

Healing Turtle Island: An Event of Cultural Reconciliation

Remembering, Recognizing, Renewing

Delivered by representatives of the Collegiate Church of New York to representatives of the Native American people on 27 November 2009 at Bowling Green, Manhattan, New York

Today we pay homage to forces greater than ourselves that exist in the human spirit: the greater Spirit of unity, wholeness and truth that surrounds and embraces us all.

Here, at the foot of Manhattan Island — the place called *Manabatta* by the Lenape people — there had been a steady “Trail of Hope,” interrupted by historical events long ago. Now, a people who call themselves the Collegiate Church of New York seek to remember, recognize and renew a connection with this Spirit and the people of its original deep expression, our Native American brothers and sisters.

Four hundred years ago, a voyage here by a few of our ancestors became the symbol of great change to all of our ancestors. The journey of a single explorer, Henry Hudson, opened a gateway for a new culture and history.

Following Henry Hudson was the Dutch West Indies Company, complete with its own customs, laws and policies. Coming less for religious freedom and more for the abundance of resources, the company poured through this gateway and formed a company town they called New Amsterdam. The company town had a company church. The Collegiate Church, established in 1628, has been and continues to be part of this history.

As traveling preachers, who moved collegially among congregations in Brooklyn, Manhattan and Staten Island, we were the conscience of this company.

We were the first Christian church to permanently settle at this gateway. On this site, the well traveled path of our Native American brothers and sisters met the gateway’s first fort, Fort Amsterdam, built to serve our newly arrived ancestors. The trail is known now as Broadway – and by what we do here today, again as “the Trail of Hope.”

In spite of the ways of life of those here before us, the Dutch West Indies Company began the steady imposition of its own culture on Native peoples.

Our forbears often had good intentions, engaging in acts of kindness, expressions of remorse, and compassion for lives lost and lands taken; but there was also ill will, great cruelty, acts of indignity and degradation, all with life-altering consequences through the generations.

We, the Collegiate Church, remember our part in these actions.

Despite being a faith of brotherhood and sisterhood and love for neighbor, our actions towards you, our Native brothers and sisters, caused great suffering under the imposition of this new culture and its accompanying economic and legal systems.

We, the Collegiate Church, recognize our part in your suffering.

We took, borrowed and bartered from you, our brothers and sisters, viewing you more often as a resource rather than a people with whom to be in relationship. Our actions set into motion a radical altering of an entire way of life.

With pain, we, the Collegiate Church, remember our part in these events.

We consumed your resources, dehumanized your people, and disregarded your culture, along with your dreams, hopes and great love for this land.

We express sorrow for our part in these actions.

The Lenape people and their kin wished and envisioned good health and a good life for themselves and for their children – and a continuation of their lives upon this great land. They farmed, they fished, and they hunted. They built homes and they made trails across this great land. They gave thanks – and they give thanks today in places far from their original homes – for the earth and the sun, for the streams, lakes, rivers, ocean, clean air, and for all gifts of sustenance and life provided for them by our common and our truly Great Creator.

We honor your vision and wish to walk together on this new “Trail of Hope.”

Examining our history for life-giving renewal in our present day, the Ministers, Elders, and Deacons of The Reformed Protestant Dutch Church of the City of New York, known now as the Collegiate Church of New York, remember the past, recognize our role in it, and renew the present with you. Intersections, a signature initiative of the Collegiate Church of New York, along with her Collegiate colleagues, seeks social justice, peace and reconciliation and has engaged in important relationships with Native American communities in the New York metropolitan region. This relationship building between our communities is establishing a spirit of collaboration and advocacy.

In the many commemorations of the 400th anniversary of Henry Hudson's voyage, Native peoples' voices have not been sufficiently heard. Today, we seek to provide a corrective balance. We wish to also acknowledge the influences of Native American people on early Dutch life and on the present-day vibrancy of this city. Native American beliefs, customs, and abiding spirit continue to have invaluable lessons for our society. Many of the difficulties in our own culture are in need of your wisdom.

We place ourselves in your teaching.

Moving forward together, we wish to continue to renew and deepen our connection, advocacy and support of your peoples, including financial and programmatic resources to the many Native American communities in this, the largest urban Native American population in the United States. We wish to persuade other individuals, organizations and communities to engage in these important efforts.

We humbly request an invitation into a lasting partnership with you.

Extending further into the future, our intention is to develop ongoing and sustained relationships with you, our Native American brothers and sisters. We have much to learn and much to offer each other's cultures and traditions.

Therefore, we, the Ministers, Elders, and Deacons of the Consistory of the Collegiate Church of New York, on behalf of our members, pledge to honor this relationship as we move forward together in the spirit of wholeness that this day represents.