

How did we listen to BIPOC leaders?

A small diverse team of ELCA leaders set aside their own assumptions to listen directly to 35 Black, Indigenous, and people of color, (BIPOC) people across the United States. We listened in 19 separate sessions, most often with an interviewer and notetaker in each session. Every interview was recorded.

This was a very brief, six-week interview window, during July-August 2022. Dozens of people who were invited to participate declined for various reasons. Some did not show up for their interview at all.

Most interviews were done with two people listening to a very small group of one to three people. This intentionally small group gave time for the interviewer to build a rapport, clarify answers if necessary, and for people to know they were heard.

The people who were interviewed were primarily church leaders (8) and pastors or deacons(19). Only one-third were under 35 years old. Most of those interviewed were ELCA Lutheran or formally ELCA Lutheran Church members.

It is important to note that most people had seen and reflected on their answers to the questions prior to the interview. The interviews were one hour in length, opened with introductions and closed in prayer. Those interviewed represented the following ethnicities:

- 2 Africans
- 7 African Americans
- 2 Arabic Americans
- 8 Asian Pacific Islanders
- 1 Indigenous
- 13 Latinx/e
- 2 Others

It is humbling to admit that none of these people expected LEAD or Luther Seminary to listen to their voice. This is a population that has not experienced being heard, by other people of color representing these organizations. Some, including pastors and deacons, shared a feeling of low value in their own congregations.

We asked eight questions. We encourage you to answer these personally as you read this report.