

R20-1 Resolution to Acknowledge First Nations in Georgia

Resolved, that the 114th Annual Council of the Diocese of Atlanta, meeting virtually on November 13-14, 2020, in order to fulfill the recommendations of Resolution 2009-D035 passed at the 76th General Convention of The Episcopal Church (as well as other relevant Resolutions including 2018-D010, 2018-D011, 2015-A024, and others), acknowledge that the people of the Diocese of Atlanta live, work, and minister on land that was the home of native inhabitants in the tens of thousands of years preceding European invasion, and that these First Peoples suffered grievously as a result of transmitted diseases, governmental rivalries, dishonored treaties, and the eventual forced removal from these lands within the borders of the Diocese. And be it further

Resolved, the Diocese of Atlanta shall therefore (1) acknowledge these injustices, (2) pay respect to the First Peoples (including the Cherokee, Muscogee [Creek], Oconee, and others who lived in Middle and North Georgia) upon whose lands the parishes and various ministries of the Diocese of Atlanta are now undertaken, and (3) address justice issues affecting Native Americans living within the boundaries of the Diocese. And be it further

Resolved, that the Diocese of Atlanta, in order to (1) acknowledge the injustices to the First Peoples, include appropriate language on its website and printed materials along these lines: *“The Diocese of Atlanta is situated on the ancestral traditional territory of the First Nations, including the Cherokee, Muscogee/Creek, Oconee, and others, who lived on this land of beauty and abundance for thousands of years prior to contact with European settlers.”* The Diocese will also encourage all parishes and worshiping communities to research Native American histories in order to determine which if any tribes of native peoples lived in their immediate areas, and to call attention to this on their own websites, printed materials, parish profiles, etc. And be it further

Resolved, that the Diocese of Atlanta, in order to (2) pay respect to the First Peoples who lived within our diocesan borders, shall produce a brief history and study guide with the help of knowledgeable scholars, which would be downloadable and shared with all parishes and members in the Diocese, and encourage parish study groups to engage with the information. And be it further

Resolved, that the Diocese of Atlanta, in order to (3) address justice issues affecting Native Americans, shall identify, assess, and address current issues affecting the spiritual, physical, financial, emotional, and psychological wellbeing of Native Americans who live within the boundaries of the Diocese, to determine if the Diocese itself and/or individual parishes might develop meaningful relationships and ministry activities in order to meet these needs in their communities, and that part of this effort would involve learning how best to establish formal partnerships with any local Native groups. And be it further

Resolved, that the Bishop’s Office form a Task Force of appropriate clergy and lay persons to oversee these activities, and that any necessary funds for this initiative be included in the annual budget of the Diocese.

Submitted by:

The Rev. Peter M. Wallace

Co-sponsors: The Rev. M. Edwin Beckham; the Rev. William Deneke; the Rev. Barry Griffin; the Rev. Dr. Angela F. Shepherd; the Rev. Katharine Hilliard Yntema

With thanks to the Rev. Cynthia Hizer, retired Canon in the Episcopal Diocese of Navajoland; the Rev. Dr. Bradley Hauff, TEC Missioner for Indigenous Ministries; and the members of the East Atlanta Convocation for their review and comments.

Explanation:

Middle and North Georgia was the home of native inhabitants in the millennia preceding European contact. With no written record, very little is known about them. However, in recent years archeologists, paleontologists, and other scientists and researchers have been increasing our knowledge of these First Peoples. When the first Europeans arrived, they found robust settlements, with native peoples having survived and thrived there for millennia. However, diseases were transmitted by the visitors, eventually decimating the Indian tribes. These tribes in Middle and North Georgia, primarily Cherokee, various others known collectively as Creeks, and some Hitchiti, Oconee, and Miccosukee, suffered grievously as a result of the rivalries of the European colonial powers, further harming if not destroying their communities. Eventually the native inhabitants were forced to deal with new state and national governments of the United States. While official treaties were enacted with the First Peoples, the newcomers did little to honor them, and government efforts to remove the native inhabitants from Georgia increased. As Max E. White writes in his book, *The Archaeology and History of the Native Georgia Tribes* (University Press of Florida, 2002, p. x), “When the Indian-removal policy became law, and with the active support of President Andrew Jackson, Georgia’s remaining Indians were doomed. The thoroughness of the Indian removal of the early 1800s left Georgia with no resident population of indigenous Native Americans.”

In 2009, the General Convention of The Episcopal Church passed Resolution 2009-D035, “Repudiate the Doctrine of Discovery” (General Convention, *Journal of the General Convention of...The Episcopal Church, Anaheim, 2009* [New York: General Convention, 2009], pp. 371-372). This resolution declares, in part:

Resolved, That the 76th General Convention repudiates and renounces the Doctrine of Discovery as fundamentally opposed to the Gospel of Jesus Christ and our understanding of the inherent rights that individuals and peoples have received from God, and that this declaration be proclaimed among our churches and shared with the United Nations and all the nations and peoples located within The Episcopal Church’s boundaries. This doctrine, which originated with Henry VII in 1496, held that Christian sovereigns and their representative explorers could assert dominion and title over non-Christian lands with the full blessing and sanction of the Church. It continues to be invoked, in only slightly modified form, in court cases and in the many destructive policies of governments and other institutions of the modern nation-state that lead to the colonizing dispossession of the lands of indigenous peoples and the disruption of their way of life; and be it further....

Resolved, That each diocese within The Episcopal Church be encouraged to reflect upon its own history, in light of these actions and encourage all Episcopalians to seek a greater understanding of the Indigenous Peoples within the geo-political boundaries claimed by the United States and other nation states located within The Episcopal Church’s boundaries, and to support those peoples in their ongoing efforts for their inherent sovereignty and fundamental human rights as peoples to be respected.

In the Diocese of Atlanta, which encompasses lands of Native Peoples that were subsumed under cover of the Doctrine of Discovery, we wish to put this resolution into action. By doing so we follow the example of our sibling dioceses in the Anglican Church of Canada and elsewhere to acknowledge these grave injustices, to pay respect to First Peoples on whose purloined land the parishes and various ministries of the Diocese of Atlanta exist today, and to learn about and address justice issues affecting Native Americans living within the boundaries of the Diocese in order to help meet their needs, following the steps included in the proposed resolution.