

Eco-justice at stake for Standing Rock people in USA



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The Episcopal Church in North Dakota, in an open letter dated 25 October 2016 and penned by Rev. John Floberg, called on communities of faith to converge at the Standing Rock Sioux Reservation in North Dakota, USA from 2-4 November to “stand witness to water protectors’ acts of compassion for God’s creation, and to the transformative power of God’s love to make a way out of no way.”

Responding to the call, representatives from the United Church of Christ, United Methodist Church and other churches in the United States and Canada came to the banks of the Missouri River for prayerful, peaceful action. Among the clergy present was Bishop Mark MacDonald, national indigenous bishop of the Anglican Church of Canada and World Council of Churches (WCC) president for North America.

“I think that peace, from an indigenous perspective, involves unique perspectives...a spiritual centre that sees a holistic view of life anchored in the Creator; organization of political borders by the need for peace; and a general stance toward life and political development of militant nonviolence,” MacDonald reflected.

On 3 November, “a day of protective witness in solidarity with the Standing Rock Sioux Nation and with the water protectors,” church people from various traditions prayed

together.

“Creator, you loved creation into being. Your goodness is present in the land and waters, in the creatures and peoples you created. You call us to be in right relation with all living things. Be present today, and every day, where people stand in peaceful defense of your creation. We recognize your presence in Standing Rock, with indigenous peoples who are protecting the waters. May we also be present in spirit and in truth. We recognize your presence in our own country where indigenous peoples also stand peaceably in defense of land and waters. May we be present in witness and solidarity. We recognize and repent for the violence that has marked relations with indigenous peoples on Turtle Island. We claim your challenge of truth and justice, and your promise of healing and reconciliation.”

Since April 2016, people from more than 100 tribal nations, environmental advocates and indigenous rights defenders have protested against the proposed construction of the controversial Dakota Access pipeline (DAPL). The oil pipeline, connecting production fields in North Dakota to refineries in Illinois, would run alongside the Standing Rock Sioux Reservation and traverse the Missouri River.

While proponents of the DAPL contend that the project will bring jobs and economic expansion, indigenous communities worry about harmful impacts on water and soils. The Missouri River is a key source of drinking water for many communities in the area. Moreover, the DAPL is said to cross Sundance grounds and village sites – lands deemed sacred by the Sioux Nations, the Arikara, the Mandan and the Northern Cheyenne.

“The construction of the pipeline, which would not only restrict access to drinking water for indigenous communities but would also pollute the river, is clearly a violation of the right to water,” said Dinesh Suna, coordinator of the WCC Ecumenical Water Network.

“Indigenous peoples' spirituality and identity are so closely tied to land and connection to ancestors that the DAPL constitutes not only a desecration of sacred sites but is one more violation of indigenous peoples' rights, explained Dr Katalina Tahaafe-Williams, programme executive for Mission and Evangelism.

“Saying ‘no’ to the DAPL, which will potentially deprive already marginalised groups of basic needs and foster fossil fuel dependency, is also a matter of economic and climate justice,” said Athena Peralta, WCC programme executive for Economic Justice and Ecological Justice.

The peaceful protests against the DAPL had been met with “the repressive power of the state...armed riot police...(and) increased arrests ” observed the open letter from the Episcopal Church of North Dakota. A signature campaign launched by the United Church of Christ condemned the “militarized” response.

“We call on authorities to stop this shameful abuse of Standing Rock Sioux Tribes' rights to their ancestral domain and natural resources,” said Tahaafe-Williams.

“The pilgrimage of justice and peace invites us to ‘stand with Standing Rock’ and support the indigenous communities who are standing up against the destruction of the land,” Peralta said.

Added Suna, “The EWN backs these communities in their struggle for water justice.”

[Faith leaders from all traditions called to stand with water protectors at Standing Rock](#)(United Church of Christ press release of 28 October)

[Clergy Call to Solidarity at Standing Rock](#)

[Stand with Standing Rock, Pray with Standing Rock on November 3, 2016](#) (Kairos Canada press release of 2 November)

[United Church of Christ Clergy Call to Action](#)

The World Council of Churches promotes Christian unity in faith, witness and service for a just and peaceful world. An ecumenical fellowship of churches founded in 1948, today the WCC brings together 348 Protestant, Orthodox, Anglican and other churches representing more than 550 million Christians in over 120 countries, and works cooperatively with the Roman Catholic Church. The WCC general secretary is the Rev. Dr Olav Fykse Tveit, from the [Lutheran] Church of Norway.

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