

WDC Anti-Racism Audit Report

Presented to WDC Executive Board on October 29, 2022

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Introduction

On January 22, 2022, the Western District Conference Executive Board approved the appointment of a team to do an internal anti-racism audit of WDC's structure, program, and policies, in order to determine next steps in ongoing work toward greater racial justice and equity. This followed engagement in 2021 by members of the Executive Board, Ministerial Leadership Commission and staff members in the Intercultural Development Inventory and online anti-racism training with Widerstand.

Members of the Anti-Racism Audit Team are Vicki Penner and Ben Woodward-Breckbill (Executive Board members), Sandra Montes-Martinez (Staff), Michelle Armster and Jenna Ratzlaff (Constituency). Heidi Regier Kreider (staff) serves as liaison for administrative support.

A budget of \$3500 was funded by \$3000 from a grant from the Schowalter Foundation and \$500 from the WDC budget for administrative costs. These monies were used to pay for language interpreters, honoraria for interview participants and BIPOC members of the audit team.

The audit process was conducted between April and September 2022.

Using the document "Anti-racism Internal Audit for Western District Conference" (adapted from Anti-racism Audit Checklist for Congregations from Widerstand Consulting), the Audit Team developed a scope statement and gathered the following information from which to answer the questions:

- How is WDC acting or participating in racist ways?
- How is WDC supporting efforts to dismantle racism?
- How could WDC better support efforts to dismantle racism?

These questions are addressed in the Recommendations and Open Questions section.

The Anti-Racism Audit team recommends that this report be made available to the WDC constituency.

General Demographics

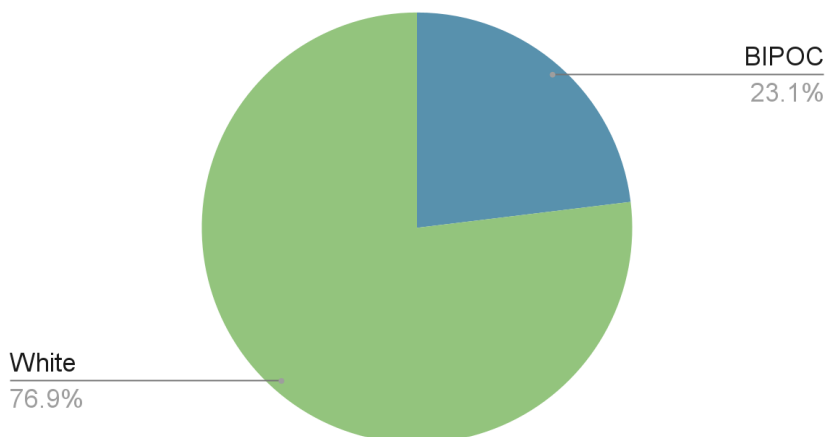
Racial/Ethnic Demographics of WDC Congregations

In October 2022, WDC member congregations report a total of 6,233 members in 52 congregations. Of this number, 12 member congregations have primarily BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, People of Color) members with a total of 491 individual members:

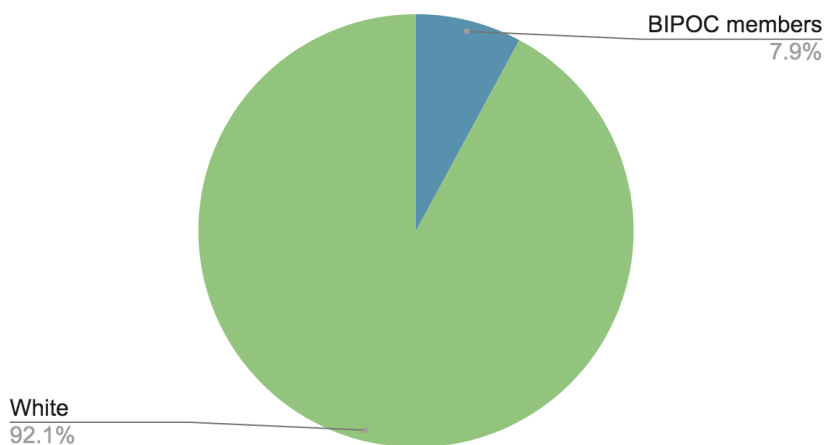
- 1 Chin congregation with 100 members
- 1 Cheyenne congregation with 20 members
- 10 Hispanic/Latinx congregations with 371 members

So, 23.1% (12 out of 52) WDC member congregations have primarily BIPOC members, while 7.9% (491 out of 6,233) of WDC members are BIPOC. (Some primarily white congregations also have several BIPOC members, but WDC does not have statistics for that). In addition, there is 1 church plant that is Hispanic/Latinx, listing 42 members.

WDC Member-congregations



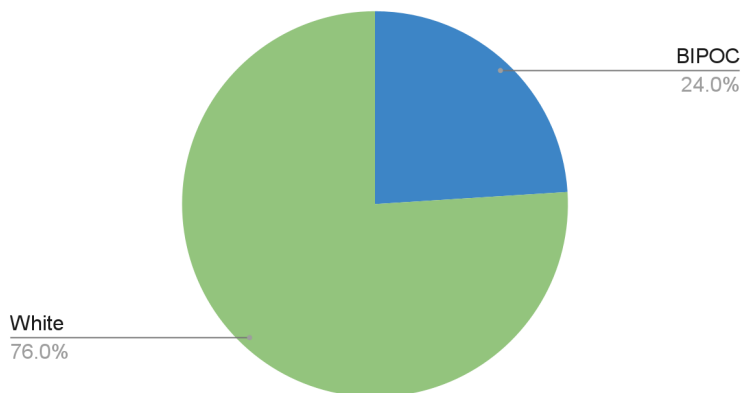
WDC members



Demographics of active credentialed leaders

In October 2022, there were 18 BIPOC and 57 White credentialed ministers in active ministry assignments. So, 24% of (18 out of 75) active credentialed ministers are BIPOC.

Active Credentialed Ministers



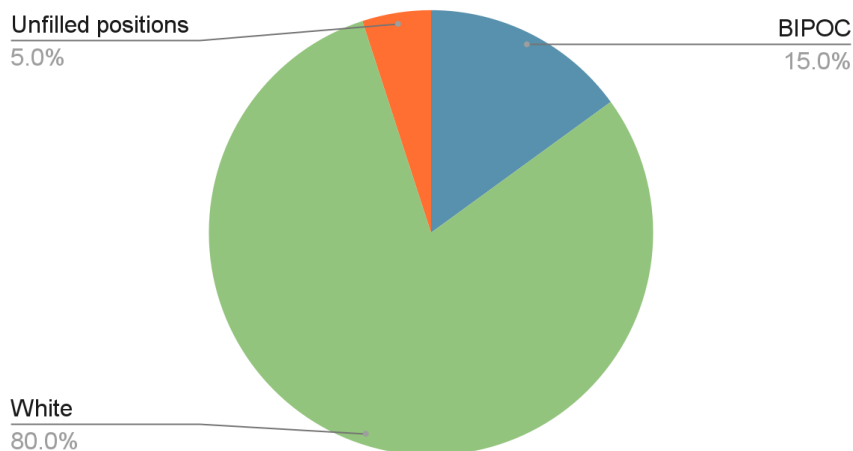
Demographics of Elected Leadership Groups

In October 2022, elected leadership groups had 5 BIPOC members:

- Executive Board (9 members/1 position unfilled) - **2 BIPOC**
- Church Planting Commission (6 members) - **2 BIPOC**
- Ministerial Leadership Commission (5 members/1 position unfilled) - **0 BIPOC**
- Resource Commission (6 members) - **1 BIPOC**
- Stewardship Commission (6 members) - **0 BIPOC**
- Gifts Discernment Committee (6 members) - **1 BIPOC**

6 positions on elected leadership groups were filled by BIPOC members, out of a total of 40 positions. 6 out of 40 = 15% BIPOC

Serving on Elected Groups



Demographics of Staff

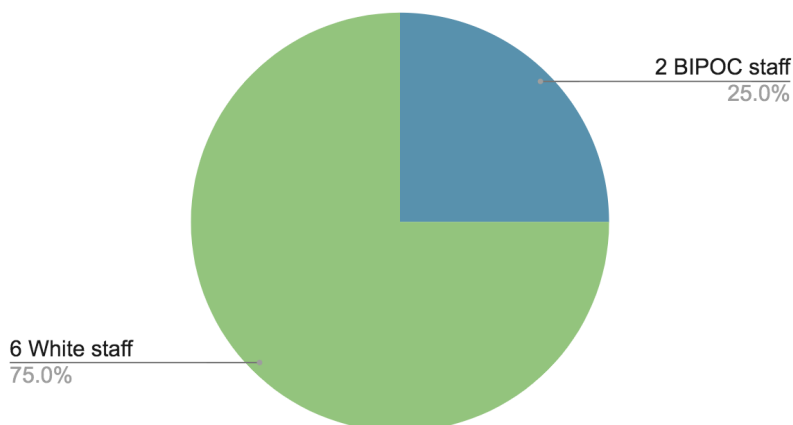
At the time of the audit in 2022 there were 2 BIPOC staff persons out of 8 staff members (2 out of 8 = 25%)

- Associate Conference Minister (Texas-based) - 1.0 FTE
- Administrative Assistant (to support Church Planting and Hispanic/Latinx and all Texas congregations and leaders) - .45 FTE

There were 6 white staff members:

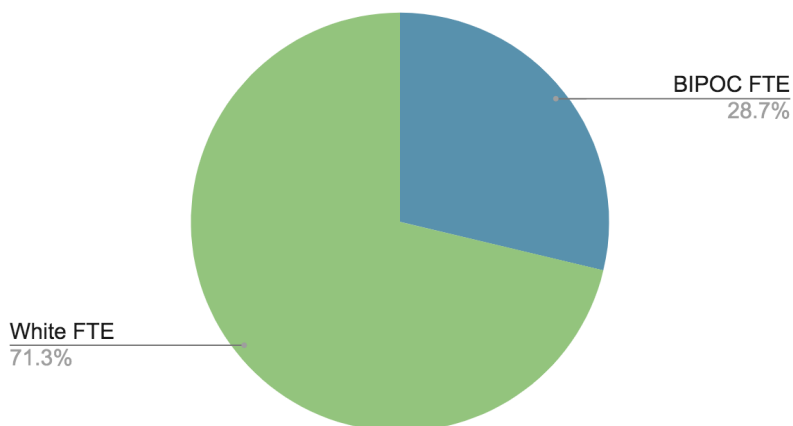
- Conference Minister - 1.0 FTE
- Associate Conference Minister (Kansas-based) - .75 FTE
- Administrative Assistant - 1.0 FTE
- Business Manager - .50 FTE
- Resource Library Director - .25 FTE
- Bi-Conference Youth Ministry Network Team Leader - .10 FTE

WDC staff persons



Staff Full-time Equivalent: BIPOC staff total 1.45 FTE (28.7%), White staff total 3.6 FTE (71.3%)

WDC staff full-time equivalent (FTE)



Interviews with BIPOC Leaders

Structure of Interviews

As we wrestled with the scope of our project, we became determined to provide something meaningful. We realized that we could easily get caught “in the weeds” of this task. We wanted to provide something that would be one more step in the on-going process of WDC becoming Anti-Racist.

Because of the skill, access and abilities available to the audit team, we decided to invite feedback from BIPOC leaders (credentialed ministers, church planters, members of WDC elected groups and staff). We encouraged them to reflect on their experiences and relationship with WDC. We endeavored to learn what is already going well, where stumbling blocks persist, and what plans could be made to work toward greater justice and equality.

We did this through explaining the audit with in-person meetings, a letter explaining the project, and one-on-one interviews. We invited consent so that participants would be clear about what was being asked and that their contributions would be anonymous and respected.

We invited 21 BIPOC leaders to provide feedback. Two declined, 14 interviews were done and one person responded via email. There were four people we were unable to connect with during the time we had allotted for feedback.

Questions

1. What is your relationship with WDC?
2. How have you been involved in and participated in WDC? What has been your experience in WDC?
3. What gifts could you offer WDC if you had the opportunity?
4. What obstacles to participation have you experienced in WDC?
5. If a miracle were to happen, how would you know you are fully welcomed and included in WDC?

Introduction Letter

See Appendix B.

Summary of themes from responses to interview questions

Question 1: What is your relationship with WDC?

The respondents to the survey distributed consisted of administrative staff, board members, credentialed chaplains, agency directors, and several credentialed ministers of which many are also church planters within Western District Conference.

Question 2: How have you been involved in and participated in WDC? What has been your experience in WDC?

The respondents have been included in Western District Conference in a variety of ways. Several have participated through committee, commissions, peer groups, and have attended different conferences/assemblies throughout their time in WDC. They appreciate the opportunity that it has given

them to network with others within the conference. Yet, time constraints appear to be a barrier for several others and their ability to participate in WDC as they wish. Many of the participants work bi-vocational jobs and voiced that the time and structure of the meetings do not fit their schedules and ask that more attention be brought to this.

Several respondents voiced that they have had great experiences in the conference. Many have been church planters and spoke of the positive experience as they have navigated church planting in WDC. They have reported having the utmost support from WDC staff. Some have been invited to share their experiences at other churches within the conference and appreciate this as it affirms them being invited and being a part of the conference. It makes them feel valued, heard, and welcomed.

There are several respondents who voiced concerns and need for change/growth within WDC. They would like to see more books and resources that are in Spanish, in the WDC library. The resources that are dispersed feel inequitable as there are not as many resources in Spanish as there are in English. Frustration was expressed as many try to learn the English language but feel that where they are at in the process, is not yet good enough. There was concern voiced over persons of color (POC) being expected to educate white people and the pressure behind it. Some do not feel welcome as they are sometimes judged because of the differing worship style between cultures. Some feel like second-class members and would like to see these relationship gaps change. A handful of respondents expressed feeling isolated in the conference. Many yearn to grow relationships with other churches within the conference. There was also vocalization over making sure there is more representation in decision-making. There was a request for commission and committee members to take a cultural competency orientation in relation to decision making about racial groups, in order to expand their mindset as to how their decisions affect different cultures.

All respondents expressed the need to feel heard, respected, validated, and included within the conference, despite how negative or positive their experience has been thus far.

Question 3: What gifts could you offer WDC if you had the opportunity?

The most prevalent response was that respondents offered to teach on cultural topics and provide support in teaching in the conference about cultural literacy. Sometimes this was mentioned clearly, but it was often alluded to with the offer of building hospitality, giving perspective of others, understanding people on the margins, or connecting with those outside of the Mennonite world. Some respondents noted the ability to share on topics and teach about their own culture. They also offered to provide their perspective to build communication bridges.

Similarly, respondents offered their gifts in preaching, teaching the Word of God and leading worship. Several offered to preach at other churches. Respondents also offered to teach on topics other than cultural literacy such as training others in music, leading worship, speaking on topics such as urban churches or training in pastoral care. Some respondents appeared interested in networking with other churches in the conference by collaborating on events.

A few mentioned being able to translate and interpret between English and Spanish. Some noted hope for more opportunities for leadership in the conference such as serving on commissions, providing facilitation, and participating in decision-making.

Uncertainty in speaking English is a barrier to using many of these gifts at the conference level. Along with this is the perception from Anglos that persons from a Hispanic or other background will be uneducated or ignorant. Another barrier appeared to be that Anglo pastors may not greet or easily engage with Hispanic pastors, and it is difficult to understand why – is it ignorance or racism. There also seems to be a lack of

understanding on behalf of the dominant, white culture that Hispanic persons can come from over 30 countries – not just Mexico.

There is gratitude for being able to serve as pastors, the work on anti-racism issues, planting churches that are open to other cultures and providing care for immigrants was expressed.

Question 4: What obstacles to participation have you experienced in WDC?

There were several obstacles listed that respondents experienced in WDC. Language difficulties were mentioned most often and included barriers with being able to speak English. Most documents and resources that are provided by WDC are not provided in the language that is most comfortable for BIPOC persons. Many of whom's first language is not English. It makes accessibility that much harder. Included in this, the geographical differences within the conferences limits the availability of resources that may be accessible in the Spanish language.

Another often mentioned concern is that for BIPOC communities' ministerial leadership is often a non-paid position and therefore other employment or business is taking up time. Pastors may have no salary from their church. Because of this, they may have too many commitments to participate in additional conference meetings which often leaves them feeling excluded. When they do have the chance to attend conference meetings, they state that the length of the meetings can be difficult to accommodate their busy bi-vocational schedules. Some respondents expressed that how business is conducted within the conference is rooted in cultural assumptions.

Respondents mentioned that the dominant white culture uses BIPOC persons as a token to their own benefits, rather than letting the BIPOC persons be truly heard, especially the women of color. This can result in emotions such as anger, powerlessness, and isolation. These emotions also stem from opinions not being validated, having theological differences, disconnection from worship forms, a lack of sensitivity in making decisions with racial groups, culturally inappropriate vocabulary, a lack of racial inclusion, and cultural assumptions.

It was noted that there were no Hispanic persons on the Ministerial Leadership Commission. Respondents noted that Hispanic churches work differently than Anglo churches so at least one representative is helpful. Dynamics within the system can also be isolating. For example, the system favors those educated in Mennonite colleges and seminaries and does not honor other education.

Respondents recommended having quality and quantity, expanding and inviting, cultivating racial leadership, building efficient communication channels and addressing resource disparity.

Question 5: If a miracle were to happen, how would you know you are fully welcomed and included in WDC?

As mentioned in above answers to previous questions, many respondents spoke of language barriers being a barrier to feeling included in WDC. Many of the respondents spoke of the need to address the language barriers to help ensure that they are fully included in WDC. Ways to proceed forward with this includes simultaneous interpretation by a paid interpreter or through personal language learning. Many of the respondents continue to give effort to learn English so that they can communicate with those around them and they would like to see this be reciprocated.

Respondents also spoke of making conference assembly and leadership meetings accessible. As mentioned in the answers to question number four, many BIPOC persons in WDC are bi-vocational. Many of the BIPOC ministerial leadership is unpaid therefore forcing them to find a secondary job in order to provide income for

themselves and their family. Several respondents spoke of being unable to attend meetings or conferences due to being bi-vocational. They would like to see conferences and meetings become more accessible to fit their needs, as well as it be recognized the expense and loss of income that comes with them attending conferences and/or meetings and not being able to work their secondary job.

A couple of the respondents mentioned wanting to build sister-church relationships with others in the WDC conference. They feel that this may help address any barriers that stand between the differing cultures and help create a greater sense of community and belonging.

Respondents voiced the need for greater cultural competence in pastoral training and credentialing. While many respondents voiced that they do feel included in WDC, this is still an essential piece that is missing. WDC is a diverse conference and the need for the differing cultures to be recognized is imperative. Alongside that, there was concern voiced about greater awareness by the conference as a whole about cultural differences and disparities experienced within WDC. Having the leaders of the conference recognize this is important, as they hold power, but it is also important that constituents within the conference recognize this as well. Part of this includes having more churches planted and celebrating the various cultures of the BIPOC churches. Most respondents, if not all, will agree that they are proud of their culture and want to share that with others around them. They invite others in the conference to celebrate with them.

Lastly, several respondents voiced that being heard matters. They want to know that their voice matters. They want their thoughts, concerns, and questions to be taken into serious consideration, the same as anyone else in the conference.

Reflections on Process of Interviewing

Language was a challenge in these interviews as often the interviewer did not speak Spanish and the interviewee did not speak enough English to feel comfortable communicating such complex thoughts as required. Interpreters were utilized, but it was noted that just translating word for word does not always capture the spirit or specific feedback that interviewees may have wanted to convey.

The Audit was also time-limited in that it was completed in six months. The Audit Team was very aware that this is just one more step on a longer journey to become more just and welcoming.

Some interviewees indicated they were unsatisfied with their initial responses and wanted to add more, but since the audit was concluding, further responses were not included in the audit. The audit team recognizes the value of people's responses and recommends that the conference provide more opportunities for ongoing conversation.

We recognize that for many of the participants the question about racism in WDC was surprising and the distrust in the system generally prevents them from being able to be open and explicit when responding to racial questions.

To the extent that BIPOC leaders experience genuine changes in the way they relate to and feel included in the life of the conference, there will be more openness to deepen into racial issues.

The power of seeing themselves reflected in the history and decisions of the conference will allow them to have a sense of belonging that will bear the fruit of true inclusion.

Assessments from staff and elected leadership groups

- *Does the Executive Board have an actionable plan for initiating and carrying through a 1, 5 and 10 year plan to dismantle racism in WDC? If so, how effectively has it been implemented?*
 - Staff: No. Work to date has been IDI, Widerstand anti-racism training, and working on internal/external antiracism audits.
 - EB: No, there have been no specific 1-, 5-, and 10-year plans, even though the anti-racism goal has been stated.

- *Has the Executive Board put into place a plan for developing accountability to communities of color?*
 - Staff: No
 - EB: No, there is not a specific plan for developing accountability to communities of color.

- *Are there efforts in place to support effective outreach to all members of WDC's constituency?*
 - Staff: 2 bilingual staff members (Spanish/English), whose work includes connecting with Spanish-speaking constituency and connecting them with WDC resources and activities. All WDC staff are involved in supporting the whole conference.
 - EB: Yes. Conference ministers have made specific efforts to relate to Spanish-speaking churches in WDC as well as the Cheyenne congregation. Translation is provided at all WDC assemblies and at board, commission, and committee meetings as needed.
 - Translation and interpretation: WDC has received grants to support translation of English documents into Spanish, such as web articles, policies and forms, commission minutes and agenda, and annual assembly materials. Interpretation is provided for many meetings, delegate sessions, and pastor resource events. At the same time, the availability of translation/interpretation does not make the resources interculturally competent. It can be difficult to find or create Anabaptist resources that are relevant across cultures.
 - Annual Assembly: Alternates between the southern and northern regions of the conference.
 - Zoom allows connection and outreach across the conference.
 - Resource Commission:
 - WDC resource library established a Texas branch with mostly Spanish-language resources. Resource library is acquiring and promoting books and resources related to racial justice, diversity, equity and decolonization. Task forces on immigration, Israel/Palestine, farm worker health.
 - Stewardship Commission: WDC website allows for translation into Spanish.
 - Ministerial Leadership Commission: MLC, often with support/assistance from Conference Ministers, does reach out to WDC ministers from time to time.
 - Church Planting Commission: Yes. Training and coaching in Spanish, church vitality forum in English
 - Gifts Discernment committee: The Gifts discernment committee reaches out to candidates for leadership across the conference.

- *Are there measures in place to support racial diversity efforts on your board or commission?*
 - Executive Board: Two members of the Executive Board are Hispanic. The Gifts Discernment Committee has worked on nominating additional BIPOC persons to serve on the board, with the goal of having multiple BIPOC persons on the Board. The GDC has

reached out to pastors of some of the BIPOC congregations to invite suggestions for nominees to elected leadership groups. A commitment has been made to provide, if needed, Spanish/English interpretation and as much translation of materials as possible for Board meetings. Staff members, Gifts Discernment Committee and Board leaders are having conversations about what measures would need to be taken to make Board meetings effective and a positive experience for BIPOC members, as greater racial diversity is represented.

- o Gifts Discernment Committee: Yes. Primarily translation/interpretation provided for this bilingual committee.
 - o Resource Commission: No specifically named measure.
 - o Stewardship Commission: No
 - o Ministerial Leadership Commission: Some. We've had new members take the IDI and have spent meeting time talking about ways to do this, recognizing that there remains more ongoing work to do.
 - o Church Planting Commission: Yes, we provide verbal interpretation, and translation of the minutes and materials.
- *What steps has WDC taken to improve and diversify outreach and ministries? Has the constituency been asked to identify what they want and need?*
 - o Staff/EB: Not in a comprehensive way. Feedback/evaluation is invited after events such as Annual Assembly, and surveys are occasionally conducted to invite constituency feedback about particular topics or ministry areas.
 - o EB: Conference ministers are in touch with all congregations, and this is sometimes a topic.
 - o Gifts Discernment Committee:
 - In the past five years, we have increased the number of non-Anglo representation on the ballots we present to the delegates for affirmation.
 - Spanish/English translation has been increased in the workings of the Executive Board and the commissions, although more translation is needed for the leadership to truly represent the WDC.
 - Within our committee, one member has spoken about the needs of Spanish-speaking congregations of WDC, but we could do better in speaking to more representatives of those congregations.
 - We have reached out to the one ethnic Chin congregation, but not the one Native (Cheyenne) congregation.
 - o Resource Commission: Don't know.
 - o Stewardship commission: Not this commission.
 - o Ministerial Leadership Commission: This happens mostly through WDC staff.
 - o Church Planting Commission: Not sure, don't know enough to respond.
 - *Have WDC's anti-racism commitments been made apparent, transparent, and consistent?*
 - o Staff: Only very minimally. The WDC constitution states, "...Desiring to follow the way of Jesus, we seek to dismantle racism and prejudice in our congregations, conference, institutions and communities." Executive Board meeting highlights are published on the WDC website, and include reference to the board's appointment of an anti-racism audit team.

- EB: WDC's anti-racism commitments have been consistent over the last number of years--perhaps not apparent enough.
 - Gifts Discernment: Yes. In particular, the Conference Minister has spoken to our committee about intentions and efforts. I think the anti-racism commitment is also seen in publications.
 - Resource Commission: Don't know
 - Stewardship commission: Not this commission.
 - Ministerial Leadership Commission: Yes. We have heard reports from the Conference Minister in the context of our MLC meetings.
 - Church Planting Commission: Can't say exactly what they are, but they exist.
- *Does WDC have relationships with local or regional groups who are actively working to challenge racism?*
 - Staff: Not institutionally. Individuals are involved in local and regional groups.
 - EB: Not in an official capacity---e.g., having a member on the board, etc.
 - Gifts Discernment: No
 - Resource Commission: Not this commission.
 - Stewardship Commission: Not this Commission.
 - Ministerial Leadership Commission: Not this Commission
 - Church Planting Commission: Not this Commission.
- *Has the leadership of WDC (conference ministry staff, Executive Board) gone to the cultural, political, and meeting spaces of local or regional BIPOC communities to listen and learn? Have funds been set aside to compensate BIPOC leaders for their consultation and advice?*
 - Staff: The executive Conference Minister has visited and worshiped in most of WDC's BIPOC congregations, and has met at various times with leaders from those congregations. One Associate Conference minister regularly goes to Hispanic and Chin congregations or meets with their leaders, and the other Associate Conference Minister has gone to the Cheyenne congregation. The Executive Board has not gone to BIPOC congregations in recent years. The Board is considering planning a listening tour by WDC leaders to WDC congregations in 2023.
 - Funds are allocated to compensate BIPOC leaders who are serving on the anti-racism audit team, and BIPOC leaders who will be interviewed as part of the audit.
 - Gifts Discernment: Not this committee.
 - Resource Commission: Not this commission.
 - Stewardship commission: Not this Commission.
 - Ministerial Leadership Commission: Not this Commission.
 - Church Planting Commission: Church Planting Commission did travel to Texas in 2019 (or maybe 2018) to participate in a church planter's retreat. Part of the goal was for those of us from Kansas to listen to and learn from the experience of church planters, many of whom were Hispanic at that time.

Policies and Documents

Constitution, Bylaws, and Policy questions

- Is racism or anti-racism integrated into the identity documents of WDC?
 - One direct mention of racism, Constitution Article II. Our Common Faith and Mission includes this paragraph:
 - *The Western District Conference seeks to foster a biblical, multicultural vision of the missional church by being inclusive of, walking with, and learning from many cultural and racial/ethnic groups. Desiring to follow the way of Jesus, we seek to dismantle racism and prejudice in our congregations, conference, institutions and communities. We covenant to be the church together to support and encourage each other as we learn what it means to be disciples of Jesus. We desire wholesome working relationships in all our ministries.*
 - In Harassment and Abuse Prevention and Response policy (Policy manual III.L), Harassment is defined as:
 - *Unwelcome conduct that is based on race, color, religion, sex (including pregnancy), national origin, age, disability or genetic information. Harassment becomes unlawful where 1) enduring the offensive conduct becomes a condition of continued employment, or 2) the conduct is severe or pervasive enough to create a work environment that a reasonable person would consider intimidating, hostile, or abusive.*
- Do those documents mention racism within the first page?
 - Constitution: Yes. See previous question
- Has WDC put in place policies for regular reviews of action toward anti-racism plans?
 - Not Found in Constitution, Bylaws, or Policy Manual
- Has WDC established policies to develop criteria for assessing the results of actions, not just the intentions?
 - Harassment and Abuse Prevention and Response policy (Policy Manual III.L)
- Are there procedures in place that hold staff accountable for embodying anti-racism behaviors in the conference?
 - Not found directly in Policy Manual.
- Are there procedures in place for responding to and challenging expressions of racism as they appear within WDC at all levels of the racism iceberg, not just Oppressive Power?
 - Not found directly in Policy Manual
- Are there procedures in place to prioritize BIPOC vendors?
 - No
- What are the stated practices around key cultural elements?
 - See Policy Manual I.A (Conduct of Meetings), especially I.A.1, Procedure:

- *In general, modern-day practice is to conduct meetings in an informal manner and to make decisions by consensus. Where consensus is not achieved and decisions must be made, the most recent edition of Robert's Rules of Order shall serve as the final guide for procedure.*

History of WDC

Review of Prairie People

A review of the WDC history book Prairie People: A History of the Western District Conference was undertaken by Audit Team Chair, Vicki Penner. The book outlines a comprehensive history of the conference from the perspective of those who lived it. In 2022, the Executive Board of WDC authorized an anti-racism audit to look at the structural injustice in the WDC system. The review of this book is through that lens. Full review is available in Appendix E.

Penner notes that the final definition of WDC in this book may be instructive on how it can and will move forward on issues of diversity, equity and inclusion that are front and center in our day. The author writes that WDC has three overlapping functions that characterize the conference: 1) voluntary confederation of congregations 2) a fellowship 3) a catalyst for social involvement. These are all built on the foundation of the Anabaptist values of nonconformity, community, nonresistance, and evangelical mission. Suggestions on how to review WDC in light of anti-racist commitments can be found in the Recommendations and Open Questions section of this audit.

Articles written on racial history of WDC

- Has research been conducted into the racial history of WDC? If so, how widely has it been publicized?
 - *Exploring Race and Ethnicity in Western District Conference* by John Thiesen (based on workshop presented at WDC Annual Assembly 2017) - <https://mla.bethelks.edu/ml-archive/2018/exploring-race-and-ethnicity-in-western-district-h.php>
 - Selection of congregational histories (submitted by congregations at WDC's 125th anniversary in 2017) - <https://mennowdc.org/congregation-history-stories/>

Recommendations and Open Questions

How is WDC acting or participating in racist ways?

- Lack of policy backing up general commitment expressed in vision statement
- Language translation and interpretation does not equal cultural competency
- Lack of resources in the differing languages, especially Spanish
- Not taking into consideration the bi-vocational careers of many BIPOC leaders, which affects their ability to participate in committees

How is WDC Supporting Efforts to dismantle racism?

- Conference is committed to and works to provide language translation
- Percentage of BIPOC credentialed leaders is greater than or equal to the percentage of BIPOC congregations. (However, there are BIPOC persons in predominantly white congregations which has not been counted so it is not clear if these percentages represent all of WDC membership)
- General commitment to Anti-Racism is specified in WDC Constitution
- BIPOC staff members represent 28% of staff FTE.

How could WDC better support efforts to dismantle racism?

- Continue conversations within conference membership on Anti-Racism as this audit was limited in time and scope.
- Invite an outside entity to build on this audit by doing further assessment and recommendations, in order to get a more objective opinion about how racism has shaped WDC and its constituency, and action steps for moving forward.
- Ensure that resources available from WDC are available in both English and Spanish
- Celebrate the various cultures that exist within WDC by recognizing holidays and/or traditional celebrations
- Tell the story of BIPOC involvement in WDC, past and present.
- Recognize that we have expressed our Anabaptist faith and commitments through a Euro-American cultural lens, and consider how to express our faith in a way that embraces our full cultural diversity.
- Educate about white supremacy, political/social dynamics, power, dominant culture and how they impact our congregations and communities.
- Make full report available to the WDC constituency.

Conclusion

The Anti-Racism Audit Team would like to extend sincere appreciation to member of the WDC staff, Michelle Schrag, Violeta Ajquejay Suastegui, Sandra Montes-Martinez and Heidi Regier Kreider who have done significant administrative work to insure that we communicated well, kept track of the important feedback we collected and facilitated compiling it into this final report.

Appendix A: Anti-Racism Internal Audit for WDC Adapted from Widerstand Consulting

Anti-racism Internal Audit for Western District Conference

(Adapted from “Anti-racism Audit Checklist for Congregations” from Widerstand Consulting)

Draft 1-14-22

Buy-in

- Executive Board buy-in established through funding approval.
- Official statement of support for audit issued from Executive Board.

Funding

- Budget set for audit.
- Budget includes stipends and honorarium for representatives from the BIPOC community.
- Budget includes appropriate funding for professional anti-racism participation and support if possible.

Audit Team

- Racially diverse team formed, majority BIPOC members if possible.
- Mix of internal and external participants established.
- Conference Minister and Executive Board representation determined
- Team no larger than 5-7 members.

Timeline

- Goal set for completion within a two-month time frame from start to finish.
- Three two-week phases established: Design, data collection, summary and report.
- Specific deadlines set for each phase.

Respondents

- One third each conference ministry staff, Executive Board members, WDC constituency [pastors? commission/committee members? Others?]
- Majority BIPOC participants identified with stipends included (if possible)
- Policies put in place to go to places where respondents are, rather than asking them to come to WDC office.

Interview questions:

- Simple three questions model developed (adapt and develop as needed):
 - How is WDC acting or participating in racist ways?
 - How is WDC supporting efforts to dismantle racism?
 - How could WDC better support efforts to dismantle racism?

Internal assessment - Audit Team reviews the following areas and answered queries about each area:

Mission, identity and purpose

- Is racism or anti-racism integrated into the identity documents of WDC?
- Do those documents mention racism within the first page?

- Has research been conducted into the racial history of WDC? If so, how widely has it been publicized?

Structure

- What is the racial composition of the Executive Board of WDC?
- Does the Executive Board hold a common analysis of racism and anti-racism?
- Has the Executive Board gone through anti-racism training?
- Does Executive Board have an actionable plan for initiating and carrying through a 1, 5 and 10 year plan to dismantle racism in WDC? If so, how effectively has it been implemented?
- Has Executive Board put into place a plan for developing accountability to communities of color?
- Are WDC's structures prepared to resist oppressive power (racism's ability to oppress, demean and harm the BIPOC community), white power (racism's ability to provide power and privilege to white people and white society based on the perception of white identity) and internalized racism (the psychological acceptance of, belief in, and acting upon the associated identities of inferiority by BIPOC community members and superiority by white community members)?

Constituency

- Does WDC have a racially specific understanding of the racial demographics of WDC's constituency?
- Are there efforts in place to support effective outreach to all members of WDC's constituency?
- Where congregations or leadership groups are all-white, are there measures in place to support racial diversity efforts?

Procedure

- Are there procedures in place that hold staff accountable for embodying anti-racism behaviors in the conference?
- Are there procedures in place for responding to and challenging expressions of racism as they appear within WDC at all levels of the racism iceberg, not just Oppressive Power?
- Are there procedures in place to prioritize BIPOC vendors?

Policy

- Has WDC put in place policies for regular reviews of action toward anti-racism plans?
- Has WDC established policies to develop criteria for assessing the results of actions, not just the intentions?
- Has WDC taken proactive steps to ensure that all spaces are fully welcoming to all?

Practice

- What are the stated practices around key cultural elements and how do they support white norms and standards? For example, how does WDC establish norms around:
 - Time
 - Conflict
 - Dress
 - Leadership style
 - Meetings
 - Worship style
- What steps has WDC taken to improve and diversify outreach and ministries? Has the constituency been asked to identify what they want and need?

Program

- How do WDC's programs support white members of the constituency to join the conference in the work of dismantling racism?
- How do WDC's programs support BIPOC members of the constituency to empower and support efforts to dismantle racism?
- Has WDC's anti-racism commitments been made apparent, transparent, and consistent?
- Does WDC have relationships with local or regional groups who are actively working to challenge racism?
- Has the leadership of WDC (conference ministry staff, Executive Board) gone to the cultural, political, and meeting spaces of local or regional BIPOC communities to listen and learn? Have funds been set aside to compensate BIPOC leaders for their consultation and advice?

Personnel

- Has WDC developed deliberate recruitment strategies to diversify the conference's staff?
- Has WDC fostered and built up members of the local or regional BIPOC community to become potential staff members?

Engage Executive Board

- Audit Team Report to Executive Board
- Executive Board identifies action steps

Results

- Results of anti-racism audit announced to WDC constituency
- Action steps with clear dates and accountability are included

Follow-up

- Action steps followed through
- Timelines set
- Check-in measures established

For reference: See The Continuum (Markers of Anti-Racist Institutional Transformation)
<https://www.widerstandconsulting.org/continuum>

Appendix B: Letter Sent to BIPOC Leaders

Western District Conference

Invitation to Participate and Informed Consent *Anti-Racism Audit*

You are invited to participate in an interview as part of an audit conducted by the Western District Conference (WDC) Anti-Racism Audit Team. Please read through the following information, so that you can make an informed decision regarding your participation in this audit.

BACKGROUND AND PURPOSE OF THE AUDIT

On January 22, 2022, the Western District Conference Executive Board approved the appointment of a team to do an internal anti-racism audit of WDC's leadership structure, program and policies. This grows out of the commitment stated in the WDC Constitution: *"The Western District Conference seeks to foster a biblical, multicultural vision of the missional church by being inclusive of, walking with, and learning from many cultural and racial/ethnic groups. Desiring to follow the way of Jesus, we seek to dismantle racism and prejudice in our congregations, conference, institutions and communities. We covenant to be the church together to support and encourage each other as we learn what it means to be disciples of Jesus. We desire wholesome working relationships in all our ministries."*

As part of the audit, the purpose of interviews is to invite feedback from BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, People of Color) leaders (credentialed ministers, church planters, members of elected groups and staff), to reflect on their experience and relationship with WDC. This will help the conference learn what is already going well, and to make plans to work toward greater justice and equity.

PARTICIPATION AND WITHDRAWAL

Participation in this audit is voluntary. Response to the interview questions constitutes consent to participate in the audit. You may withdraw your participation at any time without consequences of any kind. You may also refuse to answer any question you choose.

PROCEDURES

WDC staff will contact BIPOC leaders to schedule an interview time. Members of the WDC Anti-Racism Audit Team will conduct the interviews. These interviews will take place virtually via video conference, with an interpreter as needed. The interview will be recorded unless declined by the participant. These interviews will consist of five questions in order to receive effective feedback about WDC and to understand any needs that require attention

1. What is your relationship with WDC?
2. How have you been involved in and participated in WDC? What has been your experience in WDC?
3. What gifts could you offer WDC if you had the opportunity?
4. What obstacles to participation have you experienced in WDC?
5. If a miracle were to happen, how would you know you are fully welcomed and included in WDC?

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Sharing your experiences and insights about any anti-racism work or experiences may prompt strong emotions or feelings. You will not directly benefit from your participation in this audit, except from your

own potential learning from the experiences of others. However, the insights you share will be very useful to the WDC anti-racism audit process.

COMPENSATION FOR PARTICIPATION

Each participant will be offered a financial honorarium as a way to thank them for their time and effort that they have contributed to WDC's anti-racism audit process.

CONFIDENTIALITY

Any personally identifiable information that is obtained in conjunction with this audit will remain confidential. All confidential data will be stored securely by Western District Conference and the individual responses will be destroyed after the audit is concluded. Individual participants will remain anonymous unless the participants give permission to otherwise be identified.

RIGHTS OF AUDIT PARTICIPANTS

You may withdraw your consent at any time and discontinue participation without penalty. If you have any questions or concerns about the audit, please feel free to contact the WDC Anti-Racism Audit Team chair, Vicki Penner, at vickipenner@gmail.com, or audit team member Jenna Ratzlaff at ratzloffjenna@gmail.com. If you have questions about your rights as a participant or would like to speak to someone independent of the audit team, please contact the Western District Conference at 316-283-6300 or wdc@mennowdc.org.

MEMBERS OF THE AUDIT TEAM

Michelle Armster (Constituent)

Sandra Montes-Martinez (Staff person)

Vicki Penner (Executive Board member)

Jenna Ratzlaff (Constituent)

Ben Woodward-Breckbill (Executive Board member)

Appendix C: Books and Reference materials available in WDC Library

Reference materials available in the WDC library can be found at this online website

<https://mennowdc.booksys.net/opac/crl/index.html?mode=start#menuHome>

Specific books regarding topics in this report can be found under the List tab with the links to these topics:

- [Intercultural Competence and Anti-Racism 9/9/22](#)
- [Anti-Racism & White Privilege Education \(Kids\) 9/9/22](#)

Appendix D: Anti-Racism and WDC History: A review of *Prairie People: A History of the Western District Conference*

By Vicki L Penner MDiv, LMSW 4/27/22

Prairie People: A History of the Western District Conference by David A. Haury outlines a comprehensive history of the conference from the perspective of those who lived it. In 2022, the Executive Board of WDC authorized an anti-racism audit to look at the structural injustice in the WDC system. The review of this book is through that lens.

Prairie People is the official history of WDC as it was authorized in 1978 by the Historical Committee of the WDC. At that time, many congregations were celebrating the 100th anniversary of their ancestors' arrival in the United States. The book focuses on WDC history - not individual congregations or the larger denomination.

The book outlines strands of history and tradition from many European countries. It claims a history of many backgrounds becoming one by being woven together to create the WDC. It does not look closely at the Indigenous people who had already been resident in the lands to which these immigrants moved.

Even from the preface, the book does not clarify what the "Mennonite heritage" means. When looking through a contemporary lens, one has to ask – is this heritage and history a white, European heritage or is it in fact a history and heritage built on the foundations of Jesus Christ as understood in the Biblical text? Surely, the WDC ancestors would not understand this question as they understood their history to be built on Christ and did not completely understand that their understanding of Christ was bound up in their own white, European culture.

The preface notes that the WDC had rapid change in its first century. Coming from many different European backgrounds (Switzerland, South Germany, Galicia, Prussia, Volhynia, Polish Russia, and South Russia) much of the nascent conference's energy went to knitting together these disparate congregations and establishing its own structures. The churches and new conference felt separate from "America" and struggled to find their own identity in relation to other white and immigrant groups in the areas which they settled who spoke English instead of German. Little, if any energy, was available to understand the plight of Native Americans who had just recently been discharged from the lands on which they would make their homes. Schooled deeply in European understandings of land ownership, White, European Mennonites did not have an ability to understand Native Americans' relationship to the land.

The book does not presume to address those in the broader culture who were influenced or affected by their presence. It is clearly an internally reflective document regarding the history of those who were already in the Anabaptist- Mennonite fold.

That being said, this book was well researched and the author collaborated with important historians of the day. Because of that diligent work, we are able to reflect again on this history as we consider reparations and adjustments to our understanding of Christ's work in the world today.

WDC Mennonite identity is very much rooted in the Anabaptist experience during the Reformation in Europe. One must ask if this identity somehow precludes the easy incorporation of those persons who are not of European descent. While the Reformation impacted the world, focusing on the Reformation continues to center White and European understandings of Christ's work in the world.

Not only were Anabaptist Mennonites grounded in Europe, they were also separated from Europe. As chapter one opens, "They remained an unique people, separated from the surrounding cultures by their religious convictions." While this may have had a positive effect for the Anabaptist Mennonites in the fold, it set up a boundary of not truly seeing the humanity of those who were not in their church. This made it difficult when Mennonites moved to North America to truly see the humanity of Native Americans, Latino Americans and African Americans in their communities. At the same time, Mennonites regularly sought to serve those outside the church with compassion, nonviolence and peace. However, the sense of insider and outsider were strong.

The book has a detailed account of the early Anabaptist movement in Europe which can help with understanding current Mennonite traditions of believer's baptism, separation of church and state, nonviolence and nonresistance, discipleship after Christ and the importance of Christian community.

Because the WDC history is one of bringing together different European cultures, within its polity "a stress on individualism and congregational autonomy ensured continued diversity among the Mennonites." (pg. 16) Mennonites remained true to their faith through persecution and marginalization.

Mennonites who migrated to the central plains came primarily in the 1870's and 1880's. These were not the first Mennonites in the United States, as Germantown, PA, was settled in 1683. Many of the ancestors of the prairie people had migrated to other parts of Europe before coming to the United States. These Mennonites had found some peace after the initial Anabaptist persecutions in Russia under Catherine the Great who had guaranteed exemption from military service. By the late 1800's new military laws in Russia and Germany precipitated Mennonites migration. (pg. 20) In addition, the author suggests that "land hunger" or needing to have more land for Mennonite families was another important consideration. (pg. 20) The author notes, "The Mennonites who came to North America were unwilling to compromise their faith by performing even noncombatant military service or by assimilating with the society around them. In some respects, their migration reflected an inability to cope with rapid social change, but it was also a positive expression of the Mennonites' faith. (pg. 20 -21)

Delegates were sent to search for an appropriate place to settle in the United States. They were sent with specific directives that show the values and priorities of WDC ancestors. Those directives were:

1. Complete religious freedom and full exemption from military service
2. Moderately priced land of good quality and sufficient quantity
3. Closed communities with local self-government and the right to use German language
4. Sufficient loans to cover transportation expenses (pg. 22-23)

The author goes on to note that "The Mennonites who decided to settle in the United States did so without sound guarantees of autonomy, isolation, or exemption from military service. Kansas did not satisfy any of the three major stipulations given Suderman and Buller. Yet that is where they led their congregations. How

did this gross contradiction between intentions and actions originate?” (pg. 22) The author goes on to note the influence of railroads, immense farmland, and personal connections on deciding where to settle.

The author quotes an “Emigration Song” by Jacob Stucky that seems to reveal the very human nature (and not always Christly motivations) of the immigrants:

In Kansas is the place to be,
Where treasures are for you and me.
There is a farm and more land too
For both, your oldest boy and you.

And when the youngest is of age,
Also in farming would engage,
A quarter then he shall have too
To get a start like others do. (pg. 22)

Mennonites did practice mutual aid and would help the least of their communities. (pg. 24)

Again, the book provides fabulous details and historical references so that individuals and congregations may outline their own history and review it in light of the current leading of Christ and his Spirit. This review will not go into such detail as it is to focus on the Western District Conference and the broader calling to name potential injustice. The author notes, “No other Mennonite conference has united groups as diverse and disparate as those composing the Western District.” (pg. 58) Because of this, the Western District had to focus on those elements of the faith (values and experiences) that could be found in common. *“Community, nonconformity, and nonresistance motivated their immigration. These doctrines and an emphasis on evangelical mission soon united the diverse groups of immigrants who joined the Conference. They shared a background of persecution, discrimination, and dispersion. Their mutual encounters with the perils of migration and pioneer life in Kansas further identified them. Immigration itself as a spiritual pilgrimage drew the different groups together. Even the religious practices of each group were basically similar. Values such as honesty, thrift, diligence, humility and fidelity transcended any cultural discord.” Pg. 58-59*

This book also includes a beautiful narrative of the experiences of new Mennonites on the prairie. It also outlines the start of the General Conference Mennonite Church. These two things are beyond the scope of this review – but may be very interesting to the reader. Bethel College founding is outlined in this book and how it relates to WDC. However, Bethel College has always been a private endeavor and while always associated with WDC it has never been a project of or subsidiary to WDC.

The book outlines the evolution of the conference in relation to the broader culture especially on peace and social justice issues. Initially, education focused on preservation. Growth of the conference focused on people moving to new communities and starting churches among those with historical Mennonite roots. The initial expansion of WDC has churches with similar characteristics.

During WWI, Mennonites were required to become more politically sophisticated as they worked toward convincing government authorities of the importance of noncombatant service and conscientious objection to war.

The book specifically talks about WDC working to diminish racial prejudices and injustices in the 60's. (pg 362) This is the first place in the book where awareness of racial injustices are specifically identified in the history of WDC. It appears that the system was just becoming aware that racial injustice existed – even though it had already been over 400 years of slavery in America. Until the 60's it appears that WDC Mennonites did not choose to see these broader issues because of their more internal focus.

Also in this section, we finally have some notes on what the conference's outreach to Native Americans was. "During the 1950's both the Peace and Social Concerns Committee and the Home Mission Committee contributed funds to the Hoover's Orchard Project in southwest Wichita . . . The new effort concentrated on providing Bible classes and recreation for Indian children." (pg. 363)

The book concludes that "the most useful concept in understanding the development of the Conference is continuity. This continuity may be described in terms of two aspects: diversity and cooperation... Diversity and the freedom to maintain that diversity have continued to typify the Western District. Despite the broad differences among the immigrants, an enthusiastic spirit of cooperation united them in the Kansas Conference. A common identity and faith have persisted in distinguishing the Mennonites of Western District." (pg. 416)

The final definition of WDC in this book may be instructive on how it can and will move forward on issues of diversity, equity and inclusion that are front and center in our day. The author writes that WDC has three overlapping functions that characterize the conference: 1) voluntary confederation of congregations, 2) a fellowship, and 3) a catalyst for social involvement. These are all built on the foundation of the Anabaptist values of nonconformity, community, nonresistance, and evangelical mission.

Strengths of Western District Conference's history, as indicated in *Prairie People*:

- A self-understanding of many becoming one
- A people connected by "a common identity through many generations" [preface]
- An understanding of faith centered in the discipleship of Christ, nonviolence, importance of community
- A strong sense of community and care for one another in the church
- A sense of service to all humanity with compassion, nonviolence and justice
- Anabaptist history is one that sought more thorough changes than Protestant movement and looked to Christ directly for the formation of the church
- A polity that allows for congregational autonomy which allows for continued diversity within the conference
- A witness of how to stay true to faith regardless of persecution or marginalization
- Importance of close-knit communities to meet the challenges of broader society
- Strong faith
- History of immigration could be a common factor with some newer congregations in WDC
- A concern and commitment to starting new churches
- Strong commitment to anti-war and conscientious objector needs
- Development in peace understanding to become more engaging in world, social issues and concerns

Historical barriers potentially facing Western District Conference as it seeks become more anti-racist:

- Diversity is focused on the different European groups not on the diversity of today which includes BIPOC persons.
- Identity may be as much cultural (white, European) as Anabaptist Christians following the model of Christ
- Little energy for or awareness of Native Peoples who had been driven from lands they occupied
- An understanding of faith emanating from the reformation which has an effect of continually white-centering conversations about faith
- A significant sense of separation from those in the broader society who were not in the church.
- Difficulty in coping and adapting to rapid social change
- Motivation by land and care for family even above commitments to nonviolence, non-military service, or continuity of community
- Experience of immigration was very different – came as communities not as individuals, came with some resources not exceedingly poor, came to a country who knew them as privileged not as discriminated against
- New churches have often focused on the persons who have some history in Mennonite circles already
- Peace witness has been focused on anti-war rather than a more broad definition of peace like the biblical notion of Shalom