

AWARE Input Meetings, J-term 2014 – Results

On Jan. 22 and Jan. 29, a number of students interested in the idea of a white allies group at Meadville met over lunch to get started. The effort was initially dubbed Allied Whites Aspiring to Racial Equity (AWARE). Any interested students at Meadville who identify as white were welcomed to join us.

Meadville students in attendance at one or the other meeting included: John Czachurski, Roger Doebke (via Google hangout), Peter Farriday, James Galasinski, Chris Jimmerson, Kellie Kelly, Bob LaVallee, Doug McCusker, Andre Mol, Michelle Pederson, Pam Phillips, Robin Rhodes, Lynda Sutherland, Jennifer Thomson, Eileen Wiviott, and Shari Woodbury, convener. We also welcomed fellow UU seminarian (though non-Meadville student) Nic Cable. *(Please let me know if I missed or mangled any names; I didn't think to pass around a sign-up sheet.)*

There were additional folks interested in plugging into AWARE but unable to attend at these particular times.

On each date, those assembled first broke into dyads, to share personal experiences about our own white identity, our awareness of white privilege, or how we came to want to be an ally to people of color.

Then people shared altogether what they hoped would happen as a result of the group's existence. This included such things as:

- Provide structure for efforts to be an ally to people of color at Meadville
- Offer tools for understanding what we experience or observe
- Give a place to start beyond good intentions
- Participate in intentionally inclusive dialogue between white students and students of color (potentially including exposure to people of color's own voices and points-of-view, for white students who have had little exposure)
- Become a chapter of Allies for Racial Equity
- Be in accountability and relationship with people of color (...doing so at Meadville would not add the additional barriers of time and funds that are required to attend events at A.R.E. and G.A.)
- Practice dealing with hard issues in an environment of trust and love
- Develop a positive, radical white identity
- Be more active in taking direct action

- Create mutual empowerment to lift up all
- Understand better what white culture is or what dominant culture
- Build community and a place to draw strength for these ongoing efforts

We also reviewed the following draft statement of purpose to get input:

Allied Whites Aspiring to Racial Equity (AWARE) is a group for students at Meadville Lombard who want to offer each other mutual support for such purposes as

- healing anxieties, resistance, etc., that may come up in ourselves related to engaging in racial justice work or just talking about things like white privilege
- developing awareness of, and sources of pride in, white culture (not pride in a better-than-other-cultural-groups way, but pride as in not-ashamed-able-to-find-points-of-good-in-my-culture way)
- working to dismantle whiteness as a privilege, particularly in our school
- acting as allies to people of color, particularly other students at our school

Feedback indicated that this statement covers the key bases and that these are all things people feel are important. The fine-tuning of a statement, group name, etc., will be left to a soon-to-be-formed Steering Committee.

Additionally, questions and points raised included the following ([info known is listed in blue](#)):

- When the group will be active (during intensives only, or available virtually also) and what roles it will take. [TBD](#)
- Is it Ok for white students to meet separately? [Yes, both students and faculty of color are pleased that white students wish to be proactive – both to work as allies at Meadville, and to do our own inner work, in a way that won't burden people of color with all of the work and the risk of being hurt.](#)
- How does this fit into Catalyst 4 Change Committee? [the AWARE Steering Committee will reach out to student rep\(s\) of this committee](#)
- How will we hear what people of color believe is needed from this group? [We may become a “regional” chapter of A.R.E., which has a relationship of accountability with D.R.U.U.M. \(the national people-of-color UU group\). The network of Meadville-affiliated people associated with the annual](#)

Sankofa dinner may also be tapped for Meadville-specific insight. The Steering Committee will explore these and perhaps other possibilities.

- Should we develop a covenant for the AWARE Facebook group? (for example, when to go to personal conversation rather than an electronic interface, or if processing a triggering event, when to talk directly with those involved in that triggering event) *stay tuned*
- Do we need to become an official Meadville student group? (How would we do so?) *TBD* Do we need a faculty advisor? *No*
- Who will serve on the Steering Committee? *Lynda Sutherland volunteered to join Shari Woodbury. Kristina Spaude has also agreed to serve. Any other interested persons should contact Shari at shari.woodbury@gmail.com or 812-345-8313.*

Additional information was distributed regarding Allies for Racial Equity, including membership forms, and details of ARE's annual conference. The 2014 conference takes place in greater Cleveland on March 14-16. There is a keynote address and a variety of workshops, including several likely to be of particular interest to AWARE folks. For example, one is titled "So What Does This Mean for White Ministers?" (It addresses the MFC's Anti-Racism, Anti-Oppression, and Multiculturalism or ARAOMC competency and more broadly, the promise for our movement of solid ministerial leadership in this area.)

More information about ARE, including membership and the conference, are online at <http://alliesforracialequity.wildapricot.org/>.

Respectfully submitted,
Shari Woodbury