

AIW Address 400 Years of White Supremacist Colonialism

WHEREAS, 2020 marks the 400th anniversary of the first Mayflower voyage, transporting Pilgrims from England to the North American Atlantic Coast;

WHEREAS, the Pilgrims' invasion of the Wampanoag people led to the enslavement of Indigenous peoples on the East Coast and the removal of and genocide against Indigenous peoples across the continent;

WHEREAS, many Unitarian Universalist congregations uncritically trace their origins to the Pilgrims' "Free Church" tradition – a mythos that sanctifies white supremacy and depends upon erasure of Indigenous peoples;[1]

WHEREAS, white settler-colonialism is extractive, expansive,[2] and based in violent patriarchy – resulting in a preponderance of Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women[3] and creating unsustainable conditions for all living beings;[4]

WHEREAS, the Plymouth Plantation (a for-profit corporation with stockholders in London) established the corporate pattern of using police to extract resources from Indigenous peoples, a pattern repeated at Standing Rock nation and other Indigenous nations that resist pipeline projects and other extractive industries;[5]

WHEREAS, the Mashpee Wampanoag Tribe, whose ancestors' lands were invaded by the Pilgrims in 1620, and who have inhabited and stewarded parts of present-day Massachusetts for more than 12,000 years, came under attack from the Trump administration in March of this year and were notified that their reservation lands were being terminated; and[6]

WHEREAS, the administration continues in this and other attacks on Indigenous peoples' lands, sacred sites, and sovereignty – even as a federal district judge has temporarily blocked the taking of the Mashpee Wampanoag's lands.[7]

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED THAT we, the delegates of the 2020 General Assembly of the Unitarian Universalist Association, call upon the Unitarian Universalist Association and its member congregations to:

Continue to gather in solidarity with the Mashpee Wampanoag Tribe, Standing Rock nation, and all Indigenous peoples struggling to preserve their lands, waters, peoples, sacred sites, and sovereignty;

Continue to push for release of Indigenous Water Protectors from prisons, end public policies that criminalize resistance to extractive colonialism, and adopt a vision of prison abolition;

Work nationally, statewide, and locally on public policy that is decolonizing – such as establishing Indigenous Peoples Day, including Indigenous peoples' histories in public education curricula, and eliminating racist monuments, flags, and mascots;

Work to stop and reverse ecological harm in genuine collaboration with and taking leadership from communities most consistently and harshly impacted by extractive exploitation of land, water, air, and all beings;

Research, identify, and acknowledge the Indigenous peoples historically and/or currently connected with the land occupied by congregations, and find ways to act in solidarity with or even partner with those Indigenous peoples; and

Examine practices relative to Indigenous peoples, particularly the narratives regarding UU origins and US holidays including Thanksgiving.

[1] Unitarian Universalist history often miscredits the “covenant communities” of the Pilgrims with bringing democracy and the “Free Church” to the North American continent – and with planting these values within UU tradition. This telling of UU history denies Indigenous histories, cultures, spiritual traditions, and rights.

[2] The colonial project initiated by the Pilgrims and perpetuated in our time demands more lands, waters, and resources, such that the conquest includes the whole continent, Hawaii, and other parts of the world.

[3] This violently patriarchal model also leads to domestic violence, child abuse and neglect, and other forms of personal violence.

[4] “All living beings” includes the descendants of white settler-colonialism, whose ancestors arrived on this land traumatized by generations of empire-building in their European homelands.

[5] The corporate and state retaliation against the Water Protector movement at Standing Rock nation, Cheyenne River nation, and elsewhere is the present-day manifestation of the Plymouth plantation model, with at least five Indigenous Water Protectors becoming political prisoners of the U.S. government – and numerous states adopting legislation to criminalize resistance to extractive industries.

[6] The National Congress of American Indians (NCAI) declared this unjust move a “devastating blow to not only the Mashpee Wampanoag Tribe, but to all of Indian Country,” and statements of solidarity came from many entities, including the Unitarian Universalist Association.

[7] NCAI insists that we must remain “vigilant and stand united.”