

PRESS RELEASE

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Pilgrimage of Pain and Hope through the Scranton Area

A group of clergy and lay members from the Susquehanna Conference of the United Methodist Church embarked upon a Pilgrimage of Pain and Hope from October 7 to 9. The intent of this journey was to explore the rich history of racial justice and to inspire a deep commitment to building a Beloved Community of love and justice in our world.

The participants were journeying as pilgrims to places in and near Scranton, seeking to be attentive to the pain and the hope experienced by racial and ethnic groups while exploring and reflecting on the geography, history and stories of the people that they have been called to serve.

The group began the pilgrimage at Nay Aug Park in Scranton and learned about some of the indigenous people who inhabited these lands for centuries before the arrival of the Europeans. Dr. Adam DePaul, a Tribal Council Member of the Lenape Nation of Pennsylvania lead this conversation. The group also met with public historian EJ Murphy at the Waverly Community House and learned the history of the Underground Railroad in our region. Day one of the journey ended with a deep dive into the story of racial injustice in Scranton housing with a pre-recorded lecture from Glynis Johns, founder of Black Scranton.

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After worshipping with the Sunday fellowship at Bethel AME Church in Scranton, the pilgrims visited the Anthracite Heritage Museum and were treated to a guided tour from Slats Grobnik who shared his own immigrant story and fascinated the group with his tales of being a “breaker boy.” Day two was concluded with a conversation with Professor Philip Dray, author of *A Lynching in Port Jervis* and the award-winning history of the lynching in the United States titled *At the Hands of Persons Unknown*.

Dray prepared the group for the final day’s visit to Port Jervis, New York to learn from former police officer Michael Worden, who wrote *Lynched by a Mob* about the 1892 Lynching of Robert Lewis in his town. Worden led the group on the path where the falsely accused Lewis was dragged and beaten until he was ultimately hung from a tree where a marker now stands to honor Lewis’ memory.

Throughout the journey, the pilgrims were called to reflect upon lessons learned from theologian Trevor Hudson’s book, *A Mile in My Shoes*. Hudson speaks to the concept of pilgrimage as “coming as pilgrims, not as tourists; as learners, not as teachers; as receivers, not as givers; as listeners, not as talkers.” Their prayer throughout this pilgrimage was to experience together Hudson’s path of *Encounter—Reflection—Transformation*.

The 2023 Pilgrimage of Pain and Hope is the first of a series of journeys that will be taking place with the support of the Commission on Building the Beloved Community for the Susquehanna Conference. The intent is to explore the stories and histories of the different regions within the conference so that our churches can help tell these stories of the diverse populations in our “own backyards,” recognizing that every area has a history of pain and hope. The second pilgrimage is now being planned for September 2024 for the State College and Altoona areas.