

**A PUBLIC DECLARATION TO THE TRIBAL COUNCILS AND TRADITIONAL  
SPIRITUAL LEADERS OF THE INDIAN AND ESKIMO PEOPLES  
OF THE PACIFIC NORTHWEST**

November 1987  
c/o Jewell Praying Wolf James, Lummi

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

This is a formal apology on behalf of our churches for their long-standing participation in the destruction of traditional Native American spiritual practices. We call upon our people for recognition of and respect for your traditional ways of life and for protection of your sacred places and ceremonial objects. We have frequently been unconscious and insensitive and not come to your aid when you have been victimized by unjust federal policies and practices. In many other circumstances we reflected the rampant racism and prejudice of the dominant culture with which we too willingly identified. During this two hundredth anniversary year of the United States Constitution we, as leaders of our churches in the Pacific Northwest, extend our apology. We ask for your forgiveness and blessing.

As the Creator continues to renew the earth, the plants, the animals, and all living things, we call upon the people of our denominations and fellowships to a commitment of mutual support in your efforts to reclaim and protect the legacy of your own traditional spiritual teachings. To that end we pledge our support and assistance in upholding the American Religious Freedom Act (P. L. 95-134, 1978) and within that legal precedent affirm the following:

- (1) The rights of the Native Peoples to practice and participate in traditional ceremonies and rituals with the same protection offered all religions under the Constitution.
- (2) Access to and protection of sacred Sites and public lands for ceremonial purposes.
- (3) The use of religious symbols (feathers, tobacco, sweet grass, bone, etc.) for use in traditional ceremonies and rituals.

The spiritual power of the land and the ancient wisdom of your indigenous religions can be, we believe, great gifts to the Christian churches. We offer our commitment to support you in the righting of previous wrongs: to protect your people's efforts to enhance Native spiritual teachings; to encourage the members of our churches to stand in solidarity with you on these important religious issues; to provide advocacy and mediation, when appropriate, for ongoing negotiations with State agencies and Federal officials regarding these matters.

May the promises of this day go on public record with all the congregations of our communions and be communicated to the Native American Peoples of the Pacific Northwest. May the God of Abraham and Sarah, and the Spirit who lives in both the cedar and Salmon People, be honored and celebrated.

Sincerely,

*Thomas L. Blevins*

The Rev. Thomas L. Blevins, Bishop  
Pacific Northwest Synod -  
Lutheran Church in America

*Robert Bradford*

The Rev. Dr. Robert Bradford,  
Executive Minister  
American Baptist Churches of the Northwest

*Robert Clarke Brock*

The Rev. Robert Brock  
N.W. Regional Christian Church

*Robert H. Cochrane*

The Right Rev. Robert H. Cochrane,  
Bishop, Episcopal Diocese of Olympia

*W. James Halfaker*

The Rev. W. James Halfaker  
Conference Minister  
Washington North Idaho Conference  
United Church of Christ

*R. G. Hunthausen*

The Most Rev. Raymond G. Hunthausen  
Archbishop of Seattle  
Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Seattle

*Elizabeth B. Knott*

The Rev. Elizabeth Knott, Synod Executive  
Presbyterian Church  
Synod Alaska-Northwest

*Lowell E. Knutson*

The Rev. Lowell Knutson, Bishop  
North Pacific District  
American Lutheran Church

*Thomas J. Murphy*

The Most Rev. Thomas Murphy  
Coadjutor Archbishop  
Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Seattle

*Melvin G. Talbert*

The Rev. Melvin G. Talbert, Bishop  
United Methodist Church -  
Pacific Northwest Conference

## **A Public Declaration to the Tribal Councils and Traditional Spiritual Leaders of the Indian and Eskimo Peoples of the Northwest November 1997**

In 1987, the Bishops and Denominational Executives from churches in the US Pacific Northwest, offered to you, on behalf of the Christian churches they represent, an apology for long-standing participation in the destruction of traditional Native American spiritual practices. Since that time, our churches have been challenged to act in accordance with this act of contrition. We are still growing in our understanding of our own words.

We have prayed together, we have sat in a circle together; we have stood in solidarity and faced struggles together. We have tried to open our eyes to the ways of compassion and justice. We have opened our ears to listen and to learn from our native teachings. We have spoken from the strength in our common faith about the sacredness of all creation and Gods claim on all life. We embrace the spiritual power of the land and respect the ancient wisdom of your indigenous religions. They are great gifts to the churches. We confess our lack of consciousness and our insensitivity to the integrity of Native ways of life. We know that healing takes many forms. Healing will take commitments of time, energy and financial resources. Healing will come when we accept the grace, which comes as a gift of the Creator. Our spiritual tradition affirms a God who regenerates all that has life. We give thanks to a God who restores life from death; recovers identity when it is threatened; reclaims and protects the meaning of spirituality when it is dishonored. Because of our faith in a God of resurrection and rebirth and hope, God revealed in Jesus Christ, we make the following re-affirmations from the 1987 Apology;

To honor and defend the rights of Native Peoples to practice and participate in traditional ceremonies and rituals with the same protection offered all religions under the Constitutions and public policies of the lands in which we live.

To secure access to protection of sacred sites and public lands for ceremonial purposes.

To respect the use of religious symbols for use in traditional ceremonies and rituals.

To participate in the struggles to end political and economic injustice against tribal communities.

We continue to call upon people of faith to recognize and respect the traditional ways of life of Native and indigenous peoples. We renew our pledge to be with you in circle. A circle where peoples come to know one another. A circle where peoples come to deepen their bonds and their connection with one another. A circle where partnership and companionship embrace the notion of reciprocity.

As we continue to experience the power of the circle, we commit ourselves to be responsive to the challenges that face our communities, to protect our children's future and to honor the relationships of Christian and Native spiritual leaders in order that we may share knowledge and experience of the Spirit.

We offer these words humbly and respectfully to the Native American Peoples of the Pacific Northwest. We pray today for the blessing of the Creator on our peoples. May the God of Jesus Christ, and the spirit who lives in both cedar and Salmon People, be forever honored and celebrated.

The Rev. Dr. Paul D. Aita, Executive Minister  
American Baptist Churches of the Northwest

The Rev. Randy Hyvonen, Conference Minister  
United Church of Christ, Washington  
North Idaho Conference

The Rev. Lynne Simcox Fitch, Conference  
Minister, United Church of Christ  
Washington, North Idaho Conference

The Rev. Donald H. Maier, Bishop  
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America,  
Northwest Washington Synod

The Rev. Elias Gabriel Galvan, Bishop  
United Methodist Church,  
Pacific NW Annual Conference

The Rev. Gary F. Skinner, Synod Executive  
Presbyterian Church (USA)  
Synod of Alaska/Northwest

The Rt. Rev. Sanford Z.K. Hampton  
Bishop Assistant  
Episcopal Diocese of Olympia

The Most Rev. William S. Skylstad, Bishop  
Roman Catholic Diocese of Spokane

The Rt. Rev. Vincent W. Warner  
Bishop, Episcopal Diocese of Olympia

The Rev. David C. Wold, Bishop  
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America,  
Southwestern Washington Synod