

SPIRIT ^{OF} _{THE} LAND

A Devotional Honoring Native American Heritage Month

Presented by the JUST *Love* MINISTRY



November is Native American Heritage Month. This is a time each year to recognize the history, culture, and contributions of Indigenous people. Our Lutheran faith compels us to learn about and celebrate the diverse stories of our Indigenous siblings and confess, repent, and repair the ways we have failed to do so in the past, causing immense harm. This is a commitment that our church, the ELCA, made in 2016 with the [“Repudiation of the Doctrine of Discovery.”](#) and in 2021 with [“Declaration of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America to American Indian and Alaska Native People.”](#) The latter is the primary inspiration for this resource. Please take the time to read it in its entirety, with this reflective resource.

Introduction

“I am giving you a new road to walk,” he said. “In the same way I have loved you, you are to love each other. This kind of love will be the sign for all people that you are walking the road with me.” ~ **John 13:34-35**, [First Nations Version](#)*

Reflect

1. What stories, cultural traditions, and contributions of Indigenous people inspire you?
2. What do the stories, traditions and contributions of Indigenous people teach you about the Creator, Jesus, and/or The Great Spirit?
3. Do you know any Indigenous leaders whose work and witness influence our church and our faith?

Act

Explore the contributions of Indigenous leaders:



Vine Deloria Jr. (1933-2005), was a citizen of the Standing Rock Sioux and the son of an Episcopal missionary. Among his many graduate studies, he studied theology at Lutheran School of Theology and was a prolific author, theologian, historian, and activist for Native American rights. [“On Our Relationship with the Unseen”](#)



Tink Tinker, of the Osage Nation, is a prominent American Indian theologian and scholar who taught at Iliff School of Theology for three decades and is the author of many articles, the books *Spirit and Resistance: Political Theology and American Indian Liberation*, *Missionary Conquest: The Gospel and Native American Theology*, and co-author of *Native American Theology*. [“Repudiating Discovery and Dominion with Tink Tinker”](#)

*Throughout this devotion you will find scriptural texts for reflection in the New Revised Standard Version Updated Edition (NRSVue) and the First Nations Version, an Indigenous Bible Translation. Sometimes hearing scriptures in a different language and/or worldview invites us to see/hear the Word with fresh eyes and ears. Not all Native ministries agree with or use the First Nations Version. It is offered only to invite fresh eyes and ears.

Act

Explore the contributions of Indigenous leaders:



Vance Blackfox is a citizen of the Cherokee nation and the director of the ELCA's Indigenous Ministries & Tribal Relations. ["Telling the Truth about the Lands We Inhabit"](#)



Dr. Kelly Sherman-Conroy is a proud member of the Oglala Sioux Tribe. She is a storyteller, poet, philosopher, pastor, lover of all art forms and a mom, whose journey has made her a beacon of inspiration and change within the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) and beyond. As the first Native woman to earn a PhD in theology within the ELCA, she has paved the way for future generations of Indigenous scholars. ["Indigenous People's Liturgical Celebration"](#)
www.Kellysconroy.com | <https://scaredthoughts.blog/aboutme>



Our Confession: To the American Indian and Alaska Native communities of the ELCA

In our baptisms, we renounce the forces of evil, the devil, and all the empty promises of the evil one and then affirm our trust in the promises of the triune God. Similarly, this declaration has a three-part confession and three-part affirmation/pledge. We have broken up each portion of the confession and pledge with questions and resources for reflection and action.

"All who walk in broken ways are trampling over the law of the Chosen One, for all broken ways go against his law. You know that he came to do away with bad hearts and broken ways and that in him there are no broken ways. The ones who remain in harmony with him do not walk in broken ways. Those who walk in broken ways have not truly seen or known him.

My much-loved children, do not let anyone take you down the wrong path. The Chosen One always did what was right. So the ones who keep walking his right ways show that they are in good standing with him. The ones who stay with walking in broken ways are following the evil trickster, for he has been walking in broken ways from the beginning. The reason Creator's Son appeared was to bring an end to the ways of the evil trickster. Those who have been born from the Great Spirit do not keep walking in broken ways. They are not able to, for Creator is their Father and he has planted his message deep within them to stay."

~ 1 John 3:4-9, [First Nations Version*](#)

Reflect

1. In what ways have our communities de-valued Indigenous religions & lifeways?
2. What is the difference between seeing Indigenous people as “minorities” instead of sovereign nations?
3. What actions could we take to learn more about and connect with our Indigenous neighbors?

Act

Books to read

- *Lewis and Clark, Through Indian Eyes*, ed. Alvin M. Josephy, Jr.
- *Indigenous Continent*, by Pekka Hämäläinen

ELCA videos to watch

- [Indigenous Ministries & Tribal Relations Report \(YouTube\)](#)
- [Powwow 101 \(YouTube\)](#)

Websites to explore

- [ELCA Indigenous Ministries and Tribal Relations](#)
- [Native American Hymns & Worship Resources](#)



Our Confession: To the American Indian and Alaska Native community in the U.S.

“And to the blind guides who say, ‘A promise made outside the lodge can be broken, but one made inside must be kept,’ you are so foolish and blind! It is not the lodge that makes the promise good, but it is the Great Spirit over the lodge who sees and hears all promises. “Or you say, ‘A promise made before a ceremony can be broken, but one made during a ceremony must be kept.’ Are you so blind? Can you not see that the Great Spirit sees and hears all promises and expects you to keep them? “It matters not whether a promise is made inside or outside the lodge, or before or during a sacred ceremony. All promises on the earth below or in the spirit-world above are made before the eyes of the Great Spirit, who sees and hears everything. “Sorrow and trouble wait for you scroll keepers and Separated Ones (Pharisees). With false faces you are careful to do what tribal law says by giving a tenth of each little herb in your garden, but you ignore the more important instructions such as justice, kindness, and honesty. You are spiritually blind guides, for you strain out a small flea from your water pouch, but swallow a whole moose.

~ Matthew 23:16-24, [First Nations Version](#)*

Reflect

1. How have you and your congregation benefited from the Doctrine of Discovery and stolen lands?
2. What do you know about the sovereign nations that once resided on the lands of your congregation and community?
3. What are the issues most important to native youth in your area? If you are not sure, how could you find out?

Act

Books to read

- *What We Have Endured*, A novel of the Seminole Wars, by John & Mary Lou Missall and Willie Johns
- *Citizens of A Stolen Land*, A Ho-Chunk History of the Nineteenth Century United States, by Stephen Kantrowitz.

Video to watch

- [The Doctrine of Discovery: Unmasking the Domination Code](#)

Websites to explore

- [Interactive Native Land Map](#)
- [ELCA Land Acknowledgement Guide](#)
- [Explore the “Being a Good Neighbor” workshop from SW Florida Reset Center](#)



Our Confession: To non-Indigenous communities of the ELCA

¹⁷If the whole body were an eye, how could it hear? If the whole body were an ear, how could it smell? ¹⁸But in his wisdom the Great Spirit has given each body part its own place, so it can fulfill the purpose it was created for and make Creator's heart glad. ¹⁹If all the parts were the same, how could there be a body? ²⁰Even though there is only one body, it was made to have many parts. ²⁵This makes it clear that Creator's purpose is to keep the body of the Chosen One from division. It shows each of us how much we need each other. ²⁶If one part of the body hurts, the whole body hurts. If one part of the body is honored, the whole body celebrates. ²⁷So then, together you all form the body of the Chosen One, and each one of you has a place in that body.

~ 1 Corinthians 12:17-20; 25-27, [First Nations Version](#)*

Reflect

1. How have we been complicit and benefited from:
 - erasing Indigenous peoples, cultures, languages, religions?
 - failing to recognize harm done to Indigenous people?
2. What is your congregations' and synod's history with Indigenous people in your area?

Act

Books and articles to read

- *A Native American Theology*, by Clara Sue Kidwell, Homer Noley, George E. "Tink" Tinker
- ["The silent epidemic: Indigenous ELCA women combat gender injustice and violence"](#)
- ["Community is home: Indigenous ministries meet people's needs"](#)

Videos to watch

- [ELCA's Truth Seeking and Truth Telling Initiative on Indian Boarding Schools](#)
- [Conversation with Indian Boarding School Survivor - George McCauley](#)
- [Doctrine of Discovery: Stolen Lands, Strong Hearts](#)

Websites to explore

- [ELCA and Indian Boarding Schools](#)



Our Pledge: To the American Indian and Alaska Native communities of the ELCA

²⁹But wanting to vindicate himself, he asked Jesus, "And who is my neighbor?"
³⁰Jesus replied, "A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho and fell into the hands of robbers, who stripped him, beat him, and took off, leaving him half dead. ³¹Now by chance a priest was going down that road, and when he saw him he passed by on the other side. ³²So likewise a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. ³³But a Samaritan while traveling came upon him, and when he saw him he was moved with compassion. ³⁴He went to him and bandaged his wounds, treating them with oil and wine. Then he put him on his own animal, brought him to an inn, and took care of him. ³⁵The next day he took out two denarii, gave them to the innkeeper, and said, 'Take care of him, and when I come back I will repay you whatever more you spend.' ³⁶Which of these three, do you think, was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of the robbers?" ³⁷He said, "The one who showed him mercy." Jesus said to him, "Go and do likewise."

~ Luke 10:29-37, NRSVue

Reflect

1. What forums can we create or join to better understand our Indigenous neighbors?
2. In what ways can our congregations share and respond to local Indigenous concerns?
3. What forms of leadership, education, and certification that are Native-focused and Native-led can your church participate in?

Act

- Partner with your synod to identify and reach out to local Indigenous communities.
- Develop support strategies for existing outreach efforts.
- Contribute to the ELCA Native American Ministries Fund.



Our Pledge: To the American Indian and Alaska Native communities in the U.S.

My brothers and sisters, if anyone is detected in a transgression, you who have received the Spirit should restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness. Take care that you yourselves are not tempted. ²Bear one another's burdens, and in this way you will fulfill[a] the law of Christ.

~ Galatians 6:1-2, NRSVue

Reflect

1. Which Native nations are currently settled in your region?
2. Are there treaty rights currently being threatened with any of these nations?
3. Has your congregation engaged in advocacy at the local, state or federal level?
Around which issues?

Act

- Explore the Native nations in your area ["American Indian/Alaska Native Fact Sheet for the State of Florida"](#)
- Join the Florida Bahamas Synod at Advocacy Days (TBA)
- Financially support Native organizations that educate, support, and interpret the rights of Indigenous people and advocate for those rights locally, at the state-level and federally.

Pledge: To non-Indigenous communities of the ELCA

²So he said to them, “When you pray, say:
Father,[a] may your name be revered as holy.
May your kingdom come.[b]
³Give us each day our daily bread.[c]
⁴And forgive us our sins,
for we ourselves forgive everyone indebted to us.
And do not bring us to the time of trial.”[d]

~ Luke 11:2-4, NRSVue

Reflect

1. How can your congregation contribute to honoring Native leadership, learning from them, and securing a place for their leadership at decision-making tables in your congregation and in your community?
2. What learning events could you host in your congregation this year to teach your congregation and community about the Doctrine of Discovery and this country’s history of family separation and forced assimilation?

Act

- Host a congregation learning event
- Financially support the American Indian Alaska Native Lutheran Assoc., Inc. at www.facebook.com/ELCA/AIANLA
- Financially support the [Theological Education for Indigenous Leaders \(TEIL\)](#) program through PLTS



Conclusion

¹³But now I am coming to you, and I speak these things in the world so that they may have my joy made complete in themselves.[a] ¹⁴I have given them your word, and the world has hated them because they do not belong to the world, just as I do not belong to the world. ¹⁵I am not asking you to take them out of the world, but I ask you to protect them from the evil one.[b] ¹⁶They do not belong to the world, just as I do not belong to the world. ¹⁷Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth. ¹⁸As you have sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world. ¹⁹And for their sakes I sanctify myself, so that they also may be sanctified in truth. ²⁰“I ask not only on behalf of these but also on behalf of those who believe in me through their word, ²¹that they may all be one. As you, Father, are in me and I am in you, may they also be in us,[c] so that the world may believe that you have sent me.

~ John 17:13-21, NRSVue

Reflect & Act

1. For many Native communities, Thanksgiving is commemorated as a [Day of Mourning](#). If you are in the Plymouth area, you are invited to “to stand in solidarity with the Wampanoag people and the United American Indians of New England at this year’s National Day of Mourning and to gain deeper insight into their vital mission” on Thursday, November 28th at noon. If you are not in or around Massachusetts, how can you stand in solidarity with your Native siblings?
2. What other ways can you and your congregation “commit to the work of undoing past evils, building right relationships with Native nations and Native peoples, and remaining faithful to our shared journeys toward truth and healing”?

