

Advocates for Racial Equity (ARE) – Assembly Report 2023

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 our shared calling to reform 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 both 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 first part of the 2022-23 year, we consulted 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 May of 2022, we facilitated Sacred Sites tours with Jim Bear Jacobs and the Minnesota Council of Churches.
- We also worked with our partners in the Minneapolis Area Synod last May on a program regarding the relationship between Native American boarding schools and the current child welfare system. For more info 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 along the way. We will continue to be a sponsor in coming years.

- In 2023, the leadership of the ARE group discerned a call to focus more specifically on empowering congregations for anti-racist ministry. In March we launched these efforts with an event at Gustavus Adolphus Lutheran Church where we heard from one church's experience of committing to anti-racist ministry and then were encouraged to find ways to grow in our own efforts. There was a second event in April, and we plan to hold a third in May. Our intention is to build on these experiences to provide a space for individuals and congregations to begin more concrete planning in the Fall.

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 called to live in hope by being agents of change!