

MAY 2024



STRATEGIC PLAN FOR AUTHENTIC DIVERSITY

GREATER MILWAUKEE SYNOD

PRESENTED BY: THE STRATEGIC PLANNING TASK FORCE

STRATEGIC PLAN FOR AUTHENTIC DIVERSITY

For the purpose of our work, the Strategic Planning Task Force (SPTF) defines Authentic Diversity work as the practice of identifying the policies, practices, beliefs, and attitudes that get in the way of our being a fully inclusive and authentically diverse church; creating plans, programs/initiatives that lead us more fully into that vision; and helping the congregations and leadership teams of the Greater Milwaukee Synod more closely match the diversity of this context in terms of race, culture, gender, and sexuality. Additionally, when it is not possible to match identity composition, we strive to become competent allies through study, reflection, and extending ourselves to lived experiences other than our own.

INTRODUCTION

This initial draft of the Strategic Plan will be a living document, actively claimed by the Anti-Racism Team (ART), Reconciling In Christ (RIC) Team, synod council, and synod staff. It will continue to be further clarified and refined with more specific goals and timelines.

The Greater Milwaukee Synod has 115 congregations and ministries. Currently 50% (57) of our congregations/ministries have people who are engaged in some type of Authentic Diversity work.

In 2022, the Greater Milwaukee Synod signed a contract with Gold Enterprises, LLC¹, a leading firm in Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion work. Based on their audit (focus group, interviews, and survey data collected), Gold Enterprises, LLC identified six themes. These themes are issues or topics that arose across all of the collected data, and they can also be understood as the Phase 1 findings of the audit.

Here is a brief overview of the work ahead for the synod based on their results:

Theme/Finding #1: Racial Justice/Anti-racism Integration - The Greater Milwaukee Synod needs to engage in an intentional process of integrating racial justice and anti-racism into the workings of the Greater Milwaukee Synod from policy to preaching; content to communication.

Theme/Finding #2: Self-awareness - There is a need for all individuals within the Greater Milwaukee Synod to engage in active self-reflection on race, racism, and social justice.

Theme/Finding #3: Identity - The term “diversity” is often used as a synonym for race only. Greater Milwaukee Synod must consider the many intersecting identities of its congregants, leaders, and collaborators as it continues its journey toward authentic diversity, equity, and inclusion, not solely race.

¹ <https://www.goldenterprisesllc.com>

Theme/Finding #4: LGBTQIA+ Inclusion - While 24% (28) of Greater Milwaukee Synod congregations and ministries are Reconciling In Christ, Greater Milwaukee Synod can do more for LGBTQIA+ inclusion. Areas of continued focus include supporting and elevating trans and intersex pastors and lay people and assisting new LGBTQIA+ ministers as they are called to serve.

Theme/Finding #5: Communication - A diversification of communication methods is needed, particularly to better reach and engage younger people (under 25).

Theme/Finding #6: Knowledge/ Relevance of Synod/Synod Council - Synod leaders must be more visible and available as a resource to congregations and ministries.

In response to these identified themes, a Strategic Planning Task Force was created and they have crafted the following Strategic Plan for the Greater Milwaukee Synod.

STRATEGIC PLAN BY THEMES

The Strategic Planning Task Force has worked closely with the Anti-Racism and Reconciling In Christ Teams, the Synod Council, and the Synod staff to create goals and initiatives for each theme that will help the Greater Milwaukee Synod to live more fully into its vision of being more authentically inclusive and diverse.

THEME #1 - RACIAL JUSTICE AND ANTIRACISM INTEGRATION
(LED BY THE ANTI-RACISM TEAM)

Goal 1

Increase by 25% the number of congregations and ministries within the Synod that are participating in Authentic Diversity work by 2026 for a total of 75% participation (86 congregations/ministries).

Timelines and Success Metrics

29 new churches will have taken some action step towards becoming more authentically inclusive and diverse by the end of 2026.

Goal 2

Expand the level of engagement of the 50% of congregations/ministries already doing authentic diversity work as it relates to anti-racism and inclusiveness.

Timelines and Success Metrics

100% of congregations/ministries involved in authentic diversity and inclusion work will continue their current level of engagement or deepen their level of engagement by the beginning of 2026. (Examples of engagement: Some congregations have formed teams to lead and engage their congregations to be aware of racial, gender and class injustice. Others have held adult forums to begin initial conversations with the help of synod staff.)

Action Steps

- Equip rostered ministers and lay leaders with content that will enable them to more tightly connect racial justice and anti-racism into their theology and the life of the congregation, including resources for worship, preaching, education, and discipleship.
- Provide leadership development/mentorship for lay leaders.
- Launch a congregational anti-racism readiness tool to help them assess where they are on their anti-racism journey.
- Convene training for anti-racist and inclusive worship design for rostered ministers and lay leaders.

THEME #2 SELF-AWARENESS (LED BY THE ANTI-RACISM TEAM)

Goal 1

To have individuals across the Synod participate in deep self-reflection and facilitated dialogues on race, racism, and social justice to foster an inclusive and equitable environment.

Timelines and Success Metrics

- 500 new people will have attended or utilized one of the Authentic Diversity offerings by the beginning 2026. The Synod Council will ensure that attendance and participation at Authentic Diversity events is tracked.
- 75% of people participating in authentic diversity or support groups will have found it impactful. This will be measured using surveys and evaluations.

Action Steps

- Launch synod-wide opportunities for self-reflection, beyond the highly recommended anti-racism training for rostered ministers. Examples include: reflective activities such as movies, worship resources, offering town halls/community conversations, book studies (with facilitated dialogue); academic resources such as providing a resource list of books, podcasts, etc. on the Anti-Racism Team website.²
- Provide synod-wide opportunities to rostered ministers and laity for reflection (both virtually and in person).
- Implement regular diversity and inclusion training including, but not limited to, the topics of how history informs the present and generational trauma.
- Facilitate open dialogues on race and social justice for the congregations and ministries within the Synod.
- Create peer support groups for clergy and congregations/ministries.
- Develop a team of trained liaisons to help congregations/ministries start Anti-Racism teams.

² www.gms-antiracism.org

THEME #3 IDENTITY (LED BY THE RIC TEAM)

24% (28) of Greater Milwaukee Synod congregations/ministries are Reconciling in Christ (RIC). The Greater Milwaukee Synod can do more for LGBTQIA+ inclusion.

Goal 1

In order to increase awareness of identity and intersectionality (gender, race/ethnicity, class, ability, etc.), we will increase the number of RIC congregations/ministries in the synod and ensure that all RIC congregations and ministries have reviewed and renewed their welcome statements.

Timeline and Success Metrics

- This goal is to be accomplished by the beginning of 2026.
- To increase by 25% the number of churches who are Reconciling in Christ.
- Increase by 25% the number of individuals participating in Reconciling in Christ events.
- 75% of the people attending trainings will report that they have a better understanding and awareness of identity and intersectionality.
- All current RIC congregations and ministries will review and renew their welcome statement.

Action Steps

- Develop and offer trainings on identity and intersectionality, working with Leading for Racial Equity and other members of the ART, RIC Team, and Strategic Planning Taskforce.
- Pilot these trainings with two geographic Synod Conferences in 2024.
- Based on what is learned through these pilots, a workshop will be offered at the Together In Mission event in 2025.

THEME # 4 LGBTQIA+ INCLUSION - (LED BY THE RIC & ANTI-RACISM TEAMS)

While the Gold Enterprises report called for work on increased inclusion of LGBTQIA+ individuals, this work will only happen in a way that recognizes the intersectionality of multiple identities.

Goal 1

To work with synod leadership (synod council, synod staff, committee chairs, conference deans) to assess current practices in light of the training described in theme three and to implement necessary changes.

Timeline and Success Metrics

- By the end of 2025, these groups will have evaluated their current practices and begun to implement changes identified.

Action Steps

- Work collaboratively with synod council, synod staff, committee chairs, and conference deans.
- Research and identify assessment tools (one example: process observers)
- Train groups to use assessment tools.
- Using assessment tools, identify areas for needed growth.

Goal 2

Congregations, ministries, and members in the synod will have access to relevant, timely, and helpful information to further LGBTQIA+ inclusion and anti-racism work.

Timeline, Action Steps and Success Metrics

- Each team will identify which person/people will serve as resource communication liaisons by the end of 2024.
- Each team will have updated the resources on their respective webpages by the end of 2024.
- Each team will work with the Greater Milwaukee Synod Communications Manager to create and implement a plan to improve the visibility and resources on the RIC and ART webpages by the beginning of 2026.

THEME #5 COMMUNICATION (LED BY SYNOD STAFF)

Since 2021, the synod staff has made significant progress on the quality and quantity of our communications. However, these communications have fallen short of the desired results: Our 2022 Authentic Diversity Audit showed a lack of awareness of the synod's leadership and diversity initiatives among survey respondents; and synod staff members' anecdotal experiences have noted a trend of members not getting or reading our news.

Goals

1. Our messaging will help meet the community's need to belong and to facilitate connections within and between congregations and ministries.
2. Our communications will take into account the emotional impact of the content for readers/viewers and move from being promotion/sales-oriented to being inspiration/relationship-oriented and strive to leave our audience feeling energized and hopeful.
3. Our external communications will prioritize engagement with congregational lay leaders as a core part of our strategy; and also be accessible to potential new members. Meanwhile, messaging for rostered ministers will be treated more as "internal" communications that should usually only be shared in our Rostered Ministers emails, Rostered Ministers Resources webpage and Rostered Ministers events.
4. We will be open to receiving and acting on constructive feedback that better serves our audience and future goals through the lens of authentic diversity.

Timeline and Success Metrics

We will measure the success of this plan through ongoing quantitative engagement data (benchmarked against industry averages), and qualitative feedback from our primary audiences and staff as we roll it out. This plan should be reevaluated at least once per calendar year.

A successful communications strategy could look like...

- Increased awareness of who the synod and ELCA are, what we do, who our leaders are, and our DEI efforts by our primary audiences
- More subscribers and higher engagement rates across platforms
- Communications that are more concise, helpful and emotionally compelling

**THEME# 6 KNOWLEDGE/ RELEVANCE OF SYNOD/SYNOD COUNCIL
(LED BY SYNOD COUNCIL)**

Goal 1

Gather and maintain a database of congregation presidents and vice presidents.

Action Steps

- Create a spreadsheet list of congregations and ministries by conferences.
- Request contact information for congregational officers and offices at the synod assembly
- Follow up with congregations and ministries that did not complete the survey by assigning six congregations/ministries per Synod Council member.
- Provide script for calls to pastor.
- Call the pastor to introduce themselves and ask for contact information for the congregation president and vice president.

Goal 2

Work with congregation presidents and vice presidents to get them signed up for the Synod E-News.

Action Steps

- Synod Council will annually update information gathered in goal 1.
- Encourage congregation presidents to share E-News with congregation members (email, newsletter, bulletin, etc.)

Goal 3

Develop regular articles for E-News and emails to congregation presidents.

Action Steps

- Identify highlights after each Synod Council meeting to be shared in E-News.
- Highlight a Synod Council Member of the Month with photo and short bio/story.

Goal 4

Define and understand the role of Synod Council members and the role of Deans in reaching out and building relationships with congregations and ministries.

Goal 5

Hold a retreat annually for Synod Council members and Deans to focus on synod identities of anti-racism and Reconciling In Christ and the role of synod council and deans.