

Years of Discovery Task Force Report Update, August 2021

Our vision for building and nurturing tribal relationships continues to grow and develop. As we look across the expanse of our synod, the Task Force is identifying key people near tribal communities who are able to walk with their native siblings, enter their world, and experience firsthand the issues unique to that particular tribe. Once completed, a list of those individuals and areas will be provided. We encourage those who are interested to reach out to these key people for ways you can get involved in a native community near you.

- There are many ways for us to be involved that include global and regional issues for Native Peoples. For example: victims of boarding schools, ancestral burial grounds, treaty rights, environmental concerns, and the misuse of Indian mascot names. The synod website and Facebook page are places you can access tribal events and happenings. Most recently, Assistant to the Bishop Pastor Jim Duehring attended *Healing Around the Lakes* in Rapid River sponsored by the Native Justice Coalition and Bishop Finegan participated in the *Boarding School Remembrance Walk* in Baraga sponsored by the Keweenaw Bay Indian Community. (pictures from Facebook)



- Pastor Dave Van Kley (retired, Grace, Gwinn), Pr. Bre Kinnunen (LCM at NMU) and Dr. Mike Coyne (Messiah, Marquette) have met several times with the director of the Center for Native American Studies at NMU, Amber Morseau, and Joe Lubig, the academic dean of the department. We are exploring ways to be engaged with Native American students at the University, involving both Lutheran Campus Ministry students and members of area ELCA congregations. We are also exploring ways to partner with other faith communities, Christian and otherwise, in this work. Approximately 70% of native people in the United States live off reservation and that is overwhelmingly true in Marquette County. How can we come to “see” the native people among us and give them space to own their identity? How can we become friends and allies to the native people among us?

- We have learned that a Colonization exhibit is on display at the Beaumier Center across from the DeVos Art Center at NMU. The exhibit tells the story of displacement and cultural/human genocide experienced by native people in the northern Lakes area. We will be inviting people from our congregations to visit the exhibit and learn about the history and culture of the Anishinaabe and other native people. After February, the display will travel to other parts of the UP, thanks to a grant from the Episcopal Church.



- We will be publicizing various events on campus sponsored by the Native American Students Association and the Center for Native American Studies, at which people from our communities are welcome.
- We are exploring ways to be engaged with CNA and NSA at NMU on Indigenous People's Day in October.
- We are seeking to support efforts by the native community to influence the Marquette Area Public Schools Board of Education to take the step of changing the name of the MHS sports teams from Redmen and Redettes to something that is not offensive to many native people and reflects the life and vitality of the Marquette community today. This has been a controversial issue and the Center for Native American Studies has asked us to add our voices to those calling for change.
- Pastor Grant Van Lishout, Spiritual Director and Outreach Coordinator at Marywood Franciscan Spirituality Center, reports on ways Marywood is trying to engage the local tribal community in Northern Wisconsin:

We at Marywood have been nurturing our relationship with our neighbors of the Ojibwa Lac du Flambeau. Over the past few years, Sister Marla Lang, FSPA has participated in programs both on the reservation and off. Her main contact is Mildred "Tinker" Schuman, a highly respected Native American spiritual leader, teacher, and poet of the tribe. In this past year, Tinker and Sr. Marla have formed this group called Connecting the Dots consisting of Native American attorneys and judges, human services, sisters from a couple different congregations, to find ways to best nurture relationships and help the Lac du Flambeau community. The intentions and excitement are there, but this group has not really found the mission in what can be done. (Contact information can be provided upon request)

I along with staff at Marywood were invited into a smudging and naming ceremony where we got to experience first-hand the deep spirituality of the Lac du Flambeau ancestors, a very powerful experience. Throughout the years, Sister Marla and other staff members have been part of similar ceremonies.

This leads me to wonder what ways we can demonstrate our openness in fostering relationships with our neighbors. Quite possibly the best way is to first step into their shoes and experience their community and rituals before trying to form any reconciliation service of our own, such as the ceremonies we were part of or a pow wow.

As an education, I could see Marywood taking groups of people to Lac du Flambeau to experience the setting, hear their rich history, and converse with some of the leaders in the community.

I am thrilled to hear that the Year of Discovery committee is looking at relationships between all the Native American communities within and adjacent to our synod. There is richness and diversity between them and a lot that we can learn from them. Reconciliation, time and efforts to foster relationships can help heal the wounds of the past.

- Pastor Melinda VanderSys is working to establish a network in the Eastern Upper Peninsula, Pastor Scott Ehle is building relationships with the Native community in Menominee, Pastor Bucky Beach and Jeff Henquinet continue to work in the Copper Country, and contacts are being developed in the Rapid River area.
- Pastor Julie Belew reports on the Maawanjiding Pow Wow week of the Keweenaw Bay Indian Community, Baraga:

The week of July 18 was very busy and meaningful for tribal and community members alike as the following events unfolded. Wednesday morning began with a water ceremony to start the 17 mile water walk from First Sand Beach, L'Anse to the light house in Baraga. Participation included Pastor Bucky Beach, representatives from Lake Superior Fish and Wildlife, KBIC Natural Resources Dept., Michigan Tech, Tribal Council members and community members. As we walked, tobacco was offered to precious nibi (water) in gratitude for the life she gives to all living creatures. Prayers accompany tobacco to protect and preserve her purity. The walk concluded with a feast.

Thursday night we were honored with the presence of Beatrice Menase Kwe Jackson, Grandmother of the Three Fires Midewiwin Lodge, to lead us in the Grandmother Moon ceremony.

Friday morning began with the sunrise ceremony of lighting the sacred fire for the Boarding School Walk of Remembrance. There were moments of great sorrow as some elders shared their experience. One elder shared how he had never been hugged as a child by his parents who were reared in Boarding Schools. Another elder said he was doing this walk of remembrance as a way to forgive. Rodney Loonsfoot presented the Eagle Staff made for this walk adorned with eagle feathers and tiny moccasins. He looked to this event as a time of healing for his nation.

This Eagle Staff was also carried at the grand entries for the Pow Wow held Friday, Saturday and Sunday.

My work on the ground level included working at the Pow Wow food booth for the Veterans and helping clear the grounds for the gathering of the Remembrance Walk along with collecting wood for the sacred fire and directing traffic for this event.

I was honored to walk with Kathy Smith, Midewiwin, as a sister Water Walker to carry the Water Walk Eagle Staff on Saturday and then again on Sunday by myself.



The Task Force is grateful for the enthusiasm and willing participation from people of the Northern Great Lakes Synod. Walking together as a synod, we look forward to developing this Native American ministry. Your help is vital and important as we seek to be the Church in our local community and the world!

Keep checking on the synod website (www.nglsynod.org) and synod Facebook for upcoming events!