

Due Respect

[O]n many occasions, in a systematic and organized way, your people have been misunderstood and excluded from society. Some have considered your values, culture and traditions to be inferior. Others, intoxicated by power, money and market trends, have stolen your lands or contaminated them. How sad this is! How worthwhile it would be for each of us to examine our conscience and learn to say, “forgive me!”, “forgive me, brothers and sisters!” Today’s world, ravaged as it is by a throwaway culture, needs you!

-Pope Francis

Holy Mass with Representatives of the Indigenous Communities of Chiapas Mexico, February 2016

Pope Francis’ prayer intention for July 2016 was for Respect for Indigenous Peoples (click below for video): [“That indigenous peoples, whose identity and very existence are threatened, will be shown due respect.”](#)

During this month when sanitized versions of the first Thanksgiving abound, let us pause to consider that not everyone views the holiday as a cause for celebration:

“Since 1970, Native Americans and our supporters have gathered at noon on Cole’s Hill in Plymouth to commemorate a National Day of Mourning on the US thanksgiving holiday. Many Native Americans do not celebrate the arrival of the Pilgrims and other European settlers. Thanksgiving day is a reminder of the genocide of millions of Native people, the theft of Native lands, and the relentless assault on Native culture. Participants in National Day of Mourning honor Native ancestors and the struggles of Native peoples to survive today. It is a day of remembrance and spiritual connection as well as a protest of the racism and oppression which Native Americans continue to experience.”

-United American Indians of New England



The Holy Father with members of the Pataxo people, an indigenous group in Brazil

Doctrine of Discovery

In the 1400s, during the European nations’ forays into the lands now called Africa, South America and the Caribbean, Popes made official pronouncements (called papal bulls) stating that those lands were by right the possession of the colonizing powers. The rights of the indigenous peoples who were already living there were ignored. This Church teaching laid the basis for later court decisions in the United States which took land rights away from Native Americans and gave them to the U.S. government. While later Church teaching abrogated those original papal bulls, the effects remain.

[The Catholic Sisters of Loretto](#) explain the situation in this way: “More than 500 years later these papal decrees still shape the way many people live, think, and relate to indigenous populations. They continue to provide legal justification and lend moral credence for states’ exercise of jurisdiction over traditional peoples. Decisions based on discriminatory notions of the superiority of one race, religion, or any other such grouping over others, continue to negatively affect the lives of people for generations, even centuries.”

Indigenous people from Canada and the United States have been asking the Vatican to officially rescind the statements. In a productive meeting earlier this year with Cardinal Tomasi, chair of the Pontifical Council for Justice & Peace, native leaders explained their concerns and are waiting for further action from the Vatican.



Clergy of many faiths from across the United States participate in a prayer circle Nov. 3 in front of a bridge in Standing Rock, N.D., where demonstrators confront police during a protest of the Dakota Access pipeline. Demonstrations against the pipeline are taking place on the Standing Rock Indian Reservation near Cannonball, N.D. (Catholic News Service photo/Stephanie Keith, Reuters)

Standing with Standing Rock by Rev. Peter Sawtell Excerpted from:

Global Catholic Climate Movement www.catholicclimatemovement.global/standing-with-standing-rock

The Dakota Access Pipeline, [DAPL] now under construction, is planned to run from northwestern North Dakota to southern Illinois. It is designed to carry more than 500,000 barrels of oil per day from the Bakken oil fields near the Canadian border. At the core of the Standing Rock dispute are two issues about the routing of the pipeline: it would cross under the Missouri River just north of the reservation, and it crosses land that the Sioux tribe considers sacred.

1) Take Native claims seriously. As a matter of justice, I have been giving attention to this issue for several months because it is one arising from Native peoples, and dealing with Native lands. In Christian ethics, there is the principle of a “preferential option for the poor”, which calls on us to take very seriously the experiences and the voices of those who have been marginalized and oppressed.

2) Ties to the larger climate movement. The Standing Rock message is not a “not in my backyard” call to put the pipeline somewhere else. It is a call to leave fossil fuels in the ground, and turn toward a way of life that protects ecosystems, and provides justice for those most impacted by petroleum development.

3) Permitting process and lack of consultation. The tribe’s legal claims include distressing details about irregularities in the process by which the pipeline received federal permits... The tribe claims that consultations about the pipeline’s impacts to sacred sites and culturally important landscapes — required under the National Historic Preservation Act — were not taken seriously.

4) Risk of the pipeline at river crossings. The Dakota Access Pipeline would be buried under the Missouri River just to the north — upstream — of the Standing Rock reservation. The river is the primary source of water for the reservation, for domestic uses, agriculture, and ecological health. The risk of the pipeline leaking oil into the river is a primary motivation for the protests, because it would be catastrophic for the tribe’s 8,000 residents, and for millions of other people downstream.

An action you can take: Contact the White House by phone at 202-456-1111, and ask President Obama to rescind the Army Corps of Engineers’ Permit for the Dakota Access Pipeline.

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