



The Presbytery of Western New York

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Jimersontown Presbyterian Church
Wright Memorial Presbyterian Church

Dear Siblings in Christ,

We come to you as repentant members of the Council of the Presbytery of Western New York whose churches and properties sit on the ancestral homelands of the Haudenosaunee, particularly the Seneca Nation of Indians. We have fallen short of our collective mandate to love and follow Jesus and we are writing to take responsibility for *“what we have done and what we have left undone.”* We know that you have experienced pain which continues today. Yet as a body we have ignored the historical and generational trauma in which we are complicit. Even when you bravely brought your personal and collective experiences of loss, abuse, and trauma to the attention of the Presbytery, we did not respond with care, compassion, or any direct action. We are sorry for our silence and inaction.

We apologize for being complicit and silent during the government removal of the Seneca people from their land, as well as the subsequent burning of the Jimersontown Church building and other church buildings as well as hundreds of your homes, to make way for the Kinzua Dam. Other options to solve the flooding issues and save the Seneca Land were proposed and we did not take the time to learn about or support what would have preserved your land and people. Even though God has called us to build up the Church of Jesus Christ, we were silent as your Church, homes and land were desecrated and people displaced.

Even though the original mission of the Thomas Indian School was for the safety and welfare of native children, we apologize for the pain and suffering our Presbyterian denomination has caused in the inception, funding, participation in and ignorance of the Indian Boarding School System in general, and specifically The Thomas Indian School. We are aware of the damage this cruel system of assimilation has inflicted on the Native Americans who are United States citizens and yet we remained silent. We are sorry for our failure to raise our voices and demand justice for your children and your families.

To those individuals who were physically, sexually, emotionally, and spiritually abused as students of the Indian Boarding Schools in which the Presbyterian Church (USA) was involved; we offer you our most sincere apology. We know that as Presbyterians we participated in harmful actions



towards Indigenous people. It is our dollars that led to the building and administering boarding schools that led to the loss of your Haudenosaunee language, culture, traditions, and Longhouses. We stripped your children of their loving family, home, Seneca given names, hair, and language. We participated in putting your children up for adoption in non-Native American homes who became part of the Stolen Generations. We are sorry for our failure to acknowledge our complicity in all of these actions.

We pledge to educate ourselves about the impact the Indian Boarding Schools had on The Seneca Nation of Indians. If you are willing, we will pray, lament, and mourn the loss of the children who were not returned to their families as they were adopted or died. We will support the work of the Truth and Healing Commission on Indian Boarding School Policies Act.

We apologize for not speaking out when federal, state, and local officials, including social workers, kept the best interest of only the white population in mind thereby causing direct harm to Native Americans. From taking your land and pushing you onto reservations to removing your access to traditional hunting grounds and land, to growing traditional foods, we have severely impacted your health and well-being for many generations. In our zeal to tell you of the good news of Jesus Christ, our hearts and minds were closed to the value of your traditions and lifeways. We are sorry for not respecting your Indigenous knowledge and traditions as valid.

We also recognize, with sorrow, that we contributed to the Tonawanda Indian Church closure which was likely the result of inadequate funding to keep the building operational. In the current day, The Native American Trust Fund of the Presbytery of WNY, as you are aware, does not have sufficient funds to cover the cost of current building repair needs. We pledge to work alongside your churches to help secure funding for repairs to ensure your churches can remain operational.

This apology is only the first step we are taking in the midst of a long and painful journey as we reflect on the cries that we did not or would not hear, and how we behaved as a church. As we travel the difficult road of repentance, reconciliation, and healing, we commit ourselves to work towards ensuring that we will never again use our power as members of the body of Christ to hurt others with our attitudes of racial and/or spiritual superiority. We seek God's forgiveness, healing grace, and guidance as we take steps towards building mutually compassionate, respectful, and loving relationships.

We understand the process of grief and healing is complex and make no assumptions of what is needed to make these grievances right, yet we hope for and commit to restorative action and reconciliation, "for the world today and for the Seven Generations to come."

Grace and Peace,

The Council of the Presbytery of WNY

