

Ministry Minute

Sacred Sites Tour - Westwood Staff

“The More You Know, the More You Grow”



Westwood Lutheran's leaders grew in their knowledge of Native American and Minnesota history during a Minnesota Council of Churches Sacred Sites Tour earlier this month.

The tour, led by Pastor Jim Bear Jacobs, was part of the staff's ongoing race equity work, which addresses one of Westwood's Core Values.

Jacobs is co-director for Racial Justice at the Council and the founder of Minnesota Healing Stories, a 13-year-old program that develops dialogue, education, and healing events, particularly within faith communities. Healing Stories became part of the Council's resources about six years ago. Jacobs is a member of the Stockbridge-Munsee Mohican Nation and has degrees in Pastoral Studies and Christian Theology.

The tour consists of visits to:

- A bluff overlooking the confluence of the Mississippi and Minnesota rivers, the site of the Dakota creation narrative.
- The Dakota Internment Camp at Fort Snelling, where 1,600 Dakota were held after the 1862 U.S.-Dakota War.
- Pilot Knob Hill, a burial site for the Dakota people.

Jacobs said the tour aims to raise consciousness of Minnesota's Indigenous history and interest in Native American history in general.

While most of the 11 who attended from Westwood had knowledge of Minnesota history, the tour provided them with broader and deeper insights and unique perspectives.

After the tour, Sara Moran shared her new understanding with her daughter but found that the 11-year-old had already been learning about the difficult and unjust pieces of Minnesota history as part of her social studies classes. "We need to know the true story if we ever want to make things better," she told Sara.



"I feel hopeful for our future knowing children are being educated with the full history," Sara said.

Others were also grateful for the broader perspective and insight.

"The sites we visited are places we all drive by – Pilot Knob Road, the Mendota Bridge, along the river. I've biked and hiked there, but I didn't realize the unjust and tragic events that have happened on that holy ground," wrote Pastor Tania Haber. "As the great-great-granddaughter of a Swedish pioneer, who settled on land that I found out was given to the Dakota in the Treaty of 1851, I wonder what he knew, what he wasn't told, how our country could be doing this, AT THE SAME TIME as we were fighting the Civil War to free slaves?!"

New knowledge comes with each visit for some.

"I've done this tour twice and learned different things each time. I was especially struck by the stark difference in treatment between two sacred burial grounds (Dakota and European) and the stark injustice in desecrating the Dakota site," wrote Pastor Sarah Scherschligt. "I was also moved by the importance of place. It is much more powerful to hear these stories in the places where they took place rather than from afar."

The sense of place is strong during visits to the sites, and the history of the 'granddaughter tree plantings' especially connected for Elsa Lee, Worship Team Director at Westwood. While one tree grows differently from the others, it still thrives. "(Pastor Jacobs) said something about how he now trusts that (the tree) will continue her beautiful, crooked journey towards the sun. And it made me feel like every day we all wake up and continue down our own crooked journey towards the sun."

The background on how the Dakota were exiled from Minnesota left a deep impression on Tricia Goede, Westwood's Director of Communications. "How will people ever know these stories if we don't share them with others?" she wrote. "What is more shocking, is that Minnesota laws technically state the Dakota people still are not legally supposed to settle or live here."