

RESOLUTION TITLE

Taking Action towards Making Amends for A Colonizing Past

Submitted on August 13, 2020, by the Justice and Witness Team, Northern California Nevada Conference, United Church of Christ.

SUMMARY

This resolution invites us as a conference to take proactive steps toward healing from the legacies of colonialism and genocide of Indigenous peoples by making amends to Indigenous-led organizations that are rematriating and facilitating the return of lands to Indigenous stewardship and returning lands/land use to local Indigenous communities. It also seeks commitments from local churches to learn about the Indigenous communities on whose unceded territory they reside and to create relationships of restorative justice with the ancestors of those Indigenous communities.

BIBLICAL, THEOLOGICAL, HISTORICAL and ETHICAL GROUNDING

Whereas the year 2020 has particular historical significance for the churches of the United Church of Christ whose ranks include the first churches of the Pilgrims and Puritans, as the 400th anniversary of the landing of the Pilgrims on traditional territories of the Wampanoag Nation and their subsequent settling in Plymouth - one of the beginnings of the colonial genocide of Indigenous peoples in the Americas - and this anniversary demands our deeper exploration of the impacts of the Pilgrims' vital and important search for freedom (in religious practices and ways of living) on the First Peoples of this land, alongside our learning and lament, confession and collaboration, making relationships and making amends;¹

Whereas when European spiritual ancestors of the United Church of Christ bravely left conditions of injustice and suffering empowered by a Christian theological perspective of being God's designated inheritors of the natural world and territories belonging to established human communities, they unintentionally initiated, perpetuated, and expanded the very legacies of abuse they sought to escape;

Whereas we recognize the disproportionate impact of Covid-19 on native communities in the United States for whom the virus is both more prevalent and more deadly even as it contributes to re-traumatizing populations who experienced the deadliness of previous pandemics due to

¹In fact, this anniversary has been marked since 1970 and before by Indigenous Peoples as a National Day of Mourning:

<https://www.necn.com/news/national-international/no-thanks-native-americans-to-hold-50th-gathering-of-grief/2161837/>

settler-born illnesses; and we acknowledge the inequitable economic strain among First Peoples on revenues and incomes that can be used to address this health crisis because of long-term economic disparities and limited access to land, resources, and income opportunities, as well as current-day racism in distribution of COVID relief funds;²

Whereas the political, economic, cultural and social context of 2020 for Indigenous People in the United States continues to be characterized by systemic racism, violations of treaties, land, water, mineral, and air theft, erasure, state violence, and significant disregard, including 2020 formal attempts by the federal administration and President to revoke the lands guaranteed by the Department of the Interior in 2015 to the Mashpee Wampanoag;³

Whereas the 29th General Synod of the United Church of Christ (2013) adopted the resolution *Calling for the United Church of Christ to Repudiate the Doctrine of Discovery which Authorized the Genocide of Native Peoples and the Theft of Native Lands*⁴, which includes the commitment to “explore ways to compensate American Indians, Alaskan Natives, and Native Hawaiians for lands and resources that were stolen and are still being stolen and which are now the United States of America;”

Whereas we acknowledge that our communities are profoundly shaped by the history and current structures/cultures/realities of white supremacy, Christian hegemony, and colonial mindsets and practices, and that while these systems have harmed all of our souls and cultures, the impacts have been experienced differently, resulting in enormous privileges and access to wealth accumulation for people who are white and in tremendous violence against, wealth disparities for, and resilience required by Black communities, Indigenous communities and nations, and all People of Color;

All this is from God, who reconciled us to Godself through Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation; that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to Godself...and entrusting the message of reconciliation to us. - 2 Corinthians 5:18-19 NRSV, adpt.

Whereas we understand one of the primary vocations of those who seek to be Jesus-followers to be the ministry of reconciliation which requires accountability and making amends to those who have been wounded by our actions and the actions of our ancestors;

² For more information, see:

https://www.firstnations.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/COVID19-and-Native-Communities-7.13.20_DIGITAL_IS_WEBSITE.pdf

³ See further details at: <https://www.uuworld.org/articles/wampanoag-face-new-threat>

⁴ For the text of this resolution, see: <https://uccfiles.com/pdf/gs29-1.pdf>

Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep. Live in harmony with one another; do not be haughty, but give yourself to humble tasks; do not claim to be wiser than you are...If it is possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all. - Romans 12:15-18 NRSV

Whereas as Christians we are called to practice humility in the redress of wrongs in order to create greater harmony and live fully as co-creators of the kin-dom of God made manifest in our midst;

MOTION

Therefore we the delegates of the 2020 Annual Gathering of the Northern California Nevada Conference of the United Church of Christ call upon the Conference to participate in 40 days of prayer, listening, (un)learning, and action leading up to the 400th anniversary of the day of first encounter between European colonizers (later known as Pilgrims) and the First Peoples of this land.

Be it resolved that we call on the churches, organizations, and outdoor ministries of the Conference to engage in prayerful discernment and to take action toward changing the names of buildings, groups, and churches that celebrate our colonizing past (e.g. Pilgrim, Plymouth, Pioneer, Mayflower, etc.), recognizing that, while these names seek to honor important parts of our proud history, they significantly impact our ability to be in right-relationship with our Indigenous neighbors for whom these names represent mass genocide.

Be it further resolved that we call on NCNC-UCC member congregations to learn whose unceded territory your community occupies and include land acknowledgements (a formal statement that recognizes and respects Indigenous Peoples as traditional stewards of this land and the enduring relationship that exists between Indigenous Peoples and their traditional territories⁵) in worship, annual meetings, and other church gatherings.

Be it further resolved that we call on NCNC-UCC member congregations to respectfully, and with reciprocity, build sincere and vulnerable relationships of solidarity with their local

⁵“To recognize the land is an expression of gratitude and appreciation to those whose territory you reside on, and a way of honoring the Indigenous people who have been living and working on the land from time immemorial... Land acknowledgements do not exist in a past tense, or historical context: colonialism is a current ongoing process, and we need to build our mindfulness of our present participation.” Northwestern University, Native American and Indigenous Peoples Steering Group, *Land Acknowledgement*

<https://www.northwestern.edu/native-american-and-indigenous-peoples/about/Land%20Acknowledgement.html>

Indigenous communities and commit to actions toward making amends for our colonizing past in mutually-determined ways, reporting these actions and other decolonial trainings, educational events and actions to the Conference as part of the Antiracism Accountability Tracking Database.

Be it further resolved that we call on the churches, organizations, and outdoor ministries of the Conference, as part of their commitment to actions toward making amends, to tithe 10% of their land ownership or land use to the local Indigenous communities with whom they are fostering relationships by the year 2030, to continue learning and dialogue about the #landback movement led by Indigenous communities⁶, and to report their progress toward this goal using the Antiracism Accountability Tracking Database.

Be it further resolved that we, recognizing that two-thirds of the members of the NCNC-UCC attend churches on unceded Ohlone territory, call on the Conference to pay the Institutional Shuumi Land Tax, a voluntary annual financial contribution that non-Indigenous people living on traditional Ohlone territory make to support the critical work of the Sogorea Te' Land Trust to acquire and preserve land, establish a cemetery to re-inter stolen Ohlone ancestral remains, and build urban gardens, community centers, and sacred arbors so current and future generations of Indigenous people can thrive in their ancestral lands.⁷ To fund this annual financial contribution, we call on the Conference to initiate a special "Making Amends" offering to be taken by NCNC-UCC churches on the Sunday of Thanksgiving weekend, which will be submitted to and distributed by the Conference staff in a manner similar to UCC Special Offerings;

Be it further resolved that we call on Justice and Witness Ministries of the NCNC-UCC to create and oversee a Decolonizing and Indigenous Concerns Task Force that is tasked with facilitating conference-wide decolonizing trainings, educational events, and calls to action, hosting annual story-sharing events about conference members' experiences living into this resolution, discerning next steps beyond this resolution and toward future resolutions, and maintaining a Decolonizing and Making Amends resource page on NCNC website.

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⁶ Find out more at: <https://resourcegeneration.org/land-reparations-indigenous-solidarity-action-guide/>

⁷ To learn more about the Shuumi Land Tax, see: <https://sogoreate-landtrust.org/shuumi-land-tax/>

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