

Resolution to the 2021 New England Annual Conference

Honoring Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women

Submitted by The NEAC Committee on Native American Ministries, vote taken:

April 1, 2021, 7 yes, 0 no, 0 abstentions; Breanne MacFarland, chair

Grounding Rationale:

The Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women (MMIW) movement began in Canada and has been adopted in the U.S. to acknowledge the exceedingly high rates of Native American and Alaska Native Indigenous women who go missing or are murdered every day. The problem of MMIW is so profound that it is an epidemic.

Violence against Native women is more frequent and severe than among any other people in North America.¹ In 2016 there were 5,712 Native American women reported missing via the National Crime Information Center in the United States of America.² The Center for Disease Control and Prevention reports murder is the third-leading cause of death among Native American women.³ Additionally, it is widely accepted that Native American women are murdered at more than 10 times the national average.⁴ Experts say that even these startling numbers are likely an underestimate of the total number of Native American women affected by violence due to the inadequate infrastructure for women to report and handle these incidents.⁵

In 2013, twenty-one-year-old Hanna Harris went missing after a 4th of July celebration with her family. Harris was a 2010 graduate of West High School in Billings, MT and a mother of a 10-month-old son. Right away her family knew something was wrong but struggled to get assistance from local law enforcement because they didn't take her disappearance seriously. Four days later, Harris' body was found, murdered on the Northern Cheyenne Reservation.

Harris' birthday, May 5th, has been recognized by the United States Congress as a National Day of Awareness for Missing and Murdered Native Women. On her birthday Natives encourage supporters to wear red because red is the only color the spirits can see. Red is also symbolic of the women's blood that has been violently spilled unnecessarily; by wearing red, the spirits of the missing women will be called back to earth and laid to rest.

The death of Jalajhia Finklea, a Mashpee Wampanoag tribal citizen and New England resident, is one of the most recent Native women to suffer a tragic death. The seventeen-year-old went missing on

¹ C. Crossland, J. Palmer, A. Brooks, & B. Aughter, "NIJ's Program of Research on Violence Against American Indian and Alaska Native Women," *Violence Against Women*, 19(6), (2013), <https://doi-org.ezproxy.bu.edu/10.1177/1077801213494706>.

² A. Lucchesi & A. Echo-Hawk, "Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls," *Urban Indian Health Institute*, (2019), p. 2.

³ Ibid.

⁴ NICOA, "Inadequate Data on Missing, Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls," NICOA National Indian Council on Aging, January 21, 2019, <https://www.nicoa.org/inadequate-data-on-missing-murdered-indigenous-women-and-girls/>.

⁵ Lyndsey Gilpin, "Native American Women Still Have the Highest Rates of Rape and Assault," High Country News – Know the West, June 7, 2016, <https://www.hcn.org/articles/tribal-affairs-why-native-american-women-still-have-the-highest-rates-of-rape-and-assault>.

October 20, 2020, the night before her eighteenth birthday. Her remains were discovered over a month later 1,350 miles from her home.⁶ Her kidnapping suspect was shot in a shootout with law enforcement, and little is expected to be learned about her tragic demise.

Local Native women, our neighbors, are being killed due to racially motivated hate crimes, gendered violence, and continued historical mistreatment. This is part of a larger systemic problem that began when Columbus landed in the New World. A false narrative has been taught in schools that Columbus "discovered" the New World, when in fact, millions of people already inhabited the Americas. Since the arrival of Columbus, Native American peoples and their cultures have suffered great losses through disease, warfare, massacre, and forced assimilation.

The celebration of Columbus Day is a celebration of genocide. Columbus Day glorifies an exploration that led to the extermination of Native Peoples that continues to this day. In contrast, Indigenous Peoples Day is a protest of the historical conquest of North America by Europeans. Celebrated in lieu of Columbus Day on the second Monday in October, Indigenous Peoples Day celebrates resiliency, strength, cultures, and history.

Resolution:

Whereas, at the 2015 New England Annual Conference (NEAC) Act of Repentance⁷ service, Cabinet members committed as individuals to "Look for ways to become an ally to Native and Indigenous peoples," and to "speak up,"⁸ and,

Whereas, at the 2015 NEAC Act of Repentance service, the Conference "[Affirmed] our commitment to empowering the presence of Native and indigenous people in the life of the New England Annual Conference,"⁹ and,

Whereas The NEAC Committee on Native American Ministries (CONAM) "seeks to advocate for ministry with and by Native Americans, and to share the diverse culture, history, and traditions of Native peoples,"¹⁰ and monitors Native American ministries within the Annual Conference by communication with local tribes to discuss spiritual and physical needs,

Therefore, be it resolved that NEAC will speak out and speak up as allies against the sinful injustices of discrimination, harassment, and violence surrounding Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women, in the following ways:

⁶ Levi Rickert, "The Death of Young Pregnant Mashpee Wampanoag Woman Is Tip of the Iceberg of MMIWG Epidemic," Native News Online, December 6, 2020, <https://nativenewsonline.net/opinion/the-death-of-young-pregnant-mashpee-wampanoag-woman-is-tip-of-the-iceberg-of-mmiwg-epidemic>.

⁷ The 2012 General Conference held an Act of Repentance Service repenting for the part that the UMC has had in the marginalization of Native peoples. During the next quadrennium, Annual Conferences were each to hold their own and NEAC's was in during the Annual Conference in 2015.

⁸ Brick River, "Act of Repentance: Listening," New England Conference, June 22, 2015, <https://www.neumc.org/newsdetail/1389898>.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ "Committee on Native American Ministries (CONAM) Contacts," United Methodist News Service, March 7, 2017, <https://www.umnews.org/en/news/committee-on-native-american-ministries-conam-contacts>.

Be it further resolved that the NEAC will acknowledge and commemorate May 5th as National Day of Awareness for Missing and Murdered Native Women by:

1. Instructing NEAC Cabinet members to write statements of solidarity for the National Day of Awareness to the Representatives of their states that make up the NEAC constituency: Maine, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, Rhode Island, Vermont, and eastern Connecticut, and
2. Encouraging members of the NEAC to write statements of solidarity for the National Day of Awareness to the Representatives of their states that make up the NEAC constituency: Maine, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, Rhode Island, Vermont, and eastern Connecticut.

Be it further resolved that the NEAC will acknowledge and celebrate the second Monday in October as Indigenous People's Day by:

1. Instructing NEAC Cabinet members to write statements of solidarity to celebrate Indigenous People's Day in lieu of Columbus Day to the Representatives of their states that make up the NEAC constituency: Massachusetts, New Hampshire, Rhode Island, and eastern Connecticut (Maine and Vermont already celebrate Indigenous People's Day).
2. Encouraging members of the NEAC to write statements of solidarity to celebrate Indigenous People's Day in lieu of Columbus Day to the Representatives of their states that make up the NEAC constituency: Massachusetts, New Hampshire, Rhode Island, and eastern Connecticut (Maine and Vermont already celebrate Indigenous People's Day).
3. Encouraging local churches, the NEAC, and District offices to use the term Indigenous People's Day in lieu of Columbus Day in their communications, worship services, and event planning.

Be it further resolved that the NEAC will support Native American women by encouraging United Methodists to wear RED on May 5th, National Day of Awareness for Missing and Murdered Native Women, as well as on the second Monday of October, Indigenous People's Day.