



Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

God's work. Our hands.

A JUST SOCIETY SUPPORTING HEALTH OF ALL RESOURCE SERIES



RACE, HOUSING AND HEALTH CARE

April 2018 marked the 50th anniversary of the Fair Housing Act, a landmark bill outlawing housing discrimination in the United States. In the subsequent decades, the bill has been celebrated as a cornerstone accomplishment of the civil rights era and one of the strongest legal tools to combat segregation. Since its passage, however, little actual progress has been made in home ownership rates among people of color, and patterns of hypersegregation can still be surveyed in many of our nation's largest cities. [Among these trends](#), many researchers, lawmakers and advocates have recently paid much closer attention to the intersection of good health and housing security.

New findings affirm a daunting reality we might already have inferred through common sense: where you live can determine the health and opportunity you enjoy through your entire lifetime. With this resource we look at some factors and discern what we, as faith-based advocates and the body of Christ, can do to narrow the widening disparities in our communities.

NEIGHBORHOODS AND HEALTH

Socioeconomic and ethnic segregation are closely connected to, if not inseparable from, public health outcomes and our personal wellness. The economic blight and racial segregation of our communities are rooted in the major funding disparities between our neighborhoods.

Recent [data from the census bureau](#) indicates that “individuals in minority racial or ethnic groups also are more likely to live in poor neighborhoods: nearly half of all blacks live in poor neighborhoods, compared with only one in ten whites.” Differences in housing, public schools, municipal services, employment opportunities, proximity to hospitals and health care professionals, and such hazards as pollution, noise and crime all actively contribute to disparate health outcomes.

However, studies have also found that, on the individual level, there are frequent connections between living in a secure home and health care. Among these connections, some researchers found that:

- Housing-insecure respondents were about twice as likely as housing-secure respondents to report poor or fair health status or to delay doctor visits because of costs ([Centers for Disease Control and Prevention study](#), 2015).
- Children who have experienced homelessness are 22% more likely to be hospitalized than those in families with less anxiety over housing costs ([National Housing Conference](#)).
- People with access to affordable housing are 20% more likely to have primary care visits, are 18% less likely to visit an emergency room and have 12% fewer medical expenses ([Opportunity Starts at Home Campaign](#)).

As Lutherans, we foster “faith that is active in love, a love that seeks justice, and an insight that strives to discern what is right, good and fitting.” We “join with others to remove obstacles of discrimination and indifference that prevent people from living out their callings.” (Both quotes are from the ELCA's 1991 social statement Church in Society: A Lutheran Perspective.) But social, economic and political inequality is acute, and indications of it abound. This series places before us the intersection of racial equity with environment, global, health, housing, hunger and migration realities. It invites us to look at obstacles and equip ourselves to advocate for a just society supporting the health of all.

CRITICAL PARTNERS

As Lutherans, we support equal opportunity, connection with our neighbors and eliminating the sin of racism. Many Lutheran leaders, congregations and social ministry organizations have been critical partners in advocating for state and federal resources to increase economic mobility, housing affordability and racial equity in our communities. How these resources are allocated, however, is often decided by local officials, which makes churches and houses of worship across the country critical in ensuring that those in the greatest need receive the support they deserve.

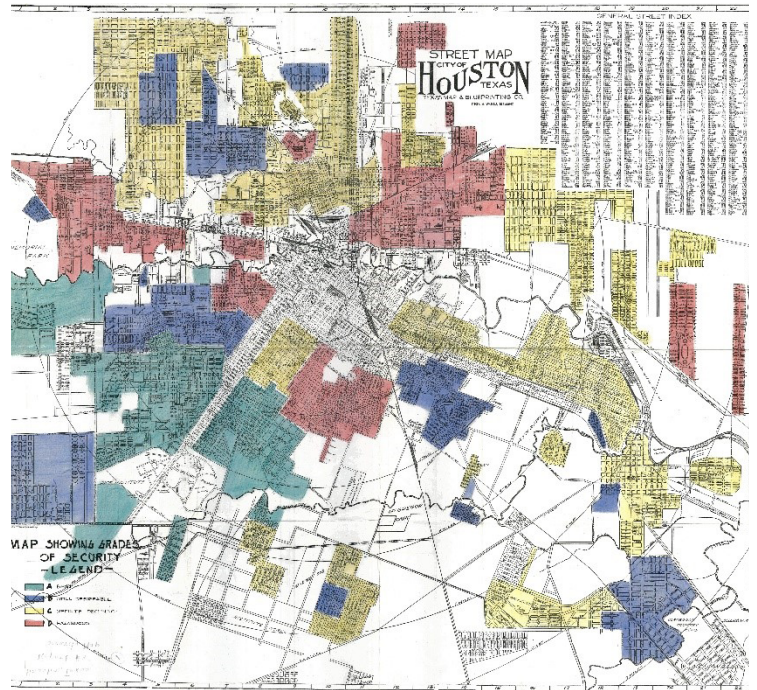
Houses of worship and Lutheran denominations have a mixed legacy on the issue of segregation. As acknowledged in the recent [Declaration of the ELCA to People of African Descent](#), many churches were complicit in racial discrimination, keeping silent on important public matters and actively contributing to “white flight” by physically relocating. [In other cases](#), churches heavily supported the civil rights movement in the 1960s, before and after which multiple religious denominations proactively desegregated their pews and communities.

As a public church, the ELCA has affirmed our calling, grounded in shared social teaching and passed resolutions, to be inclusive neighbors and address the scourge of racism in our communities. The ELCA’s 1993 social statement *Freed in Christ: Race, Ethnicity, and Culture* directly challenges us to “support legislation, ordinances, and resolutions that guarantee to all persons equally ... access to legal, banking, and insurance services [and] the right to rent, buy, and occupy housing in any place.” This stems from the basic theological understanding that, as members of the body of Christ, we are free to live out our connectedness with each other.

FURTHER INFORMATION

- [“The Color Of Law’ Details How U.S. Housing Policies Created Segregation”](#) National Public Radio interview (5/17/17)
- [“Housing and Health Partners Can Work Together to Close the Housing Affordability Gap”](#) from the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities (1/17/20)
- [Opportunity Starts at Home campaign](#) website, a multi-sector movement

ORIGINAL POSTING: August 2020



“Mapping Inequality: Redlining in New Deal America,” a September 2019 article in the *Journal of American History*, opens the files of the Home Owners Loan Corporation (HOLC) at the National Archives to expose the effects of federal housing policy and its local implementation. Redlining in Houston, Texas, is documented in this image. To find your own community, visit <https://dsl.richmond.edu/panorama/redlining/>.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. In what ways does the place you live impact your health? How about your neighborhood - how does it impact your health? Your community?
2. Are there private or public policies that might make it a healthier place?
3. In what ways is your congregation connecting and partnering with neighborhoods outside your own? In what ways can connections like these be created or strengthened?