

**Peace Lutheran Church**  
***Foundational Commitment to Anti-Racism***  
**Adopted by Peace Lutheran Church Council March 16, 2021**

## **Introduction**

Peace Lutheran Church has long sought to be a community that is “reconciled and just” while also being a “diverse community of faith where all are welcome.” As we continue to learn and experience the reality of racism in our country, local community, and congregation, we believe it is important to explicitly state our foundational commitment to *understanding, addressing, and dismantling racism* as an integral part of living our Christian faith in this place, at this time.

## **History**

The United States was founded on racist ideas, principles, and laws that justified slavery and stolen lands. Our Hilltop community – the ancestral lands of the Coast Salish people and the traditional homeland of the Puyallup Tribe – has been significantly affected by this reality. The Hilltop, the historical hub of the Black community in Tacoma, has been significantly impacted by the forces of racism, including the war on drugs, police brutality, and now gentrification.

Peace Lutheran Church was founded in 1909 by German-Russian immigrants escaping oppression in Russia. For its first 50 years, Peace was focused on being a church that preserved its members’ German culture and language. This was true even as the Hilltop became more racially diverse as Black and immigrant families moved in due to the combination of red-lining and the expansion of opportunities at Fort Lewis and other local employers.

In the 1970s and 1980s, Peace Lutheran intentionally worked to become more embedded in the life of the Hilltop community. This included intentionally engaging in door-to-door outreach, inviting community members into the life of the church, and serving its neighbors’ immediate needs. Peace also invited local Black community members to not just attend Peace, but to become leaders in the church. This outreach led to Peace creating a feeding program, starting a church gospel choir, and calling Clarence Pettit, a local neighborhood leader, to become the church’s first Black pastor. However, not all members of the church supported this new direction, and some white members, including council members, left the congregation. This time of change required perseverance and commitment.

In the last few decades, Peace Lutheran has been identified as a leader in the Lutheran Church because of our multi-racial community and neighborhood-focused ministry. While we are often held up as an example to other churches, we struggle to address racism and white supremacy as it exists in ourselves, our neighborhood, and within the practice and policies of our congregation.

In light of gentrification in our neighborhood and displacement of families of color, the numerous instances of police brutality known and unknown within our Hilltop neighborhood, and the renewed calls for racial justice through the Black Lives Matter movement and other groups, Peace Lutheran continues to wrestle with what it means to live out our vision *to be a diverse community of faith in the Hilltop community where all are welcome: a community that is spirit-filled, compassionate, healthy, reconciled, and just.*

## **Theological Grounding**

As followers of Jesus, we believe that God created all people in God's image (Genesis 1:27), Jesus breaks down all dividing walls (Ephesians 2:14), and the Holy Spirit connects and unites all people. The whole church looks forward to God's future when people will be gathered from all cultures and peoples in the reign of God (Revelation 7). This church names racism (individual and systemic) as sin. We affirm that the diversity of cultures is a God-given gift, and we seek to extend God's love to all our neighbors. We believe Jesus calls us to address and dismantle racism in individuals, communities, systems, and structures, joining God in bringing about justice for the oppressed and transformation of all society (Luke 4).

## **Foundational Commitments**

Peace Lutheran Church is committed to understanding, addressing, and dismantling racism inside ourselves, our Hilltop community, and our congregation as a fundamental way in which we live out our Christian faith and seek to love our neighbors. This is a commitment of our congregation as a whole and of the individual members of our worshiping community. This is a faith journey of learning, accountability, and grace.

### ***We seek to understand racism:***

- The history of racism in our country, larger church, community and congregation;
- The impact of racism on Communities of Color, particularly Black and Indigenous communities; and
- The racism within ourselves and our families.

### ***We seek to address racism:***

- The impact of our individual and collective actions and inactions when it comes to racism in its many forms;
- Racism as it is manifest in our Hilltop community, including gentrification and the displacement of our Black and Brown neighbors;
- The need to build up our individual and collective skills to tackle racism including listening from the heart, understanding our own biases (seeing ourselves accurately), owning both our intention and impact, and practicing accountability, apology and repair; and
- The ability to face, and live into, our own discomfort and defensiveness as we learn more about racism, our own role in allowing racism to persist, and our responsibility for addressing it.

### ***We seek to dismantle racism:***

- The racism present within our congregation in all that we do, including individual actions, church policy and practices, faith teachings, and leadership development and practices.
- The racism that is present within our neighborhood community including gentrification and displacement, policing, housing practices, and within education and other systems that impact the lives of our neighbors.

- By centering our actions and measuring our success based on the visible impact and positive change they help create for our Black, Indigenous, and People of Color communities.
- By having a congregational plan that is updated annually focused on taking bold, ambitious action to address disparities in our congregation and community.

## **Impact of Foundational Commitments**

This commitment to understand, address, and dismantle racism requires that our church take tangible steps forward. Below are ways that this document and its commitment can impact our life together as a church community:

- This commitment should inform our teaching of the faith in its many forms. We should explicitly share this commitment and its grounding in scripture in new member classes, confirmation, and church council orientation.
- All congregation members, council members, staff members, and volunteers should seek to understand this commitment and how it impacts their role in our church community.
- This commitment should be used as a lens for decision making by staff, council, and congregation members. As different ideas or policies are being considered, members should consider: How would this decision help our congregation *understand racism, address racism and/or dismantle racism*?
- Peace should work to actively dismantle racism and the ways it is embedded in other systems of oppression — white supremacy, patriarchy, white saviorism, colonialism — within the church and larger community.
- This commitment should be used when prioritizing ministries and reflecting on their effectiveness. These priorities should also be considered when we allocate financial resources or decide how to utilize our staff and members' time, wisdom, and energy.

Our commitment to understand, address, and dismantle racism should be integrated into all that we say and do as people seeking to follow Jesus in our community and context.

## **Glossary of Terms**

*Provide a link to our document with this information.*

## **Anti-Racism Resources**

*Provide a link to our document with this information.*

**Future Directions  
Recommendations  
Adopted by Peace Lutheran Church Council August 17, 2021**

**INTRODUCTION**

In November and December of 2019, Peace Lutheran Church selected a diverse group of members to work together to discern a plan to guide us into the future. The membership included Pastor Jae Bates, Kamari Carroll, Malcolm Carroll, Bill Hanawalt, Trevor Kagochi, Andie Lyons, Brendan Nelson, Sally Perkins, Pastor John Stroeh, and Kit Thompson.

As the committee met for the first time in January 2020, we agreed that the mission, vision, and values of the church continued to resonate and capture what God has called us to be about as we live out our individual and collective faith in the Hilltop neighborhood of Tacoma. In addition, two foundational lenses were also agreed upon: that our Hilltop neighborhood is gentrifying and that addressing racism is a critical part of the ministry to which God has called us.

The committee planned to complete our work during 2020, but when we started that January, we could not have imagined the impact of a worldwide pandemic and the renewed calls for racial justice in the aftermath of numerous instances of police brutality in our country and in our local Tacoma community. This caused our work to move forward more slowly as we navigated our work via online meetings and email.

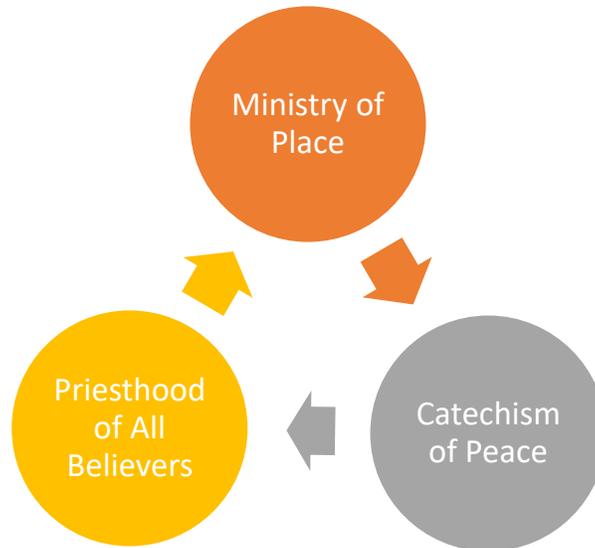
Our team completed a half-day retreat in the Fall of 2020 with the hopes of beginning to surface initial recommendations in the three focus areas that had emerged: ministry of place, catechism of Peace, and priesthood of all believers. But what God surfaced through our conversations and discernment was that before we could get to recommendations we had to solidify our foundational commitment to addressing racism as it exists in our congregation, local community, and our country.

Out of this vision, over the course of six months of conversation, reflection, and prayer, the team put together Peace Lutheran Church's *Foundational Commitment to Anti-Racism*. The recommendations in this report emerged from this commitment, our three focus areas, and 18 months of conversation, learning, and faith in action.

Our team puts forth these recommendations as our discernment of God's call to our congregation and to each of us who call Peace Lutheran Church home. These recommendations are grounded in God's call to love our community, address injustice, and build a community where all can thrive. We know implementing these recommendations will be hard work, but it is our prayer that through the Holy Spirit and Jesus as our guide, we will enter this work with faith and joy.

## THREE AREAS OF MINISTRY

In our work together as a community, three key areas of ministry began to emerge: ministry of place, catechism of Peace, and priesthood of all believers.



**Ministry of Place** – How we build relationships with our changing neighborhood to serve and learn, as well as to invite our Hilltop community into the life of the church.

**Catechism of Peace** – How we teach our Christian faith in the context of our community and embed theology that is crucial to our congregation living out our faith, like loving our neighbor, justice, anti-racism, reconciliation, and other areas.

**Priesthood of All Believers** – How we support the discipleship and leadership development of all participants in our Peace community of faith.

As these three key areas of ministry surfaced, it also became clear that they were inter-dependent. Ministry of Place is the way that we engage with our community and invite people into the community of faith; Catechism of Peace is how we teach our members (new and old) about the foundations of our Christian faith; Priesthood of All Believers is where we build on our teachings, equipping people to learn, serve, and reach out effectively and thoughtfully in our diverse community. While each of these areas are happening at the same time, with many community members active and learning in each area, they also build on one another.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

1. **Foundational Commitment to Anti-Racism:** create a plan to integrate our foundational commitment within the congregation and ministries, implement the plan fully, and evaluate.
  - Integrate our foundational commitment to anti-racism into all aspects of our Church community, including worship, programs, teaching and training, administrative policies, committee structures, Church Council, other leadership structures, facilities (including sanctuary), and work in the larger community.
  - Pursue opportunities to partner with the Peace Community Center on implementing anti-racism plans and efforts.
2. **Ministry of Place:** Center Ministry of Place and associated resources of the Church on supporting long-term Hilltop residents and residents who have been displaced.
  - Work to understand the full history of the Hilltop and the story of Peace Lutheran Church through the lens of our foundational commitment to anti-racism and the experiences of long-term Hilltop residents.
  - Evaluate all Peace Lutheran outreach ministries through the lens of the foundational commitment to anti-racism and make recommendations to strengthen and focus our ministry of place.
    - Prioritize affordable housing and create strong strategy and vision for this important ministry.
    - Engage Peace Community Center on ways that our ministries can support Center families who live in or have been displaced from the Hilltop.
    - In all outreach ministries, engage in authentic relationships and shift away from "us" serving "them."
    - Differentiate between individual member ministries and ministries of Peace Lutheran Church and discern appropriate use of church resources and level of church staff support.

3. **Catechism of Peace:** Integrate our commitment to anti-racism and cross-cultural communication into the teaching, training, and equipping of the church community (staff, leadership, participants, larger community), inviting our Peace community to greater individual and corporate learning and growth.
- Live out our anti-racism commitment in the current and future core places of teaching the faith, including new member class, confirmation, Council orientation, Sunday School (children, youth, and adults), small group ministries, and preaching.
  - Develop a regularly offered series of learning opportunities that dive deeper into anti-racism, Peace's commitment to the Hilltop, cross-cultural communication, and discovery of individual passions and gifts, grounded in scripture. Through these classes:
    - Build cross-cultural communication skills and confidence to have hard authentic conversations in relationship on topics such as anti-racism, queer and transphobia, sexism, gentrification, and other social justice issues.
    - Get to know the church's own ministries, Peace Community Center, other groups serving the Hilltop community, and how members of Peace are involved in direct service and advocacy for justice.
    - Pair learning with opportunities for participants to act for justice.
  - Build and sustain a set of self-learning, self-reflection resources on equity, anti-racism, racism, white supremacy, etc. to help people learn and grow beyond scheduled church offerings.
4. **Priesthood of All Believers:** Through the lens of our foundational commitment to anti-racism, equip all people in our church to discern and use their gifts to serve God in the community.
- Increase engagement and leadership of our Black, Brown, Indigenous, and people of color at Peace by addressing barriers and changing structures and policies.
  - Create an intentional process for people of all ages and backgrounds to discover their gifts, maintain a database of individual gifts, and equip and support individuals to use their gifts to serve in the church and larger community.
  - Put in place an intentional plan to train and equip people in our community to step into leadership roles, utilize mentors, create new equitable leadership roles and opportunities, and regularly celebrate members using gifts to advocate for justice in our church and larger community.