

From the Walking With Our Indigenous Neighbors Committee:

First, a personal reflection. When I lived in western South Dakota, we heard with alarming regularity reports of bodies of native persons found along roadsides on the nearby Pine Ridge Indian Reservation. Often, authorities struggled to identify these persons and never brought their murderers to justice.

For decades, Native American and Alaska Native communities have struggled with high rates of assault, abduction, and murder of tribal members. A 2016 study by the National Institute of Justice (NIJ) found that more than four in five American Indian and Alaska Native women (84.3 percent) have experienced violence in their lifetime, including 56.1 percent who have experienced sexual violence. In cases of reported sexual violence, more than 2/3 of the cases involved a non-native perpetrator. Many cases of sexual violence are never reported.

The homicide rate for indigenous women in Canada has been almost six times as high as the homicide rate for other women. In the United States, estimates are that native women are more than twice as likely to experience violence than any other demographic.

The historical legacy of conquest, removal, and relocation has left indigenous people economically, politically, and socially marginalized in North American culture. Poverty and homelessness are widespread, particularly on reservations and in urban areas. Racist attitudes toward Native Americans adds to this vulnerability while the lack of equality for women places native women at even greater risk.

Thousands of unsolved cases of missing and murdered Native Americans continue to cry out for justice and healing. **May 5 is Missing and Murdered Indigenous Persons Awareness Day in the United States.** We are asked to remember the Indigenous people who we have lost to murder and those who remain missing and commit to working with Tribal Nations, as well as federal and local authorities, to ensure the resolution of these cases.

The Walking With Our Indigenous Neighbors committee asks you to highlight this concern in your bulletin and in the prayer of the Church on May 5. Here are prayer petitions you may choose to include or adapt as seems best to you:

+Gracious God, in Christ Jesus you came to give us abundant life. Today, we raise our voices to you on behalf of our indigenous neighbors, remembering especially the many native women who have been missing from their families for a long time or whose lives were taken violently by others. We pray that the missing may yet be found alive and those who committed acts of violence might be brought to justice.

+We acknowledge before you the historical factors that have led to the marginalization of indigenous people and our complicity as non-native people in that history. We pray for an end to every form of racism, sexism, and inequality. Grant that, empowered by your Spirit, we might be bold in confronting evil and live as Jesus has called us, loving our neighbors as ourselves. Amen