

Pacifica Synod, ELCA
Anti-Racism Baseline Assessment Results 2026

A report to the congregations, ministries, Synod Council, and members of the Pacifica Synod

Desta Goehner, Assistant to the Bishop for Anti-Racism Coordination, in collaboration with Felecia Boone, vice president of the Minneapolis Area Synod of the ELCA and a senior diversity, equity and inclusion consultant.

October 22, 2026

This report comes from me and from the Synod Anti-Racism Team. In April and May we asked the people of this synod to tell us the truth about where they are in this work. 63 of you answered. What follows is what you said. When I write *congregation* here, I mean every ministry context in this synod: congregations, chaplaincies, campus and outdoor ministries, and the other places our people serve.

I expected the biggest barrier to be resistance. I was surprised to find that it is **exhaustion**.

If any of this is work you want to be part of, reach out to me at Desta@PacificaSynod.org and we will find a place for you in it. What I want, and what we want together, is accountable community: people who invite each other into anti-racism action and into repair. This work is intersectional and layered, and it can get very complicated. Much of it is also pretty simple.

Words we are using

Anti-racism. More than the absence of racist intent. The active work of changing practices, policies, and habits that produce unequal outcomes, whether or not anyone intended them.

Systemic. A pattern built into how an institution operates, as distinct from interpersonal, which describes how individuals treat each other. A congregation can be warm to every visitor and still be arranged in ways that keep the same people in it year after year.

Formation. The ongoing shaping of a person's faith, character, and practice. Training teaches a skill. Formation changes how a person understands and acts.

Rostered leader. A pastor or deacon on the ELCA's official roster of ministers.

Land acknowledgment. A spoken or written recognition of the Indigenous peoples whose land a community occupies. 31% of lay respondents told us they did not know what this was. There is no shame in that, and it is part of why the term appears here. We are actively working to change it.

BIPOC and people of the global majority. BIPOC stands for Black, Indigenous, and People of Color. People of the global majority names the same communities by their actual share of the world's population. Both appear in this report.

Summary

In April and May of 2026, 63 people across this synod told us where their congregations actually are in the work of becoming an anti-racist church. Of those, 20 are rostered leaders, 14 serve on church councils, and 29 are lay members and regular attendants who hold no formal office.

We will repeat this assessment every year, so that next year's numbers can be set beside these ones. No congregation, no city, and no person is named anywhere in this report. Confidentiality was promised when the survey went out, and it holds here.

Measure | Number

People who responded | 63

Respondents who are white, non-Hispanic | 90% (57 of 63)

Rate this work 8 or higher in importance | 76% (44 of 58)

Rostered leaders naming time and capacity among their greatest barriers | 65% (13 of 20)

Respondents who asked to be contacted for further conversation | 1

What we learned

1. Willingness is high, and capacity is the wall. 13 of 20 rostered leaders named time and capacity among their greatest barriers. Only 3 named lack of training. Our leaders know what this work is. They have nobody left to hold one more thing.
2. People are asking for a next step. "We have said we have knowledge but now what can we do?" surfaced across all 3 forms in different voices.
3. Members describe their congregations as welcoming, and councils see a gap in who is present. 83% of lay members believe a neighbor would feel welcome, while 8 of 14 council members say their congregation does not reflect its surrounding community.
4. Most leaders know whose land they are on, and most have not yet connected with those nations. 17 of 18 rostered leaders could name the Indigenous peoples whose land their congregation sits on. 11 of those 18 have made no connection with those communities.
5. Most leaders have not been able to act on the 2016 Synod Resolution. 65% of rostered leaders either do not know the requirement for training every 3 years exists or do not know how to meet it. The fix belongs to the synod.
6. Hawai'i is asking to be heard on its own terms. "Come and listen" was the clearest single message in the assessment.
7. Fatigue and resistance are real and in the room. 17% of respondents rated this work at 5 or lower, and several of them told us why.

What the synod is committing to

Create and share offerings so that congregations and ministries do not have to build their own. End every offering in a named next step and a form of accountability. Define what counts as anti-racism training and how leaders receive credit for it. Teach structural analysis on purpose. Build hybrid access, evening times, and short commitments into the design from the start. Connect leaders to each other. Let Hawai'i shape what Hawai'i receives. Design Year Two so that the people most affected by racism are actually in the data.

Who answered

Who responded | Number | Share

Total responses | 63 |

Rostered leaders | 20 | 32%

Church council members | 14 | 22%

Lay members and regular attendants | 29 | 46%

White, non-Hispanic | 57 | 90%

Identifying with a race or ethnicity other than or in addition to white | 4 | 6%

Preferred not to say | 2 | 3%

Age 65 and older | 32 | 51%

Age 51 and older | 47 | 75%

Young adults, ages 18 to 35 | 4 | 6%

The people most directly affected by racism in this synod are largely not represented in these responses. That is information about us, not about them. It reflects how we designed and shared this assessment, and the trust this synod has yet to earn. The findings still hold, and this absence holds with them. We can say a good deal here about how predominantly white Lutheran congregations understand themselves. We can say very little about what BIPOC members experience inside them.

Exactly 1 person, out of 63, checked the box asking to be contacted for further conversation. The invitation was on all 3 forms. I read that as a question of trust, and of what people expect will happen to their honesty once they hand it over. Year Two has to be designed with that in mind.

How to read the numbers in this report. The survey went out in 3 forms, one each for rostered leaders, council members, and lay members, and the 3 forms asked different questions. Percentages therefore use the number of people who answered that particular question as the denominator rather than the total of 63, and every percentage is printed alongside its count. A sample of 63 is small for a synod this size, and nothing here should be read as a consensus. What this data does well is locate where the pressure is and what people asked for in their own words.

What is already strong

Several of the strongest findings in the assessment are strengths we have not been naming or using.

Willingness is high. 44 of the 58 people who answered the question, 76%, rated anti-racism work at 8 or higher in personal and congregational importance on a 10 point scale. That number holds across roles.

Leaders know whose land they are on. 17 of the 18 rostered leaders who answered could name the Indigenous peoples or lands where their congregation sits. Across the responses, respondents named the Kumeyaay, Tongva, Kizh, Luiseño, Cahuilla, Serrano, Acjachemen, Chumash, Yuhaaviatam, and Kanaka Maoli.

Councils have already thought about immigration enforcement. 11 of the 14 congregational council members who answered, 79%, report that their council has already discussed how they would respond if immigration enforcement activity occurred on or near their campus. No other

question in the assessment produced a number that high. Our councils can act when a threat is concrete and close.

Members believe their leaders can change. 18 of the 29 lay respondents, 62%, believe the people who hold power in their congregation are open to learning and change on race and equity. We would want that number higher. It is still a majority.

People asked for depth we have not been offering. In the open text boxes, respondents wrote in requests on their own that go well past introductory content. One rostered leader wrote, "Let us learn about how white supremacy shows up in conflict and policy." A lay member raised the religious roots of antisemitism, having noticed how the Holy Week Gospel readings name Jews generically as perpetrators. Another argued in detail for beginning with youth and young adults, because this is where change compounds over time. One leader asked about building relationship with a local Muslim community. Several asked for more opportunities to worship together across languages.

Where the gaps are

Capacity is the wall. This is the strongest signal in the assessment. Among rostered leaders, 13 of 20 named lack of time or capacity among their greatest barriers, and 9 of 20 named limited resources in people and space. Only 3 named lack of formation or training, and only 3 named uncertainty about where to begin.

Our leaders understand what anti-racism is. What they do not have is anyone left to hold one more thing. One pastor put it this way:

"I do not have the staff or volunteers to lead more groups at this point. I would love to lead some book studies or host some watch parties and facilitate discussions. But I physically am at max capacity. In order to engage in this topic at this moment, we would need someone outside of our church to come in and facilitate."

Council members asked for the same thing in their own words: more pastoral engagement and synod resources, direct synod engagement, shared tools and expertise. When respondents were asked what kind of offering they want, 11 of the 24 who answered chose a representative from the Anti-Racism Team coming to speak or lead a workshop at their church.

People are asking for a next step. The same request surfaced across all 3 forms in different voices: "We have said we have knowledge but now what can we do?" "Education and steps to follow." "An opportunity to exercise action after the education piece." "I do not even know what tools I would need." One respondent laid out a full sequence: a sermon, then a forum with food, then a 6 to 8 week course, then an in person service project. Respondents want offerings that continue past a single session.

Members describe their congregations as welcoming, and councils see a gap. 24 of the 29 lay respondents, 83%, believe someone from the surrounding community would feel welcome in their congregation. Council members tell a different story. 8 of 14 say their congregation does not yet reflect the surrounding community and that the gap is significant. 9 of 14 say a visitor would only partially recognize themselves in the worship, the language, and the leadership. Respondents named the reason themselves:

“I think there is an openness to this idea and a sense the congregation is not racist, but not really understanding of systemic issues and ways that we might be.”

“I think we are somewhat naive in that we are largely unaware of our off-putting behaviors.”

Most congregations know whose land they are on and have not yet connected with those nations. 14 of 20 rostered leaders, 70%, report no regularly used land acknowledgment. 10 of the 14 council members report none. 9 of the 29 lay respondents, 31%, do not know what a land acknowledgment is. 17 of 18 rostered leaders could name the peoples whose land they are on, and 11 of those 18 say they have not connected with those communities in any way.

One response shows how complicated this is. We are describing it rather than quoting it. That respondent reported that their congregation does not use a land acknowledgment because an Indigenous member of that congregation asked them not to. For that member, land acknowledgments sit too close to grief that has not healed, and they cause pain where repair was intended. A land acknowledgment handed down as a synod product can do harm even in places where the practice is welcome. Each congregation has to shape its own, in relationship with the people whose land it is, including Indigenous people already among us, incorporating them in this work however they want to be included.

Most leaders have not been able to act on the 2016 Synod Resolution. Rostered leaders were asked whether they are aware of the 2016 Synod Resolution requiring anti-racism training every 3 years. 9 of 20, 45%, are not aware the requirement exists. 4 of 20, 20%, are aware but have not known how to fulfill it. 7 of 20, 35%, are aware and have met the expectation. That gap belongs to the synod, not to individual leaders. The resolution passed without a plan or a person assigned to carry it out.

The call process is where this gets set, and it is inconsistent. Rostered leaders describe experiences of the call process that have almost nothing in common. Some carried racial equity in themselves. Others reported no discussions on anti-racism at all, or that the questions they were asked were about LGBTQIA+ welcome rather than race. One respondent wrote: “Congregation leaders were adamant that ‘social and political issues’ NOT be discussed from the pulpit.” A lay member named the structural fix without being asked, writing that call committees should have specific anti-racism training related to the call process and to leaders of color.

Access is a design requirement, and people were specific about it. Respondents named Zoom participation for members in their late 80s. Location and time, with an explicit request for evening options that include working people. Flexible time commitments. A close location. One person wrote simply that they are physically unable to attend. And one wrote what every parish leader already knows: people stick around when there is food.

Fatigue and resistance

Not everyone who answered wants this work to continue. Their responses belong in this report.

6 of the 20 rostered leaders, 30%, named congregational resistance or conflict among their greatest barriers. 2 named concern about their own position or security. There are leaders in this synod who believe that preaching on race could cost them their call. 10 of the 58 people who answered the importance question, 17%, rated this work at 5 or lower.

We are printing the dissenting voices from the open text as they came in.

“I am tired of it. Thinking of leaving.”

“Nothing would be interesting. The ELCA does not have a monopoly on resources.”

“A workshop that teaches preachers on how to proclaim the gospel from the pulpit and to leave the social justice issues at the parking lot.”

“I guess I bristle at ‘anti’ and would prefer something that celebrated the different ways we are more similar than we think.”

We are responding to these voices in 2 ways.

The fatigue is real, and it deserves a pastoral answer. Some of it comes from people who met their own shame in a workshop and were never offered anything to do with it. White shame surfaces in this work. It is a normal response, and it needs somewhere to go. A rostered leader named what a better answer would need to accomplish:

“Bringing an awareness to others and tangible ways to have conversation so that folks can participate in ways that promote anti-racism and not solely experience guilt or shame.”

We will also not let the fatigue set the pace. 17% of respondents rated this work at 5 or lower. 76% rated it at 8 or higher. If this synod lets the 17% set the speed, that is a decision, and it should be made out loud.

Our design question is how to tell the truth about structures without producing shame, since the expectation of shame is part of why some people have stopped coming.

What Hawai‘i is telling us

The responses from Hawai‘i are among the most substantive we received. We are summarizing rather than quoting them, because the number of ELCA congregations in the islands is small enough that a direct quotation could identify a congregation, and these respondents were promised confidentiality like everyone else.

Respondents asked the synod to come and listen. They named the complexity of the many discriminations present there and how those interconnect. They told us that anti-racism may not be the best phrase for the islands, and that language with a more positive resonance, which feels less polarizing, lands better in that context. They also named a suspicion, earned over time, of people arriving from the continent to explain how things ought to be done.

Respondents also noted that a great deal of anti-racism work focuses on Latino or Black experience, while the heritage of the islands carries more Asian, Filipino, Samoan, and Hawaiian ancestry. In their experience, racism there shows up less as hostility toward those communities and more as a failure to bring their cultures into the life of the church. It takes a different shape than it does on the continent, and it rarely gets talked about.

Respondents asked for support for what is already alive there, including learning more Hawaiian language and singing more Hawaiian hymns.

What Hawai'i asks of us is to listen first, to set aside a continental frame instead of expecting it to fit, and to support what is already growing there before introducing anything new. Any synod wide offering we design needs a stated answer for how Hawai'i shapes its own version of it, instead of receiving a program built for Southern California.

In November 2026, I am traveling to Hawai'i for my first visit, to be with the conference there. Before that trip, I have been holding individual conversations with leaders in the islands, so that the listening begins before I arrive.

The patterns beneath the findings

The next several paragraphs use words that some readers will brace against. Here is what we mean by each one.

These words describe structures, not the character of the people reading this report. When we write *white supremacy*, we do not mean hoods and burning crosses. We mean the ordinary, mostly unexamined arrangement of an institution so that white norms, white comfort, and white leadership are treated as neutral and everything else is treated as a variation on the norm. It shows up in what counts as a well run meeting, whose grief gets time in worship, which conflicts are called divisive, and whose discomfort is allowed to set the pace. When we write *anti-Blackness*, we mean the specific and distinct way Black people are treated as a problem to be managed or a resource to be drawn from rather than as whole people. When we write *colonization*, we mean the ongoing arrangement by which land, language, and spiritual authority were taken from Indigenous peoples and by which the taking continues to be treated as settled.

None of that is an accusation aimed at any person who filled out this form. All of it is visible in the data those people gave us.

The default is interpersonal, and the data is systemic. Our people are open, and their frame is individual. 83% of lay respondents believe a neighbor would feel welcome, while council members report that a visitor would not recognize themselves in the worship, the language, or the leadership. Both groups are telling the truth. Welcome is a feeling that white members can accurately report about themselves. Representation is a structural fact about who is in the pulpit, who is on the council, what language the hymns are in, and who was never invited. Content that stays at the level of individual kindness will confirm what congregations already believe about themselves. This is how a genuinely warm congregation stays a 90% white congregation for another decade.

Somebody has to ask who benefits and who is burdened. Most of our systems lack anyone whose actual role is to pause a decision and ask 2 questions: who benefits from this, and who carries the cost. Without these questions being someone's assigned work, disparity does not require anyone's bad intent in order to compound. It accumulates, one reasonable decision at a time, because no one interrupted it. Asking that question is what my position exists to do, and to model, so that congregations, chaplaincies, and every other ministry context can use it themselves. That means making the work reachable: tools, resources, formation, community, and support that a ministry can actually take up with the capacity it has. The 2016 Resolution shows what happens without it. A synod assembly passed a training requirement 10 years ago, and nobody was given the job of making it happen. No one sabotaged that resolution. It simply had nothing holding it in place.

The land question is a colonization question, and our data shows the shape of it. Our leaders can name the Kumeyaay, Tongva, Kizh, Luiseño, Cahuilla, Serrano, Acjachemen, Chumash, Yuhaaviatam, and Kanaka Maoli. Most of them are not yet in relationship with those nations. Knowledge without relationship is precisely the pattern the ELCA repudiated when it repudiated the Doctrine of Discovery in 2016, and it is the pattern the Truth and Healing Movement exists to interrupt. We can say whose land it is. We have not asked those nations what they want from us, and in most places we do not know how we would begin.

Leaders of color should not be carrying their community's racial equity or anti-racism formation. In predominantly white congregations and ministries, the work of teaching about race tends to land on whoever in the room is not white, and the community often experiences that arrangement as progress. Too often this falls to people of the global majority, on top of the call or the role they were actually given. Making sure it does not happen here is the work of this office and the Anti-Racism Team, and it is one of the concrete ways a synod can support a ministry. This assessment did not ask leaders of color what their week is like. I will include that question in next year's assessment, in a form that is worth their time to answer.

What the synod is taking responsibility for

The data is clear enough that I can commit to several things now rather than waiting for another round of discernment.

Offerings will be created and offered by the synod. Capacity is what stops most ministries, so programming for the coming year will be portable and repeatable. No congregation or ministry should have to build and sustain a program of its own in order to participate. It is my hope that our trainings/formations leave people wanting more, not begrudgingly signing up. This hard work can be life-giving and liberative for all of us.

Every offering will end in a named next step and an invitation to accountability, at a size that a person with a full week can actually complete.

The 2016 Resolution becomes reachable, with a defined path to credit. I am bringing forward criteria that name what counts as anti-racism training/formation in this synod, how it is tracked, and how a leader receives credit.

Call committees will receive anti-racism formation. The call process is where a congregation's expectations of its next leader get set, and right now that conversation happens differently in every place. A lay member named this fix without being asked. We are developing formation for call committees, including preparation for calling and then genuinely supporting leaders of color.

We will learn together what it means to be in relationship with each other. Several of you raised this on your own: worshiping together across languages, the religious roots of antisemitism carried in our Holy Week readings, relationship with our Muslim neighbors, and relationship with the Indigenous nations whose land we occupy. These are one question in several forms. What does it actually mean to be in relationship with the people we share a building, a neighborhood, or a history with? I do not have a finished answer. The coming year will include this work, and we will learn it together rather than teaching it from the front.

We will teach the structural pattern on purpose. Our members asked for this in their own words. The coming year will include work on intersectionality and unearned advantage, cultural competency, and the layers of culture that sit beneath our stated values.

Practice, not only understanding. A case study series is in development for councils, deans, and leaders across ministry contexts, working through ordinary scenarios with the same questions each time. Who benefits here and who is burdened? What would interrupting require while the decision is still open? Many people who stay silent have never had the chance to practice interrupting.

Access is a right. Hybrid participation, evening options, recordings where the content allows, short time commitments, close locations, and food when we gather in person.

Leaders get connected to each other. Pairing a ministry that is beginning with one that is 2 years in costs this synod almost nothing.

Hawai'i shapes what Hawai'i receives, beginning with listening, and with the question of whether the framing language this synod uses is the right language for the islands.

Year Two outreach will be designed differently. Next year's assessment will add role identifiers so we can know who is actually responding. I will also ask BIPOC members of this synod directly what would make responding worth their time. If the answer is that a survey is the wrong way to ask, we will find another way.

What this costs you. Nothing, right now. Our webinars and formation opportunities are offered free of charge, funded by a line in the synod budget, because we want them as reachable as possible. Future events may carry a small fee, and we will keep it to a minimum. These resources are your congregation's mission support at work.

Where to find all of it. A redesigned anti-racism page on the synod website is coming, and it will hold the webinars, a resource hub, and the formation opportunities, for you as an individual and for your congregation or ministry to use together. Watch the synod newsletter, Facebook, and Instagram for what is coming next.

What we will be tracking

This assessment will be repeated annually with the same core questions. Beginning with the Year Two report, I will report against the Year One numbers printed above: whether congregations reporting anti-racism formation in the past 3 years have increased; whether rostered leaders report greater comfort leading conversations about race; whether more congregations have a regularly used land acknowledgment, and separately whether any congregation has moved from naming a nation to being in relationship with one; whether more rostered leaders can name and act on the 2016 Resolution; whether capacity is still the wall; whether the gap between lay perception of welcome and council perception of representation has narrowed; and who is answering the assessment.

Alongside the annual assessment, every synod offering will carry a short survey before the session and a brief check during it. One idea I am holding is a follow up 90 days later, which would ask something harder and more useful: whether anyone has actually used any of it.

On December 1, 2026, I will have been in this position for 1 year, and I am looking forward to Year Two. At or near the 2027 Synod Assembly I will give a full report of what we have done together across my first 18 months here, building on the work Antoine Cummins and the Synod Anti-Racism Team did before I arrived.

What we are asking of you

This report opens a conversation that belongs to the whole synod. Here are 3 ways to join it.

Write to me and to the team. Send questions, disagreements, corrections, or anything this report missed about your congregation or ministry to Desta@PacificaSynod.org. The Synod Anti-Racism Team is a mix of lay and rostered people from across the synod: Rev. Natalie Benson, Rev. Kurt Christenson, Rev. Rick Fry, Sarah Tees, Lin and Bruce Hodgkinson, and Rev. Kinndlee Lund.

Schedule a conversation with Desta. You can book 30 minutes [at this link](#). This includes people who disagree with the report or with the premise of the work. If you read something here that felt unfair to your congregation or ministry, bring it. You will be listened to.

Invite me in. I would love an invitation to join your congregation or ministry, in person or online. A council conversation, a forum, an adult education hour, a staff retreat, or...

One more ask. **Next year I hope we double the number of responses.** We can only plan and serve well when we know what the people and ministries of this synod want and need, so we need your voices. This assessment is one way your voice reaches us.

Questions this report leaves open

We are holding these questions without settled answers.

What would make answering this assessment feel worthwhile rather than extractive for BIPOC members of this synod? Given that capacity is the constraint, what does the synod carry, and what do we stop asking congregations to carry? What does “come and listen” ask of us concretely, and what would it mean for Hawai’i to shape its own framing instead of receiving ours?

And finally: only 1 person asked to be contacted. What would have to be different for that number to change?

A note on method and confidentiality

Source: the Anti-Racism Baseline Assessment, 63 complete responses received in April and May of 2026. Counts were computed directly from the response export. Percentages use the number of people who answered each question as the denominator rather than the total of 63, because the 3 role based forms ask different questions, and every denominator is stated on the page.

Quotations are printed in the words the respondent chose, with contractions expanded for readability and nothing else changed. No quotation has been combined, trimmed, or reordered in a way that changes its meaning. Congregation names, city names, and identifying role details have been removed throughout. Several responses are described rather than quoted, because there was no way to print those sentences and also protect the people who wrote them. Where the number of congregations in a region is small enough that a quotation could identify one, we summarized instead.

The assessment and this report's structure follow the Baseline Assessment Framework built in Year One with consultant Felecia Boone, drawing on the Racial Equity Impact Assessment Guide developed by Terry Keleher at the Applied Research Center, now Race Forward.

The 3 surveys are attached to this report, so that anyone can read exactly what was asked. This report is posted on the synod website, sent out in a synod email, and sent directly to synod staff and the Synod Council.

About the consultant. Felecia Boone is vice president of the Minneapolis Area Synod of the ELCA and served on the ELCA Commission for a Renewed Lutheran Church. Ms. Boone has spent 30 years in local government with over 10 years in Human Resources and is currently a senior diversity, equity and inclusion consultant, which includes strategic planning, supporting departmental diversity and inclusion committees, and investigating respectful workplace discrimination complaints. She is also a Qualified Administrator of the Intercultural Development Inventory. In 2023 she completed a Master of Arts in leadership from her alma mater, Wartburg College, and is a proud member of the college's board of regents.

Pacifica Synod Anti-Racism Coordination, September 2026