

Southeast Michigan Synod Diversity Task Force FINAL REPORT

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Prepared and submitted by:
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The Southeast Michigan Synod's Diversity Task Force on Sexual Orientation & Gender Expression (DTF, or Task Force) works on issues within the church surrounding LGBTQIA+ people and offers educational opportunities and resources to ELCA congregations and individuals seeking to explore questions of sexuality and gender. The Task Force's mission is for justice and full inclusion of all God's people within congregations, the Southeast Michigan Synod, and the ELCA.

More specifically, the group shares information of joy and concerns for the LGBTQIA+ community and raises awareness around issues of hate. The Task Force also provides a presence at events such as annual meetings, pride festivals, and other synod activities. Additionally, the group walks congregations through Reconciling In Christ, or RIC, a program for congregations, synods, colleges, seminaries, and other Lutheran organizations to publicly welcome LGBTQIA+ people. The Task Force also helps to promote those welcoming RIC congregations.

The Task Force's current membership is aging and suffering from a decline in leadership and participation. Yet the current political climate necessitates a focus on Task Force work more than ever. As such, the Task Force finds itself at a crossroads regarding its future: to reinvest in and recreate the body in new form and/or function to foster and fuel new membership and energy or to contribute its past accomplishments and mission to another similar initiative or organization to allow this work to continue and live in different new structure or format moving forward.

To identify participation issues, organizational needs, participant preferences, and stakeholder visions for paths and options forward, the Task Force asked *do good* Consulting's Chief ChangeMaker, Laura Huth-Rhoades, to guide the Task Force through a member surveying and facilitated feedback initiative at the 2025 Rise Up Synod Assembly.

In April 2025, an online survey was sent out to key contacts among Diversity Task Force participants and leadership. Forty responses were received to the survey with nearly 70% of respondents identifying they were from a suburban Southeast Michigan area. Others named urban and rural Southeast Michigan as home.

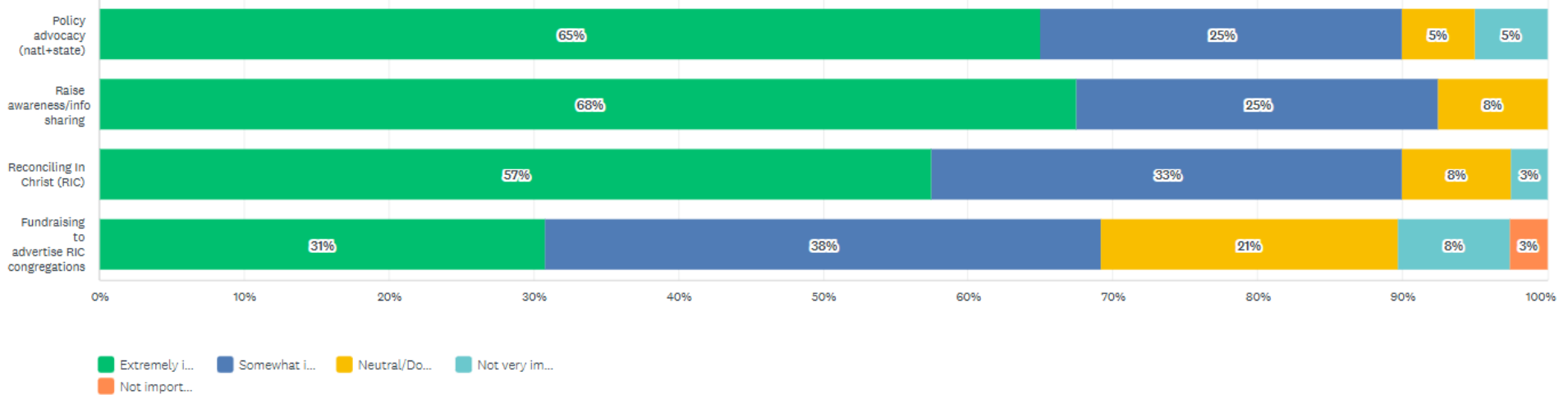
In May 2025, nearly 40 people from across the Southeast Michigan Synod region participated in a facilitated input session at the 2025 Rise Up Synod Assembly in Westland, Michigan. This report summarizes findings across the survey and session, showing side-by-side comparisons in results.

Both inquiries began by asking how important four different areas of Task Force work are, especially in today's climate. The side-by-side responses to these questions are on the next page, displayed by survey vs. session.

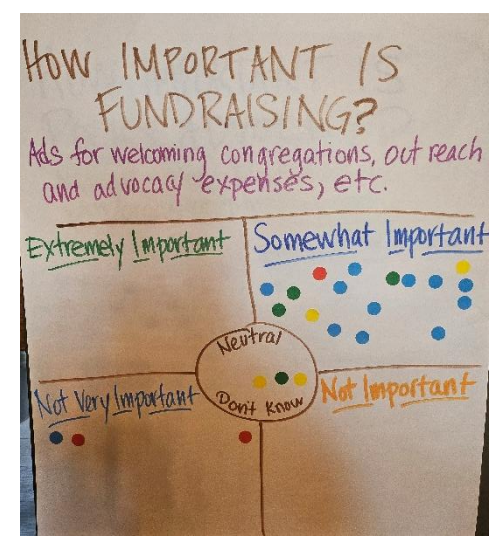
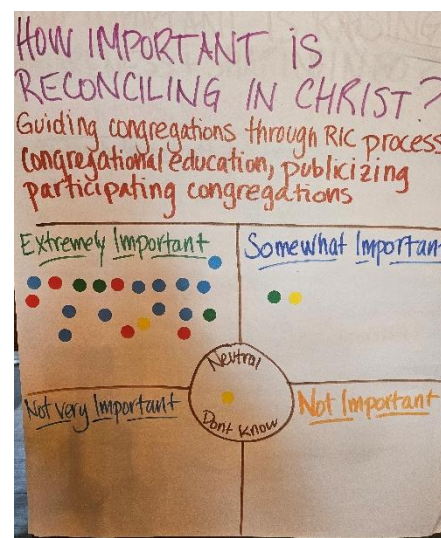
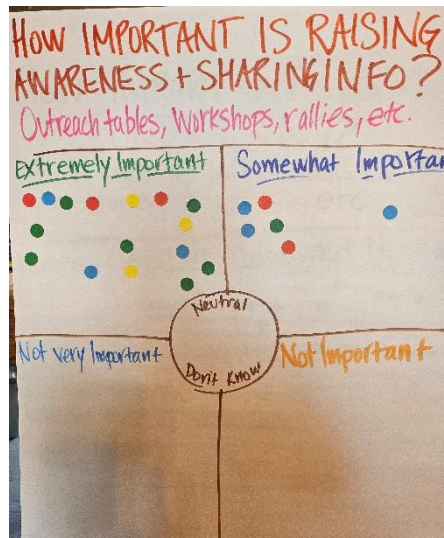
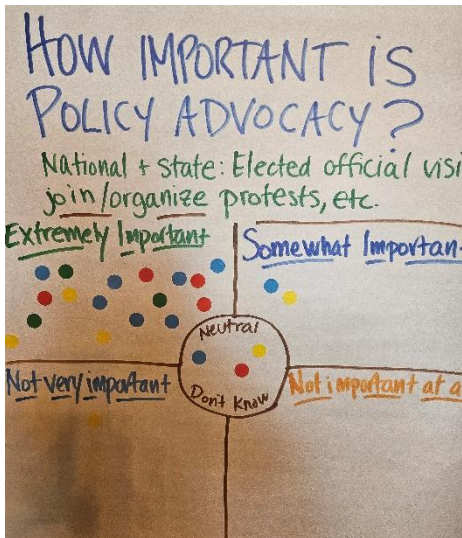
QUESTION #1:

How important are these Diversity Task Force issues to address, especially in today's climate?

Survey responses (out of 40 respondents):

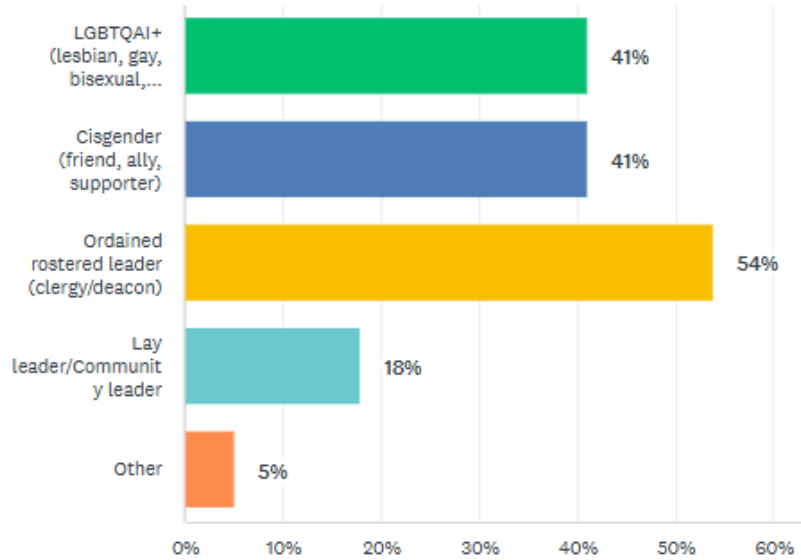


In-person session responses, indicated by one-dot-per-person voting (color insignificant):



The survey also asked respondents in an optional question how they identified, with the option to select as many options as they wished. The same question was not asked during the in-person facilitation.

Survey responses to Question #2, “How do you identify”:

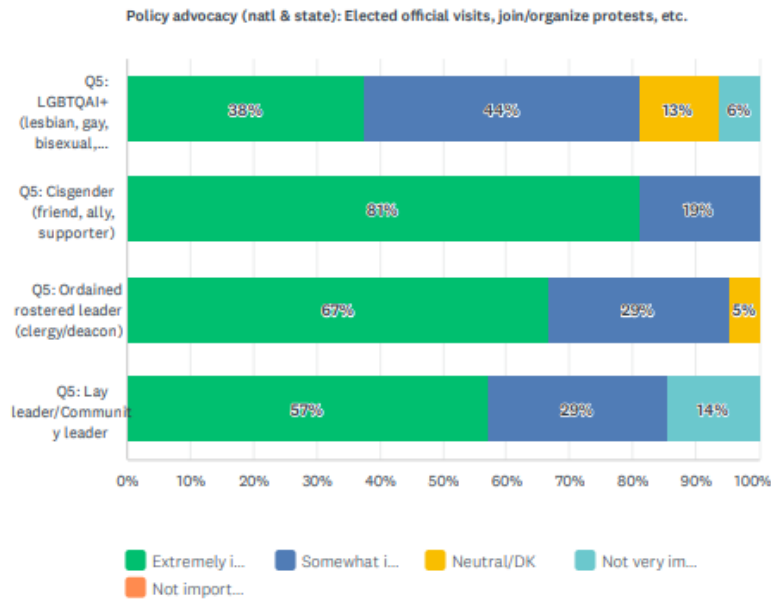


When a comparison was applied to illustrate how survey respondents answered Question #1 regarding issue importance given their answer to Question #2 regarding identity, some interesting differences emerged that can be found on page 4.

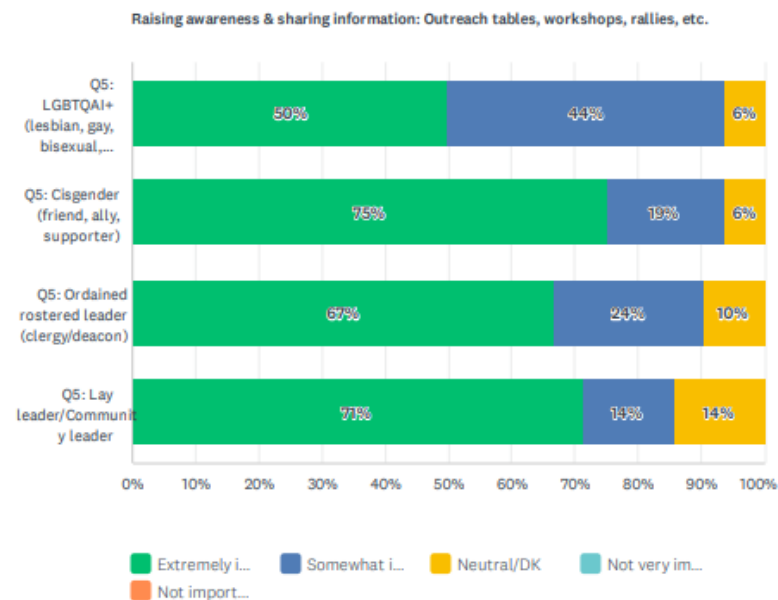
QUESTION #1 + Question #2 COMPARISON:

How important are these Diversity Task Force issues to address, especially in today’s climate + How do you identify?

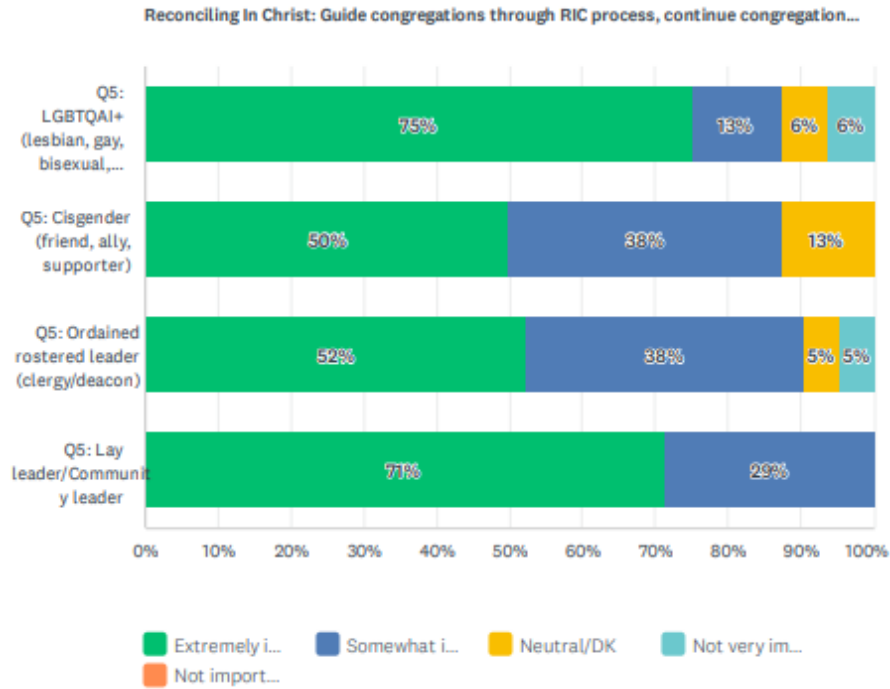
Regarding POLICY ADVOCACY:



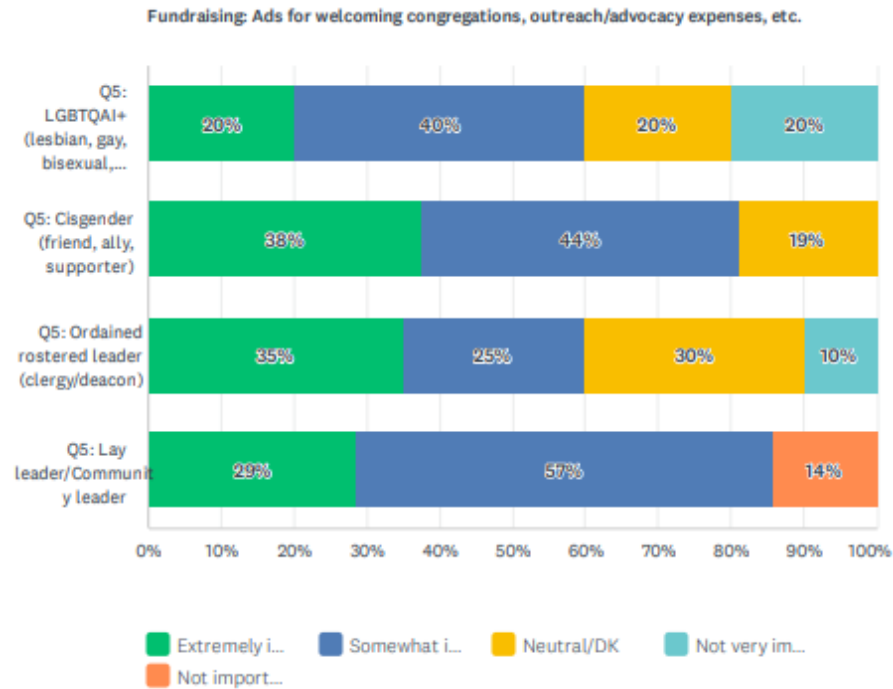
Regarding RAISING AWARENESS & SHARING INFORMATION:



Regarding RECONCILING IN CHRIST:



Regarding FUNDRAISING:



Some important differences come to light when audience segmentation is used to filter these questions, namely in the areas of Reconciling in Christ versus Policy Advocacy and Raising Awareness. The LGBTQIA+ identifiers named Reconciling in Christ as a top priority with 75% saying this was extremely and another 13% saying it was somewhat important. The Cisgender and Clergy/Deacon audiences came in with 52% and 53% respectively for extremely important, far lower than their LGBTQIA+ peers at 75%.

Another difference emerged in the Policy Advocacy question, flipping the narrative shown above. When Cisgender, Clergy/Deacon, and Lay/Community audiences ranked the question on Policy Advocacy, 80%, 67%, and 57% respectively showed this as extremely important work. Their LGBTQIA+ peers weighed in at just 38%.

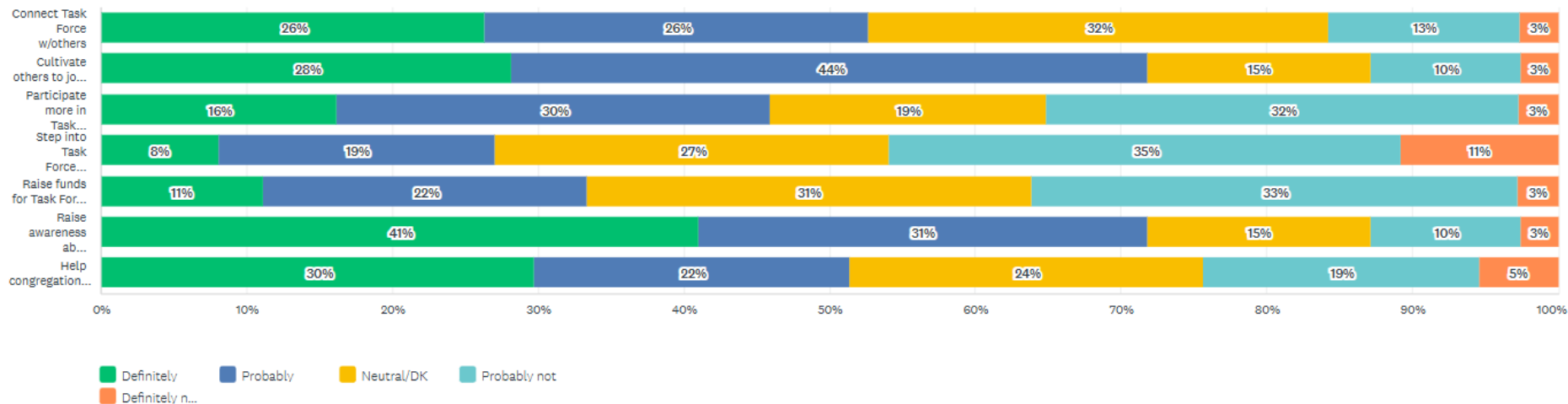
A similar showing was found again when asking about Raising Awareness & Sharing Information: 75% of Cisgender, 67% of Clergy/Deacon, and 71% of Lay/Community audiences ranked this question as extremely important work. Their LGBTQIA+ peers weighed in at just 50%.

The survey also asked this question about respondents' willingness to participate in future Diversity Task Force work. A similar set of questions was also asked of participants at the Rise Up event in May. An abbreviated side-by-side of these responses show on page 7 with a verbal analysis appearing on page 8.

Question #3:

How willing are you to participate in Diversity Task Force work:

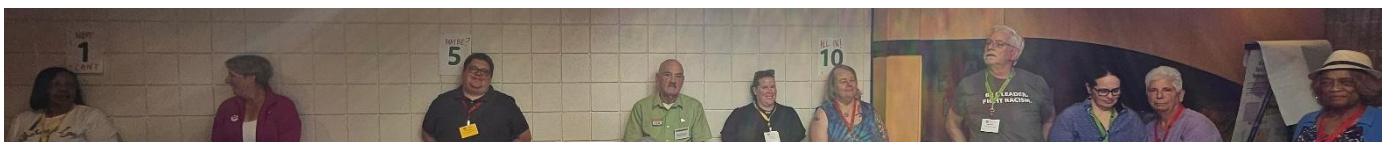
Survey respondents (out of 40):



In-person Rise Up Facilitation: How willing are you to participate in or be involved in Diversity Task Force work (1 not at all/10 I'm all in)?



In-person Rise Up Facilitation: How willing are you to step into Task Force leadership work (1 not at all/10 I'm all in)?



Raising awareness and cultivating Task Force membership ranked the highest from survey respondents. Ranking lowest of the questions were stepping into Task Force leadership and raising funds for Task Force work. Participating in Task Force needs also ranked relatively low in the survey.

When this participation question was asked during the Rise Up facilitation, however, more eagerness appeared. A human continuum exercise was used for this question. Seven participants chose to stand in an area beyond the continuum range and created a “15” to expand the scale of enthusiasm. Another nine chose to position themselves between 5 and 10.

The question then shifted to these individual’s willingness to engage in Task Force leadership, not just participation. The group thinned, which is not surprising, though four participants remained between 5 and 10 and another 4 remained in the beyond 10 range expressing eagerness for Task Force leadership.

Current Task Force leadership intends to follow up directly with those individuals who expressed interest and contact information to discuss next steps to encourage their participation and connectivity to the Task Force moving forward.

What other issues should the Diversity Task Force focus on?

The survey and the in-person session also provided respondents and participants with the opportunity to share what other issues the Diversity Task Force should focus on. The inputs from the facilitated discussion in May appear below, followed on page 10 by the compilation from the April survey.

Assembly session DISCUSSION SESSION INPUTS

At the facilitated Rise Up Assembly session, discussion was fostered on the issues the Task Force should focus on and deal with. A free-form discussion ensued with these topics shared:

- **Increased Reconciling in Christ (RIC) advocacy and support is needed coming from church leadership**
- **We need to change our “welcoming” language away from simply “All are welcome here” to something more intentional**
 - This is often now viewed as strings attached: connotations of “...except...” connected with it
 - We need to use better language AND change our welcoming behavior as well – more than just words (walk the walk)
 - Change posture to something like “We are an Intentionally Inclusive Community” or “There’s a Place for YOU here” to show a deliberate and purposeful approach – beyond just words
- **Increase publicity to raise awareness, not just of LGBTQIA+ issues, but of the Task Force itself to help with the membership and work**
 - More information on the Task Force itself and the work the group wants help with is needed before some are willing to step up to help
- **Cultivate more Task Force members – reach out to inform and invite**
 - Conduct a leadership gap analysis to identify diversity information and membership needs

- Work to eliminate obstacles to participation (e.g., transportation, personality types like introvert)
- **How do we overcome the “we need you” approach that cultivates people to show up places where we lack participation, voice, or representation from a particular group? (Move away from a posture of “we don’t have you represented and you can do that for us if you join us” to something more like “Your voice is needed here” and “YOU can do that work if you join us”)**
 - Inclusion of rainbows and LGBT letters doesn’t always represent true intentions and often gets used in place of real work or positions – we need to be sensitive to this
 - Often ignores the impact that history has had on someone and their lived experiences
- **How do we expand RIC efforts to more churches and entities?**
 - How do people create intentionality in their congregations for the RIC process?
 - How do we create intentionality around follow-up and support once a church or entity is RIC? Where can we do better here?
 - How do we consider the probability that as we add RIC congregations that this might cause rifts in congregations or people to leave, etc.
- **How do we consider intersectionality and collaboration (BRRICK, Justice Summit, etc.)?**
 - How do we have the Task Force fit into the broader scheme of Justice work?
- **Be bolder in raising funds by asking friends, colleagues, and others for support**
 - Need to coordinate efforts by gathering names and preparing appropriate fundraising materials
- **Create authentic spaces for real conversation to help welcome others and other ideas and approaches.**
 - Give oxygen to foster discussion and exploration as well as resources and encouragement to grow
 - Questions that cannot be answered until we get folks to the table:
 - Will people come out to be part of the conversation? How do we get them there?
 - Do we rename and refocus to get the participation that’s lacking?

From the survey: (green are top answers in each affiliation area)

April survey results to the question “What other issues should the Diversity Task Force focus on?” appear below, listed first by respondents’ self-described identifications, then at the end as aggregated results for comparison.

LGBTQAI+	
More Synod and church leadership training and education on LGBTQIA+ and conflict resolution	4
Congregational education, support, and resources on LGBTQAI+ issues	4
Pastoral care and place of refuge for those who feel threatened	3
Policy advocacy & change (Synod, ELCA Churchwide, national, state, local)	3
More LGBTQIA+-led community building (small group ministries, dinners, retreats) for marginalized people	3
Creating more sense of community and connection across the Synod and congregations	2
Trans and wider LGBTQIA+ youth support	2

Cisgender (Friend, Ally, or Supporter)	
Congregational education	3
Advocacy (LGBTQIA+ kids/public schools, protect Medicaid and Department of Education, etc.)	3

Ordained Rostered Leader (Clergy or Deacon)	
Congregational education	4
More Synod and church leadership training and education on LGBTQAI+ and conflict resolution	3
More LGBTQIA+-led community building (small group ministries, dinners, retreats) for marginalized people	2
Creating more sense of community and connection across the Synod and congregations	2
Pastoral care and place of refuge for those who feel threatened	2
Trans and wider LGBTQIA+ youth support and advocacy	2
More Synod and church leadership training and education on LGBTQIA+ and conflict resolution issues	2
To stand compassionately with and support all those who are oppressed	2

Lay Leader or Community Leader	
Advocacy (LGBTQIA+, protecting Medicaid and Department of Education, etc.)	2
Congregational diversification	2

TOP RESPONSES ACROSS ALL CATEGORIES	
Congregational education, support, and resources on LGBTQAI+ issues	11
Policy advocacy & change (Synod, ELCA Churchwide, national, state, local)	8
More Synod and church leadership training and education on LGBTQAI+ and conflict resolution	7
Advocacy (LGBTQIA+ kids/public schools, protect Medicaid and Department of Education, etc.)	5
Pastoral care and place of refuge for those who feel threatened	5
More LGBTQIA+-led community building (small group ministries, dinners, retreats) for marginalized people	5