

Prayer Service In Observance of UN Day for Indigenous Peoples, August 9

SETTING:

Ritual center, covered with cloths of various cultures (if these are not available, use pictures or the names of different groups of indigenous people on brightly colored paper). Bowl of corn kernels with object to crush corn; several ears of corn, unhusked and in basket.

CENTERING MUSIC:

*You may wish to begin with the sound of a rainstick (in the album *On Sacred Ground* by Sweet Honey in the Rock, the song "Mystic Ocean" uses a rainstick background). You may also use Native American flute music or other reflective music.*

INTRODUCTION:

We gather today in solidarity with the indigenous peoples throughout our world. We remember that, in 1994, the General Assembly of the United Nations decided that the International Day of the World's Indigenous People should be observed each year on August 9.

We remember also the words of Pope John Paul II, who wrote, "Unjust economic policies are especially damaging to indigenous peoples, young nations and their traditional cultures; and it is the Church's task to help indigenous cultures preserve their identity and maintain their traditions."

In this spirit of solidarity, let us pray:

OPENING PRAYER:

Creator Spirit,
gather us in as we ask God's forgiveness for the hurt and brokenness caused by our ignorance, fear and prejudice. We celebrate God's grace as we realize our healed oneness. Creator Spirit, fill us anew with the breath of life in our depths and in the presence of all peoples.
Amen.

NAMING OUR LOSSES:

(Invite individuals to read aloud each of the following statements describing what continues to happen to indigenous peoples in our world.)

- Indigenous people face serious discrimination. They lack the rights to property, languages, culture, citizenship, basic services and material conditions essential for a satisfying life and identity. Discrimination often leads to alcoholism and suicide in the indigenous society.
- In central Africa, hunter gatherers and forest people (Pygmies) are threatened by conservation policies and wars. They are forbidden to hunt in the name of conservation, which is causing them to lose their traditional ways of life.
- Nomadic Pastoralists, Maasai and Saburu of east Africa are limited to smaller spaces which make it difficult to maintain livestock. Farming and conservation in their lands have forced them to urban areas.
- San or Bushmen of southern Africa are nearly disappearing. They have been lost or driven from their traditional homelands. Large numbers still remain in Namibia, but they are usually living in poverty and do not live in their traditional ways. Those who stay behind are poorly paid laborers on farms in their own territory.
- In northern Africa and Shael, imazighen (berbers), live in the mountains or deserts. Few cultural protections exist.
- In Australia, Canada and the United States, indigenous children were often given to adoptive white families. In this "Stolen Generation," children were sent away to school and were permitted to speak only English. They were not allowed contact with their families and often told that their families had died.
- In the U.S., American native people continue to live in poverty on reservations and in urban areas, still see negative images of "Indians" in popular culture, suffer from diseases in higher numbers than other groups, and have only 1% of their population move into higher education.



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LITANY OF REPENTANCE

(After each statement is read, crush some of the corn to symbolize how our social sin crushes the hopes and dreams of our sisters and brothers.)

1. We renounce and repent those moments when we have been closed or insensitive to others whose customs, traditions or cultures differ from our own.

(GRIND CORN)

ALL: We renounce and repent!

2. We renounce and repent the sin of racism that prompts people to act as if the lives of indigenous people have less value and dignity.

(GRIND CORN)

ALL: We renounce and repent!

3. We renounce and repent attitudes and actions which emphasize there is only one acceptable way to be, and that way is defined and dictated by the dominant culture.

(GRIND CORN)

ALL: We renounce and repent!

4. We renounce and repent the worldview that dismisses or ignores the gifts of other cultures and races, diminishing God's dream for our world.

(GRIND CORN)

ALL: We renounce and repent!

LITANY OF REDEMPTION

(After each statement is read, lift the basket of corn to symbolize how our work for inclusion and our respect for diversity bring new life and hope into our world.)

1. We proclaim God's redemption in the lives of those who open themselves to conversion, to new ways of seeing and being.

(LIFT Basket of corn)

ALL: We proclaim God's redemption!

2. We proclaim God's redemption in those who dare to challenge the telling of history which reflects only a single voice and view.

(LIFT Basket of corn)

ALL: We proclaim God's redemption!

3. We proclaim God's redemption in the witness of all who work to honor the fullest image of God among us.

(LIFT Basket of corn)

ALL: We proclaim God's redemption!

4. We proclaim God's redemption in the church that walks with people of every culture in their struggle for abundant life, in the church that builds the community of God.

(LIFT Basket of corn)

ALL: We proclaim God's redemption!

READING:

Remember the sky that you were born under, know each of the star's names.

Remember the moon, who she is . . .

Remember the sun's birth at dawn, that is the strongest point of time.

Remember sundown and the giving away to night.

Remember your birth, how your mother struggled to give you form and breath. You are evidence of her life, and her mother's, and hers.

Remember your father. He is your life, also.

Remember the earth whose skin you are: red earth, black earth, yellow earth, white earth, brown earth, we are earth.

Remember the plants, trees, animal life who all have their tribes, their families, their histories, too. Talk to them, listen to them. They are alive poems.

Remember the wind. Remember her voices. She knows the origin of this universe . . .

Remember that you are all people and that all people are you.

Remember that you are this universe and that this universe is you.

Remember that all is in motion, is growing, is you.

Remember that all language comes from this.

Remember the dance that language is, that life is.

Remember.

(Excerpted from "She Had Some Horses," by Joy Harjo, an Native American poet.)



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QUIET REFLECTION:

What moves in you as you listen to this remembering?
What in your own story do you especially cherish and remember about your own cultural experiences?
How is your heart moved to act as you reflect on the stories of injustices to indigenous people in this country and other countries, the memories that have been taken from indigenous peoples, the cultural experiences that have been disrespected?

SHARING:

Invite anyone who wishes to share their reflection with the group.

CLOSING PRAYER:

O God of all peoples,
enlighten our minds and soften our hearts
so that we will be open to change.
Enables us to see each other with eyes like yours.
Call us to a new awareness of the beauty
in the diversity so that we might contribute to a world
where there is harmony, justice and lasting peace.
Amen.

CLOSING SONG:

Suggested: “Blessed Assurance”, “Song of the Body of Christ”, or any hymn that reflects our solidarity with one another’s stories.

Prayer Service In Observance of UN Day for Indigenous Peoples by Chris Koellhoffer, IHM

