

Northeast Iowa Synod Racial Justice Advocacy Network List of Recommended Books

This list was compiled by the Racial Justice Advocacy Network of the Northeastern Iowa Synod, ELCA.

Members of the network were invited to recommend books they have read that relate to racial justice, including a summary, suggested audience and use, and any connection there may be to Lutheranism or Iowa. Network members will continue to add to the list and are open to suggestions from others as well.

For Book Study:

The Color of Compromise: The Truth about the American Church's Complicity in Racism
by Jemar Tisby

Tisby concisely begins to tell the story of racial injustice in the US. He focuses specifically on how church communities and Christian denominations were and continue to be complicit in racial injustice. For me, this was an impactful book as a group study, both to learn the past mistakes that make up the history of the church, but also to see how compromises made in the past (often at the expense of racially minoritized people) continue to shape the church today.
– *Rev. Daniel Hanson*

Audience: Young Adult/Adult

Trouble I've Seen: Changing the Way the Church Views Racism by Drew G.I. Hart

“In this provocative book, theologian and blogger Drew G. I. Hart places police brutality, mass incarceration, anti-black stereotypes, poverty, and everyday acts of racism within the larger framework of white supremacy. He argues that white Christians have repeatedly gotten it wrong about race because dominant culture and white privilege have so thoroughly shaped their assumptions. He also challenges black Christians about neglecting the most vulnerable in their own communities. Leading readers toward Jesus, Hart offers concrete practices for churches that seek solidarity with the oppressed and are committed to racial justice.” (from Amazon)
Free downloadable study guide available.
– *Rev. Tim Malek*

Audience: Adult

From Somalia to Snow: How Central Minnesota Became Home to Somalis by Hudda Ibrahim

“This book gives readers an invaluable insider's look into the lives and culture of our Somali neighbors and the important challenges they face. Designed with a diverse audience in mind, this book is a must-read for students, health-care professionals, business owners, social service agencies, and anyone who wants to better understand the Somali people.” (-Amazon)

– *Rev. Tim Malek*

Audience: Adult

The Sum of Us: What Racism Costs Everyone and How We Can Prosper Together, by Heather McGhee

Written by an expert in economic and social policy, this book really opened my eyes to the impact that racism has had on society and all people in the U.S. It spells out the hidden – or unseen – costs of racist institutions and policy through our history and in more recent times. McGhee also reveals proof of the “Solidarity Dividend,” the benefits that are realized when people work together across perceived racial barriers to achieve what can't be done alone. “It leaves us with a new vision for a future in which we finally realize that life can be more than a zero-sum game.”

– *Lisa Nelson*

Consider also the companion workbook for use with groups, and the adapted version for young readers.

Audience: Young Adult, Adult or Teens

A White Preacher's Memoir: Montgomery by Rev. Robert S. Graetz

In the late 1950's Montgomery, Alabama was the hot spot for the modern Civil Rights movement. Lutheran Pastor Robert Graetz was one of the few white people bravely standing with bold Black preachers, audacious enough to face racism, hatred and threats to their lives in the deep South. Graetz shares stories of the events and his participation in the famous Montgomery Bus Boycott including two bombing attempts to kill him and his family. His memoir provides a first hand account of one of the most significant and effective non-violent protests of the 20th century. He is a human rights icon in the Lutheran churches in America.

– *Reginald Green*

Audience: Young Adult, Adult - Biography

Moon of the Snow-Blind: Spirit Lake text and pictures by Gary Kelley.

Other books on the Spirit Lake, Iowa massacre have been written but not from the standpoint of indigenous people's response to the white people invading the space where they lived. This graphic Novel showcases the artistic skills of award winning graphic artist Gary Kelley. I was intrigued by the way he attempted to tell the story from both the Dakotas' and the white's point of view. His illustration captures the emotion of the story.

– *Reginald Green*

Audience: Young Adult, Adult – Graphic Novel

Children's Picture Book Recommendations

God's Holy Darkness by Beckah Selnick and Sharei Green, Illustrated by Nikki Faison

This book “deconstructs anti-Blackness in Christian theology by celebrating instances in the story of God's people when darkness, blackness, and night are beautiful, good, and holy” (beamingbooks.com). The story is accompanied with stunning illustrations. I have read it many times to my own children, as well as during a children's sermon, though it is a wonderful resource for people of all ages.

– *Rev. Rebecca Baird*

Audience: Children, all ages

ELCA connection: Green is pursuing an MDiv at LSTC; Faison is a pastor in the ELCA.

Bible Commentary:

The New Testament in Color: A Multiethnic Bible Commentary, 2024 IVP

From the back cover:

Historically, Bible commentaries have focused on the particular concerns of a limited segment of the church, all too often missing fresh questions and perspectives that would be fruitful for biblical interpretation. Listening to scholars from diverse backgrounds and ethnicities offers us an opportunity to see the Bible from a wide angle, a better vantage point. Each contributor brings exegetical expertise coupled with a distinctive interpretive lens to illuminate the ways social location and biblical interpretation work together.”

I find it to be a helpful aid in preparing for preaching and bible study.

– *Rev. Daniel Hanson*

Audience:

Young Adult, Adult, Bible Study, Preaching Preparation

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