



Greater Milwaukee Synod

Framing the Authentic Diversity Audit

June 2, 2023



GOLD ENTERPRISES, LLC

What is the Audit?

- In May 2022, Synod voted to engage in the Audit.
- Admittedly, the Synod's actions have not always matched its rhetoric regarding antiracism.
- The Audit includes a review of GMS governing documents and public statements:
 - This work was begun by the Authentic Diversity Task Force formed at the 2021 Synod Assembly
 - Documents analyzed through an authentic diversity lens.
- The Audit also included a large-scale survey, interviews and focus groups to identify those things that inhibit the Synod's progress.
- We approach audits with humility and a "We don't know what we don't know" philosophy.

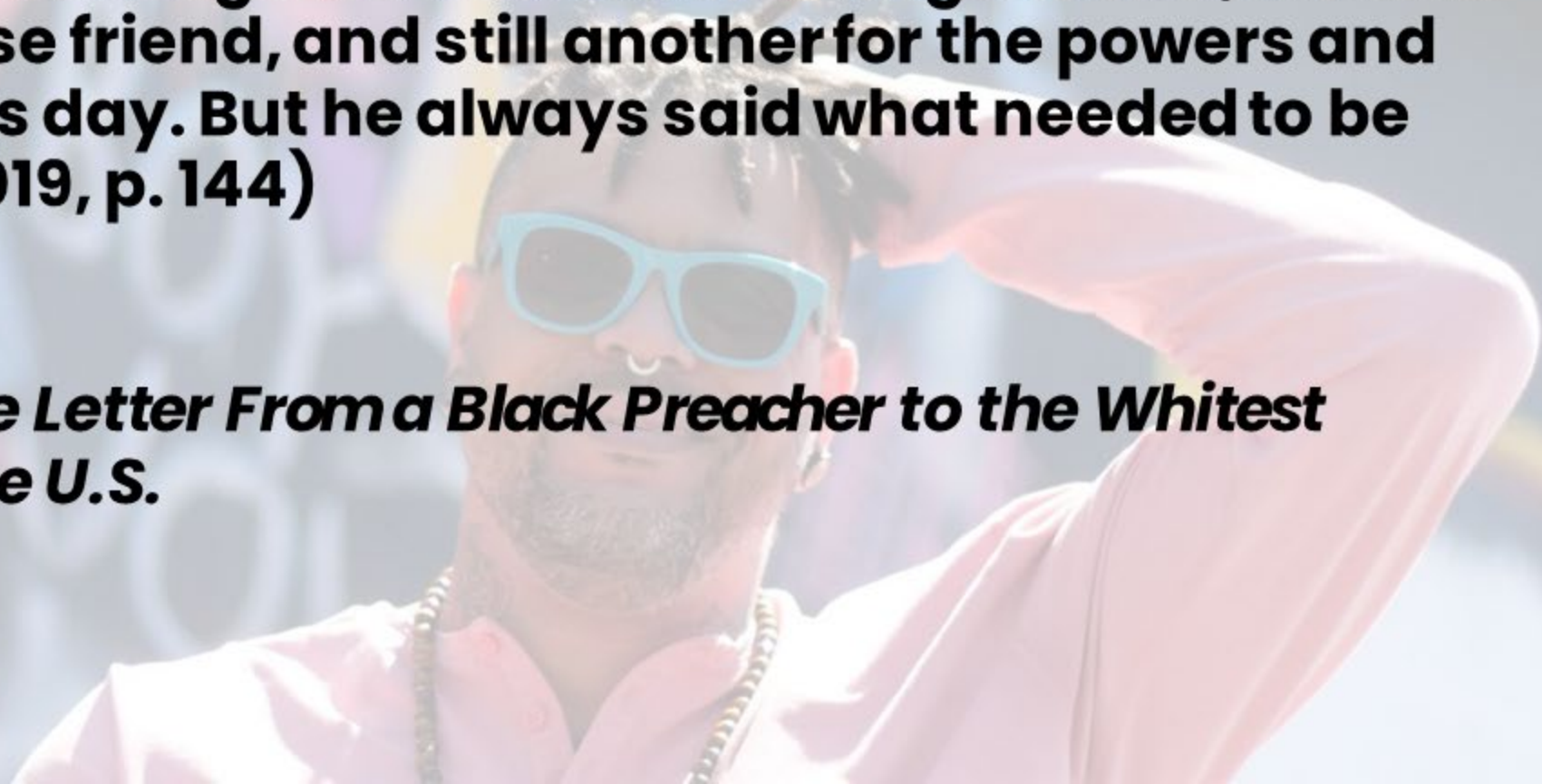
Why is an Audit Important?

- An audit is an effort to identify the policies, practices, beliefs, and attitudes that prevent the Synod from being a fully inclusive and authentically diverse church, both racially and otherwise.
- An Audit helps the Synod see where they can make changes that will improve the experience of all in the church.
- It is easy to get stuck in the “We’ve always done it that way” mindset and harmful traditions.
- We can recognize the historic nature of inclusion’s influence on today’s church.

Why is it Important?

“[Jesus was] an orator who used His words to comfort the afflicted and afflict the comfortable. He chose his words wisely, knowing that one message was needed in a large crowd, another message for a close friend, and still another for the powers and principalities of His day. But he always said what needed to be said.” (Duncan, 2019, p. 144)

Dear Church: A Love Letter From a Black Preacher to the Whitest Denomination in the U.S.



Framing Considerations: Ways of Knowing

- Methods used in the past may have been rooted in exclusive research practices:
 - Anthropology
 - Experience filtered through white male researcher perspectives.
 - Marginalized groups were not invited to participate as equals, they were often “studied.”
 - Focus on statistics alone misses human experience.
- GELLC tries to engage with non-traditional auditing approaches:
 - Personal narrative
 - Oral history
 - Ethnography
 - Much broader coalition of project or audit participants.
 - Intentionally amplifying voices people who have historically been ignored.

Framing Considerations: Learning, Meaning, Doing

GELLC looks at the totality of the information:

- Documents
- Policies
- Focus groups
- Interviews
- Survey
- Observation

Develop action steps from themes that emerge across all the “data”.

Framing Considerations: Generalizability vs. Usefulness

Generalizability refers to the ability to extend conclusions from a small group of participants to a larger group.


Usefulness refers to information we can use, learn from, and apply to our various contexts.

- "Rigor" how is this defined? Who defines this?
- Decentering historically male and white ways of knowing as "the" Truth.
- The number of responses does not negate the learning we can take from the experiences and perspectives shared.
- Numbers alone do not encompass the totality of people's experiences.
- If 10 people share they have experienced discrimination, that's a problem. (We don't need 2000 people to say that to learn and grow!)

Framing Considerations: Presence and Absence

- Acknowledging what is being communicated by both presence and absence in Audit participation and whose voices are missing.
- Lower or non-participation can indicate a number of things including:
 - Lack of trust of the Synod.
 - Lack of Interest in the subject.
 - Feelings that participation may be a waste of time.
- Many people from marginalized communities have been excluded throughout history from the ELCA.
 - Their willingness to engage in change processes will be informed by this historical and (in some cases) ongoing exclusion.
 - Can be retraumatizing to continue to share their stories and see nothing change in response.
- We are always asking “Who is at the table?” “Who is not at the table?” “Who knows about the table?”, “Who thinks they own the table?” and “Who is loudest at the table?”

Mindset Shifts



Western Science	Common Ground	Native Knowledge Systems
Limited to evidence and explanation within the physical world	Open-mindedness	Inclusive physical and metaphysical world linked to moral code
Emphasis on “understanding” how	Body of knowledge is stable but subject to modification	Emphasis on practical application of skills and knowledge
Skepticism (“Prove it” approach)	Inference and prediction	Trust of inherited wisdom
Hypothesis falsification, Global verification	Honesty and Inquisitiveness	Respect for all things
Quantitative written record and mathematical knowledge	Pattern recognition	Communication of metaphor and story connected to life, values, and proper behavior
Communication of procedures, evidence, and theory	The Universe is unified	Integrated and applied to daily living

“This desire to learn what the faith is from those who have lived it in the face of being told they are not welcome or worthy is far more than “inclusion.” Actually, inclusion isn’t the right word at all, because it sounds like in our niceness and virtue we are allowing “them” to join “us”—like we are judging another group of people to be worthy of inclusion in a tent that we don’t own.” (Bolz-Weber, 2013)

Patrix: The Cranky, Beautiful Faith of a Sinner & Saint

