



Massachusetts Episcopal Bishops support MA Indigenous Legislative Agenda

June 16, 2025

Dear faithful in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts,

As your bishops, we have committed ourselves to the spiritual work of racial reconciliation. This includes, but is not limited to, the irreparable harm done to native people, lands and culture begun by European colonists in the 17th century.

The Episcopal Church formally [repudiated the Doctrine of Discovery](#) in 2016 rejecting the flawed theology that put God on the side of death and destruction, but the generational trauma of cultural genocide has not been publicly addressed by the church in the Commonwealth. We address it here in the hope of the Easter event and in faith, with humility. We invite you to be part of the work of repair.

For generations we have lived, worshipped and engaged God's mission on the unceded land of native peoples. From the coastal lands of the Wampanoag, Massachusett and Patuxet, to the central lands of the Nipmuc and Agawam and to the western lands of the Pocumtuc, Nonotuck, Mohican and the Dawnland Confederacy, the artificial borders of states and dioceses have largely ignored the rights of the first people of this place. We wish for this ignorance to end in our time.

Since 2022, our two dioceses have shared a joint recognition of Indigenous People's Day. In 2025, this gathering will mark the 350th anniversary of the

beginning of Metacomet's Rebellion (King Philip's War) with a pilgrimage on Monday, October 13, to Deer Island, MA – the internment site where hundreds of Native people from the “praying towns” died from exposure and starvation in the winter of 1675-1676.

As we prepare for this landmark commemoration, we call on all of our worshipping communities to mark Sunday, October 12, 2025 as a *Day of Remembrance and Lamentation* for the anguish caused by the expulsion, enslavement, and genocide of Native people across our Commonwealth. Further, we encourage you to take part in the educational, formational opportunities that will precede our local commemorations on Sunday, October 12, and our pilgrimage on Monday, October 13. We have much to learn together and trust that the Spirit is with us in our desire to be present to the sorrow left in the land. All we can do is bring our souls to the place and let the place tell the story to our souls.

Our commemoration is in the nascent planning stages with the support of indigenous people in Massachusetts whose ancestors survived the Deer Island expulsion, and who live among us as witnesses to Native resilience, strength and endurance. While this observance is months away, there is something critically important we can do today for our Native neighbors. We can support the [MA Indigenous Legislative Agenda](#).

The Province 1 Indigenous People's Justice Network has commended all five legislative priorities:

1. **Remove Racist Mascots:** Prohibit Native American mascots in Massachusetts public schools.
2. **Honor Indigenous People's Day:** Replace Columbus Day with Indigenous Peoples Day to celebrate Indigenous resilience and survival. The change acknowledges the true histories of colonialism, genocide and racism that Native peoples have experienced and continue to face.
3. **Celebrate and Teach Native American Culture & History:** Ensure that schoolchildren in Massachusetts learn about Native American history, culture, and current issues.

4. **Protect Native American Heritage:** Ensure Native American funerary objects, sacred objects, and objects of cultural patrimony held in governmental or non-profit collections are not sold for profit.

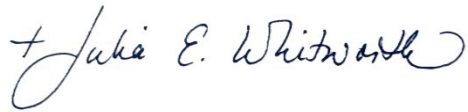
5. **Support the Education and Futures of Native Youth:** Improve educational outcomes and opportunities for American Indian and Alaska Native students.

If you have made the [Sacred Ground](#) journey, you might agree that these things are the very least we can do to begin to repair what has been broken. We must care about the issues that are of utmost importance to our indigenous neighbors and be witnesses of the injustices that still harm and scar native youth. These five pieces of legislation will make the Commonwealth of Massachusetts a safer, healthier, more respectful environment for native people. As bishops of The Episcopal Church, we support this legislation and the rights of indigenous people to be the stewards of their own culture and the keepers of their own sacred stories. This is our first step, but it will not be our last.

In the hope of the risen Christ, *Creator Sets Free*.^[i]

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Douglas J. Fisher". The signature is written in a cursive style with a cross at the beginning.

The Right Reverend Douglas J. Fisher
Bishop, Western Massachusetts

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Julia E. Whitworth". The signature is written in a cursive style with a cross at the beginning.

The Right Reverend Julia E. Whitworth
Bishop, Massachusetts

[i] *First Nations Version: An Indigenous Translation of the New Testament*, InterVarsity Press, 2021