns/>).

³³ Cancelmo, Cara and Jennifer C. Mueller. 2019. “Whiteness.” *Oxford Bibliographies*. Retrieved January 11, 2022 (doi: 10.1093/OBO/9780199756384-0231).

³⁴ Painter, Neil I. 2015. “What Is Whiteness?” *The New York Times*, June 20.