



NAIC
Native American International Caucus
of the
United Methodist Church

August 26, 2021

PRESS RELEASE:

Historic Native American Church, St. John UMC in Bridgeton NJ, vandalized by apparent hate crime

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On August 13, 2021, the property of the historic Native American church, St. John United Methodist Church, was extensively vandalized, incurring thousands of dollars of damage to its sacred cemetery, burial grounds and headstones, in addition to a recently installed Veterans Memorial stone, flagpole and landscaping. The horrific incident has created significant fear among the congregation and community members and more heartache in the wake of the death of their recently retired pastor, Rev. Roy Bundy.

We pray for the lost souls who feel it is okay to attack our Native American church, which means they have also chosen to attack our people. Elders are afraid to visit the graves of their loved ones. Neighbors are nervous and have a right to feel frightened. But we will fight back. We will not be made invisible ever again. We are a people who honor our ancestors. We continue to seek their wisdom even after they have walked from this place to place beyond. We will continue to resist all efforts to disrespect or dehumanize our ancestors, our people and our culture. We will continue to seek justice and peace with our neighbors, those who befriend us as well as those who persecute us.

St. John, which celebrates its 180th anniversary this month, is one of Bridgeton's historic sites having been designated as such in 2017. The church was founded in 1841 by the Pierce brothers shortly after the Indian Removal Act that was enacted during the Presidency of Andrew Jackson. That legislation required the Nanticoke Lenni Lenape (and many other Native Americans) to be forcibly removed from their homes. While some of our ancestors were ordered to northeast Oklahoma with many painful stops along the way, many others stayed in New Jersey, hiding in plain sight. The church became the gathering place for the Tribe until the mid-1900s when families began to assemble publicly without fear of reprisal. During those 100 plus years, the church was the keeper of the Nanticoke Lenni Lenape culture.

Now we ask for your prayers for the church and tribal members as well as for the perpetrators and the ongoing investigation by the New Jersey State Police and the Attorney General's office of New Jersey who are working to officially determine if this is a hate crime. We also ask for your concrete expressions of God's love through financial donations to the church to help with the needed repairs of the cemetery and restoration of the many significant ministries within the community that were interrupted by this shameful event. Gifts can be made to: gnjumc.org; at the top, click on "Give to your church" and put in St. John's name, Delaware Bay District, with church number #9029. May we continue to stand in God's truth, light and perseverance.

Submitted by the Native American International Caucus officers and members; Chairperson, Ragghi Rain, ragghirain@gmail.com