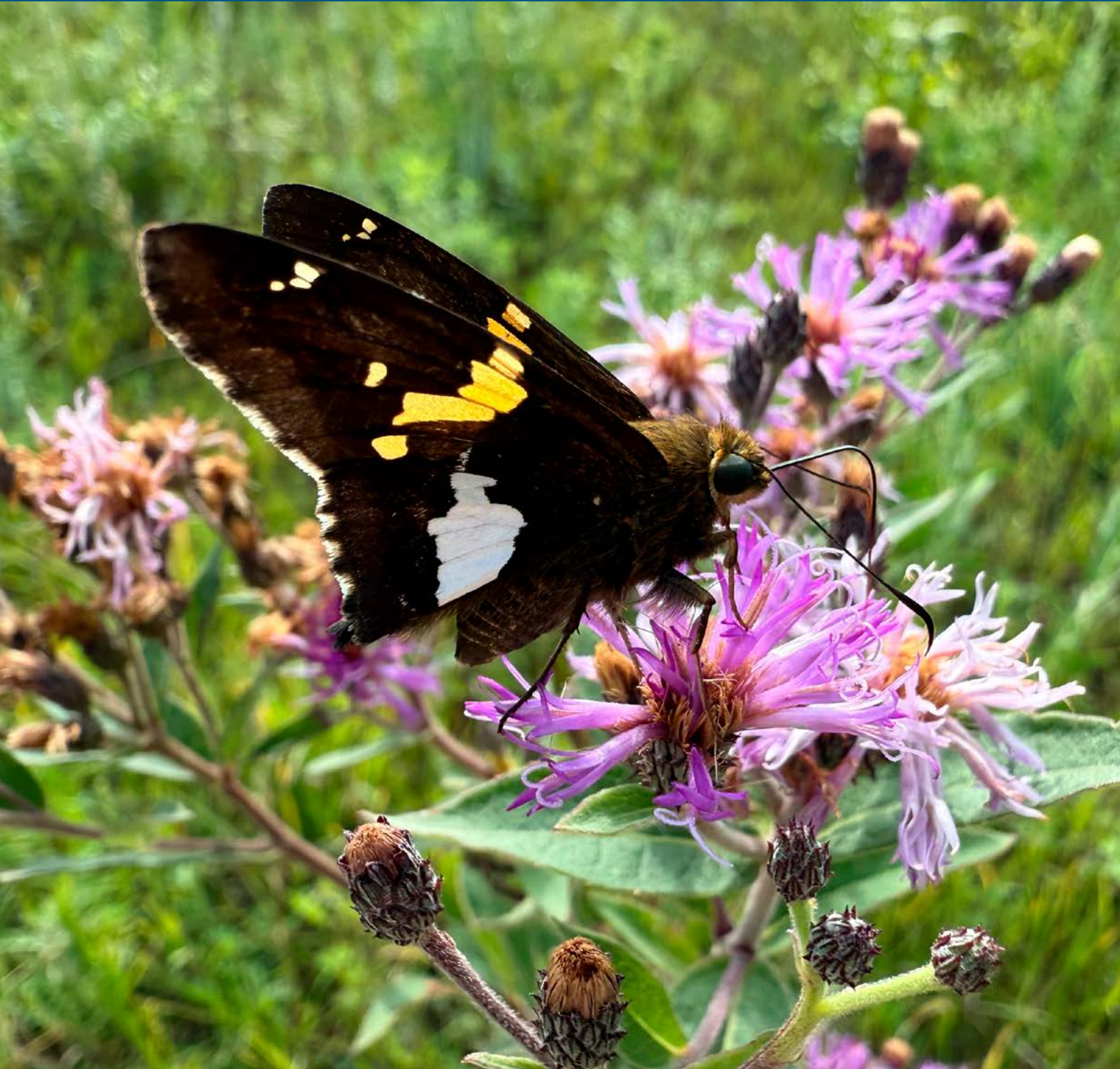




SALT & LIGHT

a hope church publication

SUMMER 2026



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OUR FAITH

Hope Church is called by God and equipped by the Holy Spirit to be a witness to the unity, reconciliation, and justice given in the saving grace of Jesus Christ. These touchstones drawn from the Belhar Confession give voice to the historic Christian faith in our time and place.

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Touchstones of Justice



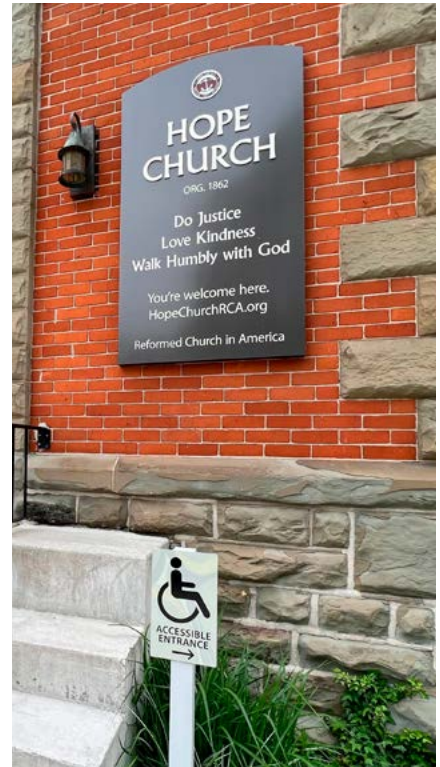
The past few months there's been a lot happening around and on the Hope Church grounds. Construction of the affordable housing project has moved along quickly, and I get to admire the ongoing progress on my daily commute! The solar panels installation is complete (I've gone to the roof and admired those too!), and we

celebrate that the solar array is now providing electricity for our building. Both of these projects are connected to something else that will appear on the Hope Church grounds this summer: images in our exterior windows of Hope Church's four “Touchstones of Justice.”

Let me explain.

Over the past several years in the ministry of Hope Church, four areas of focus on issues of justice have emerged as an urgent and abundant calling for our congregation, four “touchstones”: LGBTQIA+ inclusion; racial justice; care for creation; and accessibility. Each of these touchstones has a long history in the ministry of Hope Church, but in recent years through the work of ministries, committees, Consistory, pastors, and congregation, a clarity has come into focus about both the particular importance of each of these four touchstones and the intersectionality between them. Intersectionality helps us to see that whenever we are tending to one touchstone of justice, there are always threads that connect to the others. The affordable housing project is a great example, as this project is providing apartments for those with disabilities, is being built with eco-friendly design, includes our native American neighbors, and is consciously aware of using leasing practices that do not discriminate.

It's been very meaningful for me as a Hope Church Pastor to see the emergence of these touchstones in how we speak of our shared calling and ministry. It's helped me as a leader and in my own path of faith to see the



connections among our justice commitments, as I've experienced how Beloved Community includes all in the abundance of love for God and neighbor.

And now we are taking the step of making those justice commitments visible to our community and to all who come to Hope Church. Lois Maassen and Chris Wiers have developed a colorful and communicative image for each of the touchstones, and those four images will be installed/displayed this summer in the windows above both the 11th Street sanctuary and parking lot entrances, with the words of Micah 6:8 displayed in the middle window: "Do justice;

love kindness; walk humbly with God." At the 11th Street entrance, these graphics will replace the current "Black Lives Matter" banner and exterior pride flag. And this will be all new at the parking lot entrance! I think you'll be pleased with the visual impact of having these images at our primary entrances, as we communicate to all who enter—and all who pass by!—Hope Church's commitments as followers of Jesus Christ in love for our neighbors.

Be on the lookout! Summer blessings.

Peace – Pastor Gordon

Engaging with the Scripture

Jackson Nickolay, Associate Pastor for Faith Formation

You may have noticed banners emerging in the chapel recently. These banners are the product of some of the practices we've engaged as a congregation in the Chapel Service as we responded to the word together.

Once a month in the chapel service over this past semester, we participated in a worship practice that drew us into embodied participation with the Word. These embodied practices were tied to paintings or drawings that now fill the banners in the chapel.

These banners were brought to life through the collaboration and leadership of Kari Miller, who, throughout the season of Lent and Easter, came to both lead and participate in worship; she helped to illuminate for us ways in which we could use calligraphy and pictography as a way of engaging the scripture.

Pictography and calligraphy as art forms and ways of expressing the greater realities of life have existed as long as human history. From cave drawings to Japanese calligraphy to Jackson Pollack, humans have long incorporated shapes and colors to evoke deeper meaning and express what cannot always be spoken in words.

We engaged three different scriptures across the seasons of Lent and Easter to create these banners. Here's how we engaged each banner.



Banner 1

Materials: Paper and Conté
Scripture: Psalm 32

Psalm 32 contains a well-known phrase within verse 7: “You are a hiding place for me; you preserve me from trouble; you surround me with glad cries of deliverance.” The whole Psalm confirms this assertion, speaking of deliverance and perseverance amidst trouble and the steadfast love of the Lord. Using Conté, a type of pastel chalk, we were invited to reflect on what stood out to us in the scripture and sketch out what that evoked for us on the banner. At a second prompt, we were invited to shift our position and pick up where someone else had left off.

What emerged was an impactful piece that evokes pictographic drawing of early human cultures. Images of shelter and protection abound with many drawings containing arches, circles, and harbors, referring to both the hiding place and the steadfast nature of God amidst distress.



Banner 2

Materials: Paper and Ink
Scripture: Ezekiel 37:1-14

Ezekiel 37 contains the well-known vision of the “Valley of Dry Bones,” in which Ezekiel is shown an evocative image of death being transformed to life. We were prompted to reflect on the whole passage while painting with black ink, as inspired by such art forms as Japanese calligraphy. Our second prompt focused on verses 7–10 and God’s prompting Ezekiel to prophesy life’s breath over the dry bones “that they may live.” For this second prompt we incorporated colorful ink and filled out the banner with more calligraphic icons and splashes of color.

What emerged was a flowing set of images that evoked both the hard lines of dry bones and the lyrical sweeps of the breath of life. The banner simultaneously speaks to the reality of exhaustion amidst waiting for God’s justice to come and the deep breath of relief when that justice is glimpsed.



Banner 3/4

Materials: Paper, watercolor, and ink

Scripture: Psalm 23; John 10:1-10

Psalm 23 is one of the most recognizable scriptures in the Bible; engaging it amid the season of Easter, however, illuminates new facets within this well-loved Psalm. We were asked to reflect on the peaceful images evoked by that Psalm paired with the passage from John 14, which shares the rich imagery of sheep and their shepherd. We used colorful watercolor in our first prompt and were asked to capture some of the emotion of Psalm 23 in the shapes and colors of our painting. Then we listened to the passage from John and responded with ink again, painting connective tissues and pathways between our colorful images of rest. We had enough people at this service that we needed

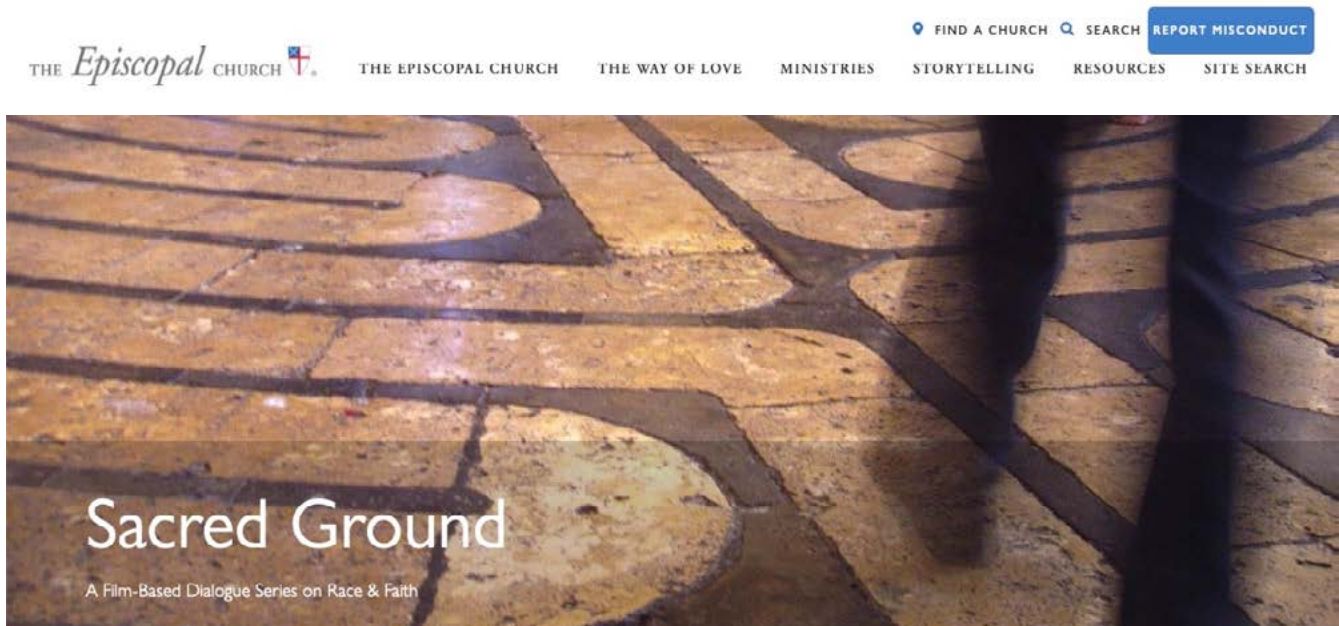
to have two banners, which now hang on the north wall of the chapel.

These embodied practices using a variety of artistic media expanded our engagement with the scripture. They stretched us in interesting ways and helped us to remember the importance of engaging scripture with more than just our minds. When we welcome our whole selves, body, mind, and soul, into the practice of engaging God through God's story as revealed in scripture, we open a door to a new experience of God and our worship of God in community.

I look forward to continuing to explore this practice through the chapel service on its return in the fall.

Sacred Ground: Dialogue on Race and Faith

Larry Terlow



Hope Church is committed to being and continually becoming an antiracist congregation. That commitment requires more than good intentions. It asks us to keep learning, to tell the truth about history, to examine the systems that continue to shape our lives, and to respond faithfully by changing our behavior. Education about racism is not optional for people of faith who seek justice and reconciliation. It is necessary information for anyone who wants to participate meaningfully in the healing of our communities.

The Justice and Reconciliation Ministry team invited church members and worshippers to participate in Sacred Ground, a race and faith series from the Episcopal Church. Eight of us met for eleven sessions over the past year to discuss racism and how the Christian faith and the Christian church have contributed to both harm and healing.

By learning more fully about the history of racism in America, we began to better understand how our culture arrived at the realities we face today. This kind of learning matters because racism is not only a matter of individual prejudice or past injustice. It is woven into laws, policies, institutions, religious traditions, cultural assumptions, and everyday practices. If we do not take time to study these patterns, we risk

repeating, ignoring, or benefiting from them without accountability.

I participated as both a class member and group facilitator. Together, we shared questions, feelings of discomfort and grief, and thoughtful discussion about how we might become more fully engaged in justice and reconciliation personally and collectively. The experience was challenging and informative, often overwhelming, and also rewarding and inspiring. We came to understand that this time together was not about completing the program but about beginning a new chapter of creating and living in loving community with all human beings.



We began our time together by holding and reflecting on the devastating

consequences of slavery. We also examined how racism continued to evolve after slavery formally ended. The documentary *Slavery by Another Name* revealed how unjust laws and the prison system were used to incarcerate Black people. It also showed how their labor was exploited

and given to landowners at little or no cost. This history is difficult to confront. It's painful. And it must be confronted. Without this knowledge, we cannot truly understand present-day racial inequities. Racial inequities continue to impact housing, education, health, wealth, policing, and opportunity.

Our learning also extended beyond the Black-white racial framework. The experiences of Indigenous peoples, Asian and Pacific Islander communities, and Mexican and Latino communities revealed the broader scope of racism in the United States. Racism has harmed many communities in distinct ways and has shaped a national culture that assigns value, safety, opportunity, and belonging unevenly.

In *Waking Up White* and *Finding Myself in the Story of Race*, Debby Irving explains that, in its simplest form, a system is a procedure or a way of doing something. She connects skin-color symbolism (white is better than other colors), favoritism (embedded in American society), and power (the ability to turn racial attitudes into policy,

law, and practice) to systemic racism. Systemic racism touches every American life. It affects how people experience education, employment, safety, healthcare, housing, public life, and the church itself. For those of us who are white, learning about racism requires a willingness to see how we have been shaped by this system, not just how others have been harmed by it.

Howard Thurman, in *Jesus and the Disinherited*, asks why Christianity has so often seemed unable to address discrimination and injustice based on race, religion, and national origin. His question remains urgent. If our faith does not move us toward truth-telling, repentance, repair, and transformed relationships, then we must ask whether we

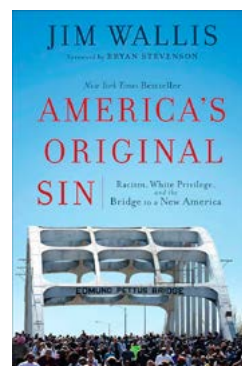
have misunderstood or diminished the gospel we claim to follow. Thurman insists that Jesus be understood not as a religious object but as a religious subject. Jesus' teachings, suffering, and solidarity with the disinherited must shape how we respond to racism today.

We were also challenged by author Jim Wallis, of *America's Original Sin*, to do the hard work of repentance. Repentance is more than regret. Repentance means stopping, turning around, and choosing new actions. It is a change of mind and heart that must be demonstrated through transformed behavior. If we are serious about racial justice, our learning must lead to different choices: how we worship, how we listen, how we spend money, how we vote, how we build relationships, how we use power, and how we participate in public life.

This is why investing in racial justice education is so important. We cannot repair what we refuse to understand. We cannot love our neighbors well while remaining uninformed about the forces that have harmed and continue to harm them. The work of racial justice requires humility, courage, spiritual discipline, and a willingness to keep learning, even when it is uncomfortable.

Throughout our sessions, we often began by holding in our hearts Eugene Peterson's version of Romans 12:1–2. His version calls us to place our everyday lives—our sleeping, eating, working, and walking-around lives—before God in service. The passage warns us not to become so comfortable in our culture that we fit in without thinking. That warning is

especially important in the work of racial justice. Racism survives when people of faith become comfortable, silent, or passive in the face of injustice.



Repentance is
more than regret.
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new actions.

Sacred Ground: Dialogue on Race and Faith, Continued

As we concluded the study, we explored core questions. How will we grow as reconcilers, healers, and justice-bearers, building relationships across dividing walls and seeing Christ in the other? In addressing broken institutions and systems, how will we participate in the repair, restoration, and healing of people, institutions, and systems? We also learned

*How will we
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how others have started meaningful change. We viewed stories of restorative circles that brought prisoners and parolees together with victims for a genuine experience of remorse, forgiveness, and healing. Church leaders invited members of Native American

nations to share their stories as the leaders listened with compassion, responding with loving support and a desire to work for justice and healing.

We are called to be changed from the inside out. We are called to fix our attention on the Divine Presence within us and allow the Spirit to lead us into maturity, courage, and action. Continuing to learn about racism is how we open ourselves to that transformation. It helps us become more truthful, more compassionate, more accountable, and more faithful. This educational experience is core to the work of discipleship, reconciliation, and love. We encourage you to share your thoughts and questions, and to participate in future offerings for study and positive action.

Middle Assembly Coming in the RCA

Larry Schuyler



Photo credit: Reformed Church in America (rca.org)

The Reformed Church in America (RCA) is creating a new organizational structure throughout the denomination. Historically, the RCA has been structured with four levels of government and ministry.

1. First, the Consistory in local churches.
2. The second level has been the Classis, which is an accountability structure for churches and ministers.
3. The third level was the Regional Synod. A regional synod was an accountability gathering of Classes (plural of Classis).
4. The fourth level is the General Synod.

Reformed polity reflects the belief that decisions are best made through assemblies. Each level, then, is a gathering through which actions are taken by mutual agreement.

Particularly due to the downsizing of the membership of the RCA, the decision has been made to eliminate the regional synod level of governance. The responsibilities of the regional synod are being handed off to the Classis and to the denominational staff. Our regional synod, the Great Lakes Regional Synod, will end its existence this summer. Its resources will be distributed to the region's ongoing "middle assemblies."

"Middle assemblies" will take the place of classes, which are merging in light of the elimination of regional synods. Formerly, the Great Lakes Regional Synod was a gathering of seven classes. Currently, three classes remain;

they will become the middle assemblies in our region of our denomination. Holland Classis is one of those transforming middle assemblies. The other two emerging middle assemblies in our region are the North Grand Rapids Classis and the Great Lakes City Classis.

Already, churches and ministers have come into the Holland Classis from South Bend, Indiana, and from Kalamazoo, Muskegon, and Shelby Michigan. Ministers from these same locations have entered as well. This influx will rightly call for a new identity with a new name, which was proposed to the Holland Classis in May, subject to final adoption in September: Lakeshore Middle Assembly. The new middle assembly will call forth new bylaws, policy guidelines, and amended documents of incorporation. Its staffing configuration still needs to be determined, also. These items are being addressed now to be in place by the beginning of 2027.

A team has been working to conceive of the vision for the emerging Holland Middle Assembly. It is

envisioned to be a “large tent” in which a diversity of people and viewpoints can work together to support one another in ministry. Here is the newly approved Mission Statement:

Holland Assembly Mission Statement

Abiding in Unity

Naming Christ as Center

Developing Kingdom Ministries

...we aspire to be a covenantal community of diverse churches and leaders who humbly learn together AND seek to follow Jesus in today's world

Each church (and minister) will have the option to choose which middle assembly would seem to be the “best fit” for their ministry and convictions. Hope Church consistory will have that decision option. So, as we live into this new future, we can expect much change and realignment while the greater church continues its role to follow Christ in ministry.

Concluding the Service of Regional Synod Great Lakes

Phil Quinn

While much of the RCA's energy in recent years has been devoted to imagining and bringing into being new structures in the hope that these will support us as we lean into the challenges and opportunities of this generation, it's worth pausing to notice as the structures that have served us well are put to rest.

The final assembly of the Great Lakes Regional Synod convened on May 4, 2026, at the DeWitt Ministry Center in Grand Rapids.

The meeting was crafted to be a time of invitation, inspiration, and alignment with God's Spirit as the final work of the regional synod was set into motion. The business portion of the meeting was brief, with very few items raising discussion and none raising objection. A budget to cover the remaining work was approved, and officers were put in place to oversee the final actions. The synod

approved the liquidation of assets, which will be evenly disbursed to the three middle assemblies that will be moving forward (though what names they carry into the future are yet to be finalized): Great Lakes City Classis, North Grand Rapids Classis, and Holland Classis. Other items included final committee reports, tasks that remain to be completed, and a great deal of reflection, gratitude, and celebration.

The business portion wrapped smoothly and early, and the afternoon was devoted to worship and celebration of the history of the work and ministry of the Regional Synod Great Lakes, and an invitation to hopeful prayer around the future of Holland Classis and our sibling middle assemblies, as well as the entire denomination as we walk forward together into this next season of the work God is inviting us into of reconciliation, community, and love.



Hope, Peace, and Light

Jackson Nickolay, Associate Pastor for Faith Formation

There are many things about my first year with the youth ministry here at Hope Church for which I'm grateful. The time to get to know our young folks, the gift of time given by our great group of co-leaders, and the opportunity to see how God is at work in the lives of our young folks have all been very meaningful and life-giving.

One of the things I've been most excited about is cultivating communal art practices within our time together at youth gatherings. The expression of our faith through art is a core element of my theology, and I was glad to find many ways to incorporate that practice into our youth gatherings this last year.

A favorite project we worked on was the solar Art/Advent project the youth collaborated on over the months of December to February. In the late Fall, while the initial stages of the solar panel installation were underway, the youth of Hope Church were invited to reflect on both the season of Advent and the theme of light in association with the solar installation.

I was glad from the beginning of this project to work with the awesome team of artists at CultureWorks. I collaborated especially with Miranda Craig, the program director at CultureWorks and a good friend. She came up with the idea for the medium for this project being cyanotype. Cyanotype is a process that takes a piece of treated fabric and exposes it to the sun/UV light to create a reaction. Using negatives and

various other coverings, an image can be made during this exposure. Cyanotype's blue base color and its chemical reaction being caused by exposure to sunlight made it the perfect medium to engage Advent and the solar project.

Once we had the framework for the project in mind, we invited the youth to craft images on small cards that connected to the themes of hope, peace, joy, and love or images of light and darkness. These small images, done on postcards, can be seen on display in the youth room over the summer.

The images created were scanned and used to make "photo negative" transparencies to be used in the cyanotype process. The youth then went to CultureWorks to engage the development process and to craft two more un-gridded collage pieces, which lean more into the theme of light within creation.

What was produced was four panels of cyanotype. The gridded pieces connect our reflections on Advent, the gridded appearance evokes the solar panels, and the two collage panels connect our work with the solar panels to our care and connection to all creation. What I love about all these panels is the rich variety within them. Across the entirety of these pieces, the creativity, insightfulness, and playfulness of our young folks is on full display. I look forward to next year and more opportunities to grow in faith with our young folks around communal art and expression.

Responding to Gaza: What Would A.J. Muste Do?

Tom Arendshorst

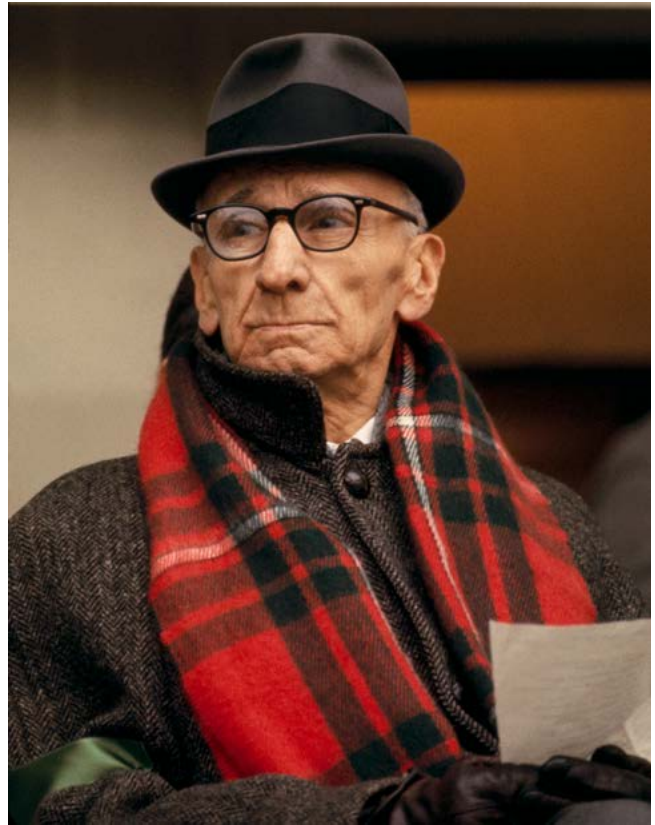
Ariel Gold, general secretary of the Fellowship of Reconciliation USA, delivered Hope College's thirty-eighth annual A.J. Muste Lecture, titled "Responding to Gaza: What Would A.J. Muste Do?" to a packed Schaap Auditorium on October 22. The Fellowship of Reconciliation is the largest, oldest interfaith peace and justice organization in the United States; Ms. Gold is an American Jew and an activist for nonviolence and Palestinian rights.

A.J. Muste, a 1905 Hope College graduate (valedictorian and captain of the basketball team), was a Reformed Church pastor, political activist, and executive director of the Fellowship of Reconciliation who is globally remembered for his work in the U.S. labor movement, the global pacifist movement, antiwar movements, and U.S. civil rights movement. Martin Luther King, Jr., considered Muste a close mentor and advisor. Ms. Gold began her address by speaking of A.J. Muste's life and the precepts of political nonviolence he helped develop: violence fails to resolve conflict, no ends justify violent means, violence begets violence, and durable peace requires a foundation of justice.

Gold spoke of Zionism, noting that Zionism began outside the Jewish community as a Euro-American movement, and that, from its beginning, taking Palestine required the forced displacement of Palestinians from their homeland: "Israel was birthed in violence." She discussed the corrupt but enduring myth, especially within the global Jewish community, that Israel began as "a land without people for a people without a land"; she criticized Israel's culture of violence, its colonialist tools of militarism, and its ideology of justified violence.

Gold reviewed the horrific, murderous violence of Hamas's intentionally suicidal Hamas attacks against Israelis on October 7, 2023—as well as the severely disproportionate Israeli response, which has murdered more than a quarter-million Gazan Palestinians, ruined Gaza, and crushed Gazan society. She decried Israel's long-term orchestration of Palestinian desperation and the utter predictability of violence arising from hopeless desperation.

Israel is experiencing a cascade of problems triggered by the vicious Hamas attack and



A.J. Muste, antiwar activist
Bernard Gotfryd (photographer). Public Domain.

Israel's massive, violent response. Conscientious objection in Israel is rapidly growing; now 13 percent of conscripted Israelis claim conscientious objection, even though many are imprisoned by their government in reprisal. Many young Israelis refusing military service are serving and helping Gazans in Gaza. Israel's desecration of Gaza is "changing hearts and minds from the inside," said Gold. In the U.S, the current Jewish youth generation has swung to anti-Zionism and support for Palestinian rights.

The two years of crushing invasion have fueled the reactionary rise of armed Palestinian gangs inside Gaza, turning against perceived collaborators. Israeli mines and unexploded bombs that look like children's toys are scattered all over Gaza, luring children to their deaths.

Gold concluded with views of the future for Israel and its relationship with Palestinians, saying "Jewish safety *depends* on Palestinian liberation." Gold stated that her own Jewish education in the

Responding to Gaza, Continued



The aftermath of an Israeli airstrike in Gaza City on October 9, 2023, leaving widespread destruction in the Rimal area. Palestinian News & Information Agency (Wafa) in contract with APImages.

United States “lied” about the history of Israel’s founding—the event Palestinians remember as the *Nakba*, which translates to “catastrophe,” their name for their 1948 forced displacement by the Israeli militias. From its Holocaust, Gold said, Israel learned that, for them, there can be no true ally.

At the end of her address Gold responded to questions with observations and wisdoms:

- We can urge our U.S. congresspersons to support the “Block the Bombs Act,” a partial embargo on sending weapons to Israel.
- In response to a student’s concern that expressing pro-Palestinian views could ruin his chances for internships and employment, Gold answered that “Everyone can find a role to play, none of which are to be *silent*”—actions ranging from supporting mutual respect in relationships to front-line activism.
- Where is the place for long-term peacebuilding while lives are being lost and terrorized? “Small victories.” Only a peace built on a foundation of justice and mutual respect can endure.
- “Co-resistance” is developing among Israeli and Palestinian activists acting together.
- The liberation of *all* dominated peoples is tied together.

Gold’s address has returned me to my own efforts to teach Hope College students about the enduring conflict between Israel and Palestinians (including both the West Bank and Gaza). Any attempt to understand and respond to events in the Israel-Palestine conflict must engage the daunting complexities of the conflict’s history and driving forces. To bypass those complexities is to yield to mere bias. In every violent conflict, people

on both sides are victims as well as perpetrators. Each side offers its preferred history and justifications. Any wisdom demands engaging a conflict's full complexity. Any concern for justice and peace in Israel and Palestine must respect and be concerned for the well-being, security, and future of both Israelis and Palestinians.

Violence in Israel and Palestine affects American Jews and Muslims by triggering racial-ethnic discrimination and hate. Islamophobia and anti-Semitism are familiar in our society, and have caused terrible violence in the United States. Over the past two years we've seen public sentiment swing from unquestioning sympathy for the people of Israel and the Israeli government to anger against Israel's annihilating war against Gaza and Palestinians. The flip side of this dynamic has been horrified anger against Hamas turning to sympathy for the victimized people of Gaza.

In trying to make sense of this ongoing violent conflict, it's crucial to grasp that the people of Israel are not the government of Israel. The people of Israel have been surrounded since their nation's birth by hostile forces and the constant threat of violence. In its efforts to gain national safety, Israel's government has developed and enforced brutal, systemic apartheid in Palestine over the past four decades. In response to the appalling murders perpetrated against Israeli civilians by Hamas terrorists two years ago, the Israeli government has turned loose its military to utterly destroy the people of Gaza and their cities, towns, and infrastructure—hospitals, water and sanitation systems, and so on. Many Israeli citizens have opposed the repression and violence of the Israeli government for decades.

It is entirely possible to condemn certain policies and actions of the Israeli government (colonialist regime over Palestinians, total destruction of Gaza) while respecting and caring for the people of Israel. Therefore, criticism and even condemnation of certain Israeli government actions and policies are not "anti-Semitism."

In exactly the same way, the Palestinians are not Hamas; indeed, Hamas and most Palestinians are quite dissociated. It is entirely possible to condemn murderous violence and other actions

of Hamas while respecting and caring for the people of Gaza and all Palestinians. Criticism and condemnation of Hamas's murderous violence is not Islamophobia.

We know that racial and ethnic hatreds are alive and kicking in our United States. As public opposition to Israel's annihilating of total destruction against Gazan Palestinians has grown and spread, hostility against American Jewish people—anti-Semitism—has reared its reprehensible head. Racism has no justification.

The long-term future of the Israeli people depends on their developing, with Palestinians, mutual commitment to mutually acceptable peace. Neither repression nor military or terrorist violence can lead to durable peace and safety.

Ariel Gold's Muste Lecture offers hope for a third way, that of opposing violence while respecting and caring for the well-being of both Israelis and Palestinians—the hope of building peace from within, based on the peoples' hopes to end repression and violence, through building relationships, reconciliation, and commitment to mutually acceptable peace.



Ariel Gold, general secretary of the Fellowship of Reconciliation USA
Photo courtesy Hope College

Meditation on Legacy

Bob Jerow



Photo by Author

“... [I]n which case he who hath received any damage, has, besides the right of punishment common to him with other men, a particular right to seek reparation.”

— John Locke, *Second Treatise of Government*

This past winter, Joyce and I returned to Montgomery, Alabama, to focus on the Legacy Museum site proper. It was a transformative experience I share as a prelude to a meditation on our public declaration as an anti-racist Church.

In an interview with NPR’s Fresh Air Terry Gross, Bryan Stevenson said, “You can’t get the beautiful ‘R’ words, like redemption and reconciliation and restoration and repair, unless you first tell the truth.” His creation of the Equal Justice Institute and the Legacy Historical Sites is his effort to first face the past.

To justify treating Black people horribly from slavery to the present, Stevenson says, one needs a narrative. The false narrative that Black people are not as good as white people—less capable, less worthy—survived the Civil War. Further, those who perpetrated the narrative and used it to justify actions that excluded, segregated, impoverished, and humiliated Black people have never been held accountable. Consequently, in Stevenson’s words, “people feel like you can get away with, you could

get comfortable with bigotry.” The Legacy Museum is Stevenson’s challenge of the false narrative.

The Journey

I am a typical white male product of the 50s and 60s. As I enter the museum, I carry within me a legacy from history lessons taught and learned in the 1960s: a belief that slavery and post-Civil War racism were a “Southern thing.” At the same time, many students of my era in the South were being taught that the Civil War was fought to protect the rights of individual citizens against a distant government, an honorable crusade sadly lost. In the comfortable narrative, Dr. Martin Luther King solved all that with a great speech at a reflecting pool, and Congress addressed the problem with a Civil Rights and Voting Rights Act.

Then I enter the museum. The first room is a large black cube. Before me is a floor-to-ceiling wall of water; the ocean waves are moving, realistically, menacingly, well above my head. I have begun the journey of a slave. In that room I learn that death on the slave ships was so common, the slave traders/shipowners insured themselves against loss. Historians have used those insurance records to estimate that two million Africans died on the journey. I was never taught that. It was New England banks that required insurance of the

Boston ship owners. It seems slavery was not just a Southern problem.

A digital map on the side wall of the room moves with a timeline. The dots representing ships explode across time along a dense trade route; it dawns on me that ships must have seen each other regularly along the trade route. And this is just the first room.

The Legacy Museum has a single focus: the legacy of slavery. A walk through the museum is a journey from the distant past to the present with a very specific focus. The weight on my chest grew heavier the closer to the present my walk took me. It's quite intentional.

I found myself taken by the exquisite presentations. There are rooms full of information, data, narratives that repeatedly break your heart. But what holds in those moments, what makes it real, is the artwork, the photographs, the sculptures, the setting in which the narrative is presented. Sculpted bodies of Africans are ever present. The history, the data is about real people. You stand among them as you learn their stories. The history here is meticulously researched and presented in an authoritative, thoughtfully crafted way, within a powerfully artistic experience so as to reach inside one and stamp its truth on one's heart.

We move on to rooms filled with the personal stories of African slaves and their enslaved American-born children. Rooms dedicated to two-hundred-and-fifty years of slavery. Rooms dedicated to ninety years of Jim Crow, sixty years of separate but equal, thirty-five years of racist housing policy, and the current system of private prisons renting out largely Black convict labor to large farm operations. Somewhere in the 1950s or 60s, in the midst of black and white images of white politicians defiantly defending segregation in my lifetime, and burned-out Boston school buses, Joyce and I looked at each other and wordlessly acknowledged that we were spent. We needed the balm of walking back out into a warm Montgomery spring evening.

The Legacy Museum makes a compelling case that the bigot's belief in Black people's inferiority informs American institutions and attitudes from the beginning to the present. So where does this leave me and us now?

I was overwhelmed as I left the Legacy Museum. I pondered that the Hope Church Anti-Racist Statement, adopted by the Consistory in April 2024, is a call for action following declaration and commitment. We all must choose our level of engagement. What's next?

Part two of Bob's meditation will be included in the fall issue of Salt & Light.



Photo by Author



Photo by Author

Yes, You Can Plant a Pollinator Garden!

Judi Boogaart

In the Lent 2026 issue of *Salt & Light*, the Creation Care Team outlined its plan for a two-pronged commitment for Hope Church: Spiritual Formation and Practical Action. Pollinator gardens are the practical action focus for 2026. The article explained briefly what pollinator gardens are, and the April 26 Adult Education session ([video](#)¹ and [handout](#)²) provided more detail on why they are important and what types of plants to use.

What would that look like for you? How do you get started? Local spring native plant sales are mostly over by now, so your actions this summer may be limited to choosing your space and design and prepping it for planting in the fall or next spring. Jonkers Gardens is a good local source for native plants; Wild Ones River City Grand Rapids Chapter will hold Browse & Buy days at Fulton Street Market in southeast Grand Rapids on June 17, July 17, August 21, and September 18. They can offer advice and options to start making your landscape pollinator-friendly already this summer.

One way is to start small with container gardens. These work well if you have only a deck or a balcony to work with, or if there are association rules that limit what you can plant. They also are good interim projects if you aren't yet sure what you want to do with your space or want to experiment with plants before making a final decision.

Since native plants often have deeper root systems than cultivated flowers, it is best to choose a container that is at least 15 to 20 inches

tall. Find a spot with good sun that is easy for you to maintain. You can even combine natural pollinator plants with some of your favorite summer flowers or perennials. Your native plant provider can offer suggestions for which plants would do well together in your situation and give care tips for the best results.

In small yards, start with a sunny corner, a border along the lot line, or a small swathe of your lawn. Prepping may involve removing turf or wood chips or digging over an existing bed. Talk with other Hope Church gardeners who are interested in pollinator gardens or ask a source of native plants for ideas for the best location, design, and plant choices.

In our yard, we look forward to the resurgence of pollinators each spring. We begin by simply leaving some dandelions in our back lawn, as they are often the only food available when the first slumbrous bees make their appearance. Even our daffodils, tulips, and grape hyacinth provide nectar for some insects, and several types of bees eagerly swarm our crabapple tree when those blossoms burst open. In summer, our summer sweet bush is a magnet for them too. Enjoying the warmth of the season, the bright colors, and the buzz of bees in flight reconnects us with nature and with the Creator. Planting a pollinator garden is a simple way for you to do the same.

Watch the Creation Care board in the Gathering Area to see what others are doing, and happy gardening!

¹ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2fMcyz9d6SE>

² <https://hopechurchrca.org/wp-content/uploads/2026/05/Pollinator-Garden-Resources.pdf>