

Advocates for Racial Equity (ARE) – Assembly Report 2022

ARE is a public witness group within the Saint Paul Area Synod. We seek to live out the mission of emboldening public witness by empowering God's beloved to confront privilege and racism in and through the Saint Paul Area Synod. Our work consists of holding one another accountable in the work of reforming unjust structures by educating congregations about institutional and systemic racism, advocating for racial equity in the church and the world, and building relationships with partners within and outside of the church for more just communities. You are invited into this holy work of being the beloved community together!

So steeped in white supremacy and systemic racism is our world that any anti-racist efforts are rightfully considered acts of resistance against a stale status quo. ARE sees this work of resisting the powers and principalities that divide and conquer as a needful feature of contemporary discipleship, which follows Christ in recognizing and standing for the imago dei (image of God) that is evident in every created being. Anti-racist action is always necessarily internal and external work. Doing this work means engaging in self-reflection, education, and direct action. As the brilliant theologian and mystic activist Howard Thurman points out in, *Jesus and the Disinherited*, "resistance is defined as the physical, overt expression of an inward attitude." ARE wants to nurture the Church's anti-racist inward attitude and provide opportunities for the physical, overt expression of such an attitude. For this reason, our work typically consists, dually, of education and action.

Over the course of this past year, we have witnessed God's Spirit moving mightily in the lives of individuals and congregations. In October of 2021, the American Indian/Alaska Native Lutheran Association released a letter calling upon Lutherans to engage in education and action to "Remember the Children" who were killed at Native American Boarding Schools throughout Canada and the US. Together with the Saint Paul Area Synod, ARE made this the focus of our work. Throughout the year, we have been consulting with congregations as they have grappled with how to engage in anti-racist efforts most effectively and encouraged work to Remember the Children.

In addition to case-by-case congregational consultations, ARE has been busy with both education and action.

- In November, we held an educational event on Zoom entitled, "American Indian 101" with Vance Blackfox.
- In December, we produced and distributed a worship resource to connect the Remember the Children movement to the Feast of the Holy Innocents. This resource is still available on the Saint Paul Area Synod's Vimeo page here: <https://vimeo.com/657169307>
- In January, the Rev. Jim Erlandson wrote a blog with details on ways that congregations can build altars in remembrance of victims of boarding schools.

- In March, ARE held a Zoom discussion panel event in which we looked at one Minnesota town's Native American boarding school. Joining us on the panel were the reporter, Mark Wasson, the Rev. Gary Mills, and Ruling Elder Elona Street-Stewart. This resource is still available on the Saint Paul Area Synod's Vimeo page here: <https://vimeo.com/692398130>
- In May, we facilitated Sacred Sites tours with Jim Bear Jacobs and the Minnesota Council of Churches.
- Additionally, we helped support the Assembly's opening engagement with the Remember the Children movement.
- We will also be supporting our partners in the Minneapolis Area Synod this month with a program on May 23 regarding the relationship between Native American boarding schools and the current child welfare system. For more info and to register visit this site: <https://mpls-synod.org/event/theyre-still-taking-our-children-the-evolution-of-boarding-schools/>
- ARE continues to support the work of community partners such as the Overcoming Racism Conference. We have been sponsors of this Twin Cities event since 2016, participating, offering support and leading workshops in 2021. We will continue to be a sponsor and seek ways to engage SPAS congregations to partake in this event. Learn more at <https://overcomingracism.org/>

“If one part suffers, all the parts suffer with it; if one part is honored, every part rejoices.” 1 Cor. 12:26

We are God's beloved. We are called into suffering and rejoicing with one another. We commit to the work set before us. ARE is here as a support and resource to walk with your congregations and communities to hold one another accountable in the work of reforming unjust structures by educating congregations about institutional and systemic racism, advocating for racial equity in the church and the world, and building relationships with partners within and outside of the church for more just communities. We have work to do. Let's get going, church. We are church together!