



## Restoring the Sacred Circle with Indigenous People: Acts of Repentance

The following Act of Repentance was offered during opening worship of the 2016 PNW Annual Conference directed at Restoring the Sacred Circle with Indigenous People. The full service is available on youtube at the link <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=g5Dqw144ScY>

### **An Act of Repentance: Offering Respect**

**Darin Gemmer, Camp Indianola Director**

At Camp Indianola, our vision is that every person who steps foot on our grounds would discover the spirit of sacred space. I believe the Spirit of God used our understanding of sacred space and our tradition of selfless service to motivate our recent decisions to rename a majority of the buildings at our camp.

Last December, we were honored by Barbara Lawrence-Piecuch who brought the wisdom and stories of the Suquamish people to a gathering of camping professionals from all over the country. With bravery and humility, she also shared the wishes of the Suquamish people that their language not be used to name our buildings nor spaces. She explained that so much had been taken from her people, and that language was one of the few things that remained distinctly theirs. Additionally, she pointed out that many of the words we were already using, like “Chak-Chak,” were, in fact, Chinook jargon, forced upon the Suquamish people as a sort of catch-all native dialect acceptable to white-military and missionaries.

While the native names were chosen in consultation with members of the Suquamish Tribe and intended by the original team as honoring, the interpretation of their use had changed with deeper understanding of the history and culture of the area.

As our understanding changed, the Indianola Site Advisory Team chose to continue the tradition of honoring our Suquamish neighbors, and all of the buildings now carry the name of wood found onsite: Madrona, Driftwood, Maple, Alder, Evergreen. When I followed up with Barbara to inform her of the change, she was silent for a long moment before expressing her deep gratitude. It was an honor for each of us at Camp Indianola to be a part of this small step toward reconciliation.



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## Study Guide: Offering Respect by Kristina Gonzalez

### The Statement

Use *Lectio Divina* to reflect on the reading. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lectio\\_Divina](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lectio_Divina)

Read the statement on Offering Respect three times aloud. After each reading, ask the following question:

- Reading 1: What word, phrase or image stood out for me in this reading?
- Reading 2: What is meant by the term ‘respect’ in this context?
- Reading 3: What is God asking me to do, be or change through this testimony?

In groups of three to six persons, use Mutual Invitation<sup>1</sup> after each reading to hear reflections from the group members. Mutual Invitation is a method of intercultural communication that allows everyone to be invited to the conversation and to invite. It works this way:

The facilitator or the reader poses the question aloud prior to reading and again in a moment of reflection following the reading. This person offers their reflection to the group, modeling the length of response, then invites another to participate. Avoid the temptation of going around a circle.

Once invited, one can share, and then invite; ‘pass for now,’ meaning ‘please come back to me,’ then invite; or ‘pass,’ meaning ‘I don’t have anything to share on this question,’ then invite. All responses are honored, and each person takes responsibility for their level of involvement. No cross talk or questioning is allowed during the process, though this can happen at the end if there is time.

Mutual Invitation allows for reflection, depth in the study, and mutual learning from the wisdom of the participants. In addition, the invitational aspect honors the many cultures for which an invitation is important to share comfortably.

### Reflection: Offering Respect; Intent vs. Impact by Kristina Gonzalez

“With bravery and humility, she [Barbara Lawrence-Piecuch of the Suquamish] also shared the wishes of the Suquamish people that their language not be used to name our buildings nor spaces,” wrote Darin Gemmer in his reflection above. Imagine how it must have felt to Ms. Lawrence-Piecuch to bring this request, knowing that generations of United Methodists hold fond memories of their camp experience, and knowing that the request may be minimized or rejected. Imagine how it must have felt to receive the request, knowing that the names were intended to honor the Suquamish Tribe. What would you do?

This story illustrates well the gulf between intent and impact. The intent in the original naming of the cabins was to honor the Suquamish Tribe. The statement indicates that tribal members were even

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<sup>1</sup> Kaleidoscope Institute for leadership in a diverse changing world. <http://www.kscopeinstitute.org/>



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involved in the naming. But times change, and greater understanding of how tribal peoples were stripped of their language and culture inform how we think about honor and respect today. The intent in the naming was positive, but the impact was negative.

Our Wesleyan tradition asks us to operate from three simple rules, the first of which is, ‘do no harm.’<sup>2</sup> The Indianola Site Advisory Team, in choosing to approach the issue with cultural humility, heard the request and honored it, changing the names of the cabins. The advisory team did in short order what so many others have been asked, petitioned, cajoled or boycotted to do: listen to the impact on indigenous people and choose to remove the harm.

The issue of use of Indian names and images has been before United Methodists for many years, particularly pertaining to sports teams and mascots. The National Congress of American Indians reports beginning advocacy for removing harmful images in 1968. Though much progress has been made, notable teams retain names or images demeaning to Native people. Some within Indian country disagree on this issue, though some also question the basis of the research that led to this conclusion. The 2016 General Conference of The United Methodist Church passed Resolution 60851 titled *Names Demeaning to Native Americans*, which called on agencies of the church to raise awareness on this issue.

In keeping with the Wesleyan tradition of ‘do no harm,’ and United Methodist resolutions regarding demeaning speech or actions, what would you have felt, thought or done had you been a member of the Indianola Site Advisory Team? Do similar issues face your community? What awareness can you bring to the concept of ‘respect’ inside and outside of the church?

### The Commitment

What commitment will you and your group make to:

- Group study and discussion?
- Study on the use of American Indian names, images or language within popular culture?
- Study of the history and culture of Indian people in your area, and how the church intersects the history close to home?
- Intentional planning to initiate or enhance relationships with tribes or American Indian people, including protocols for getting started?

### Resources

#### Print

Mann, Henrietta and Phillips, Anita. *On This Spirit Walk, The Voices of Native American and Indigenous Peoples*. Muskogee, OK: Native American Comprehensive Plan, The United Methodist Church.

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<sup>2</sup> Paraphrased from The Book of Discipline of The United Methodist Church 2012, pg. 52.



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Noley, Homer. *First White Frost, Native Americans and United Methodism*. 1991. Nashville: Abington Press.

Roberts, Gary L. *Massacre at Sand Creek: How Methodists Were involved in an American Tragedy*. 2016. Nashville: Abington Press.

*The Book of Resolutions of the United Methodist Church 2012*. 2012. Nashville: United Methodist Publishing House. Pgs. 417-438.

### Web

YouTube: Doctrine of Discovery, Mennonite Church:  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JvM4SJN76Yg>

Ending the Era of Harmful “Indian” Mascots, National Congress of American Indians:  
<http://www.ncai.org/proudtobe> Follow the links in this article for additional research on the harmful psychological effects of derogatory images.

Why use of Native American nicknames is an obvious affront, Steve Wolf, ESPN Senior Writer:  
[http://espn.go.com/espn/otl/story/\\_/id/11426021/why-native-american-nicknames-stir-controversy-sports](http://espn.go.com/espn/otl/story/_/id/11426021/why-native-american-nicknames-stir-controversy-sports)

TEDTalk: “Walk a Mile in My Red-Face” – Indian Sports Mascots by Dr. Cornel Pewewardy:  
<http://billhowe.org/MCE/professors-tedx-talk-about-native-american-mascots-selected-as-editors-pick-by-ted/>

Playing Indian at Halftime: The Controversy over American Indian Mascots, Logos, and Nicknames in School-Related Events by Cornel Pewewardy: <http://www.popspot.com/2013/11/playing-indian-at-halftime-the-controversy-over-american-indian-mascots-logos-and-nicknames-in-school-related-events/>

General Conferences of the United Methodist Church have legislated against names and images demeaning to Native Americans since 1996. Below are selected references to resolutions passed by General Conferences since that time.

- <http://gc2000.org/gc2000news/nativeamerican/nagc002.htm>
- <http://archives.umc.org/interior.asp?ptid=2&mid=4746>
- [http://s3.amazonaws.com/Website\\_Properties/general-conference/2016/documents/gc2016-advance-daily-christian-advocate-full-english.pdf](http://s3.amazonaws.com/Website_Properties/general-conference/2016/documents/gc2016-advance-daily-christian-advocate-full-english.pdf) and  
<http://calms2016.umc.org/Menu.aspx?type=Petition&mode=Single&number=851>

Updated article on General Conference Action, <http://www.umc.org/who-we-are/petition-caucus-condemn-use-of-native-americans-mascots>

Share other resources as you find them helpful. For questions or assistance, contact:  
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