

Happy Monday to all,

On this date, February 9, 1822, an organization referred to as a "Society for the Benefit of Indians" was organized in Washington, D.C. The name was misleading as this organization focused on indigenous relocation and reflected the era's focus on cultural assimilation.

The society promoted the so called "benefit" of Native Americans through education, agricultural training, and Christianization. Its goal was to assimilate Native Americans, encouraging them to adopt European-American agricultural practices and religion. It was a means to achieve indigenous removal as white settlers pushed to acquire land.

On the issue of immigration-based injustices occurring on a daily basis in the U.S., the Native American communities have historically been- and still remain- some of the most affected but least mentioned. European settlers, who immigrated to their lands, inflicted such radical brutality upon the native populations – at this point-- any conceivable means to make their people whole again would be impossible to imagine. Native American communities now face complex social issues rooted in this historical trauma and systemic disparities, including high rates of poverty, unemployment, marginalization, and substandard housing.

Violence against Indigenous women is a crisis, with 80% of the abuse perpetuated by non-Native Americans. Native Americans have the highest poverty rate of any ethnic group in the U.S. at 24.5%, leading to overcrowded and substandard housing on reservations. Inadequate access to healthcare, underfunded Indian Health Service (IHS) facilities, and high rates of diabetes, substance abuse, and suicide, particularly among youth, remain severe. These challenges are further compounded by environmental risks on tribal lands, such as water contamination, and the struggle to protect sovereignty, culture, and language. The history of forced relocation, land seizure, and systemic discrimination continue to impact contemporary life.

Catholic Social Teaching (CST) on current Native American conditions emphasizes the concepts of solidarity, respect for human dignity, and call to restorative justice, focusing on repairing historical injustices, supporting sovereignty, and respecting indigenous cultures. The Church advocates for addressing high poverty, addiction, and suicide rates, while actively opposing environmental harm to sacred lands.

The Church has acknowledged its role in, and apologized for, the trauma caused to Indigenous families through, for example, the forced boarding school systems, which led to widespread cultural loss and, in some cases, death. In 2023, the Vatican officially repudiated the "Doctrine of Discovery," the ideological foundation for colonial-era policies that justified the seizure of indigenous lands and violation of human rights.

Although only approximately 1% of the Diocese of Stockton population identifies as indigenous or Native American, members of the Miwok, Yokuts, Monache, Washoe, and Maidu tribes do still reside in the diocese. As we do with all residents in our diocese, Catholic Charities actively

serves our indigenous populations through services assisting with food, housing, healthcare, behavioral health, and educational needs as well as supporting and advocating for environmental protections to traditional native lands.

Polarization, prejudice and hatred continue to poison the social fabric of our country. This poison, facilitating the dehumanization of mass numbers of people and indiscriminate deportation, is the same poison that led to sad chapters in the history of our country such as the mass relocations of Native Americans, enslavement of Africans, and the indiscriminate imprisonment of Japanese-Americans in internment camps during WWII.

In the words of Archbishop Paul Etienne of Seattle: "May we choose, again and again, the path of truth, justice, charity, and peace."

A pathway to truth, justice, charity and peace may be found in Pope Leo XIV's Jan. 9 address, "*Dilexi Te*":

https://www.vatican.va/content/leo-xiv/en/apost_exhortations/documents/20251004-dilexi-te.html

Blessings to all,

Deacon Mike