

Dear Church Leaders of the Greater Northwest Area,

We are writing today to encourage you to participate in Native American Ministries Sunday because of the incredible meaning and value of Native people and communities in our region and to raise awareness of the suffering our Native siblings have endured at the hands of Christian leaders, including our heritage denomination, the Methodist Episcopal Church. Native American Ministries Sunday is officially celebrated on Sunday, April 14, 2024; however, you can celebrate this on a most convenient date for your congregation.

We are part of the group of youth and adults who were supported by our communities and conferences to attend S.L.A.M. Trips (Students Learn About Missions) on the Yakama Reservation during the summer of 2023 (see photo). During the summer, S.L.A.M. Trips leaders taught us about the history of their tribe. They graciously invited us into their sacred spaces and told us about their meaning. They showed us the grounds of the Indian Boarding School, which was started by one of our clergy (Portland FUMC's second pastor), James Wilbur, who was a missionary and Indian agent for twenty years, beginning in 1860.



We learned how they required Yakima tribal members to deny their heritage and beliefs and assimilate into Western European cultural norms. Not only were we taught about these historical events, but we were also able to experience what it was like to be on the grounds of the school. One of the most moving experiences was to enter the detention room where children were required to go who spoke their native language, wore native clothing, or in any way acknowledged their history or traditions. It was sobering as we imagined what it must have been like for these young children to experience such hatred for their own culture.

We know that the church leaders of the time acted out of ignorance. We know many of them changed their hearts and minds. We believe it is essential to speak the truth of these atrocities to continue to bring an awareness of the history of our denomination and the harm it caused as we seek to be a part of both healing and appreciating the gifts and fullness of our Native siblings and communities. In doing so, we can all work toward taking responsibility for the harm these actions have caused.

On our mission trip, we learned the word *Yáych'unál*, which means courage. We ask all churches to have *Yáych'unál*, acknowledge the impact of our foremothers and forefathers, and work toward (re)conciliation and healing. Working together, we can affect change within our church and heal relationships with our native siblings.

Acts 3:12-19 speaks of how the community bore witness to the life, suffering, and death of Jesus. It then states that it is known that these acts were done in ignorance and invites the community to repentance and transformation. Repentance doesn't just mean saying you're sorry. It is turning away from the sin and doing something different. It means making amends with those who were harmed.

This takes *Yáych'umal*. We hope that we may be in right relationship with our native siblings, and we understand that telling the truth is an integral part of that process.

In this document, fellow students and leaders who participated in our trip have worked together to use the lectionary text for the week (Acts 3:12-19) to prepare and share a call to worship, offering **prayer and benediction**. We hope that these resources that our experiences have shaped can be a gift to connect our ministries across the Greater Northwest Area and that we might grow in relationship, partnership, and awareness with our Native American siblings throughout our region.

Additional resources from UMCGiving can be found at: <https://www.umc.org/en/content/native-american-ministries-sunday-ministry-article>

Thank you for your time and consideration in reading this letter. We pray that God has touched your heart through our words.

Sincerely,

The youth of Portland First United Methodist Church  
*on behalf of the 2023 S.L.A.M. Trips GNW UMC Participants*

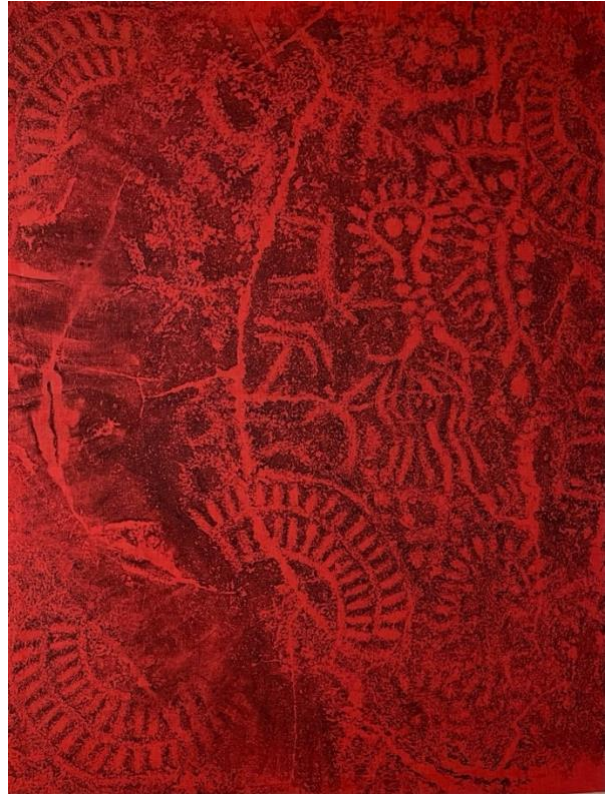


Photo: Petroglyph Ink Rubbing (1971) made by Elfriede McKay Tingleaf. The petroglyph is located north of Vantage, WA. These are among a series of other petroglyphs that were relocated due to the construction of the Wanapum Dam.

## CALL TO WORSHIP

*Written by the youth of Tigard United Methodist Church on behalf of the 2023 S.L.A.M. Trips GNW UMC Participants*

One: We come to this place seeking faith;

**All: May God strengthen our faith in all that we do and witness.**

One: We come to this place seeking forgiveness;

**All: Open our eyes and ears to the places where we have acted in ignorance.**

One: We come to this place seeking to learn;

**All: Help us to know our neighbors and our history.**

One: We come to this place seeking transformation;

**All: Give us all the courage to step into a new way of being.**

## OFFERING PRAYER

*Written by the youth of The Samoan Mission (a ministry of Canyonville UMC and Myrtle Creek UMC) on behalf of the 2023 S.L.A.M. Trips GNW UMC Participants*

God of all generations, thank you for all of your blessings, seen and unseen. Thank you for the richness of the diversity of your creation and in our communities. As we present our gifts to you today, multiply them so that we might participate with you in your transforming love that we have witnessed, and are fortunate to witness in indigenous communities around us. Transform these gifts for the ministries with, for, and by Native Americans to speak truth, celebrate culture and language, bring just healing, and breathe the Spirit of transformation. Amen.

## BENEDICTION

*Written by the youth of Tigard United Methodist Church on behalf of the 2023 S.L.A.M. Trips GNW UMC Participants*

May you go forth from this place and be a witness to God's love for you and all people. Grant us the courage to repent, the strength to heal, and the wisdom to seek reconciliation. May our actions honor your sacred teachings and foster unity among all nations.