

God is still speaking

God is still speaking,
**UNITED CHURCH
OF CHRIST**



**A Public Declaration to the Tribal Councils and Traditional
Spiritual Leaders of the Native Peoples of the Northwest from
the United Church of Christ**

April 17, 2016
c/o Jewell Praying Wolf James, Lummi Nation

God is still speaking through the United Church of Christ as we stand in solidarity with Native leaders in their long struggle to protect sacred sites and treaty fishing rights.

In 1987 and again in 1997, our Pacific Northwest Conference Ministers joined with other denominational leaders to offer letters of apology to the indigenous peoples of the Northwest. These letters acknowledge the historical disrespect of traditional Native American spiritual practices and traditions. In those letters, we promised to “honor and defend the rights of Native Peoples...including access and protection of sacred sites... (and to) end political and economic injustices against Tribal communities.”

In recent decades, a new threat is confronting Native peoples of the Northwest and across the whole continent: the mining, transport, burning, and disposal of fossil fuels. Tribal lands are at risk from toxic mining practices; train transport of coal and oil poisons the air and water and threatens the safety of Native and non-Native communities alike; and the wanton greed of a few fossil fuel companies disregards the intrinsic value of the land indigenous peoples hold in trust for their descendants and for all our relations.

Tribal leaders have asked us to keep our past promises. And so, through the Pacific Northwest Conference, we have done just that. We reiterated our commitment to stand with Native peoples in defense of their sacred lands and fishing rights in a 2014 letter of support signed by our PNW Conference Minister. In Northwest, the UCC has been an active voice for Native peoples: in editorials, in public comments at fossil fuel hearings, and in a Conference resolution to oppose coal export passed in 2013.

*Today, in my installation as General Minister and President of the United Church of Christ, I affirm this vow by the PNW Conference. Indeed, I represent a United Church of Christ that seeks at every level to uphold the rights of Native people as primary stakeholders and ultimate decision-makers over their land. In the words of Pope Francis in his encyclical *Laudato Si'*, “indigenous communities ...should be the principal dialogue partners, especially when large project affecting their land are proposed. For them, land is not a commodity but rather a gift from God... a sacred space.” (145).*

I call on other Christian denominational executives and leaders of all faiths across the country to share this pledge with me: that we affirm and commit ourselves to uphold treaty rights,

Officers of the Church

Rev. John C. Dorhauer
General Minister and President

Rev. Traci D. Blackmon
Justice and Witness Ministries

Rev. J. Bennett Guess
Local Church Ministries

Rev. James A. Moos
Wider Church Ministries

honor sacred sites, and stand with indigenous communities in protecting God's creation and the land of their ancestors.

Our debt to Native communities and future generations is enormous. Because God is still speaking in the United Church of Christ, we hear the voice of God in the indigenous people of our continent. They have our support and gratitude for their leadership on behalf of Earth's ecosystems, and our commitment to stand with them against destruction of their lands.

On the occasion of the installation of The Rev. John C. Dorhauer as General Minister and President of the United Church of Christ – Seattle, Washington, April 17, 2016