

John Dieffenbacher-Krall Statement in Support of Resolution #8

**RESOLUTION DENOTING THE FORMAL SUPPORT OF THE EPISCOPAL
DIOCESE OF MAINE FOR LD 2094 – AN ACT TO IMPLEMENT THE
RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE TASK FORCE ON CHANGES TO THE MAINE
INDIAN CLAIMS SETTLEMENT ACT**

Offered at the 201st Convention of the Episcopal Diocese of Maine
October 17, 2020

We Episcopalians pledge at Baptism to “strive for justice and peace among all people, and respect the dignity of every human being.” The Wabanaki, People of the Dawnland, the Original Peoples and Nations that lived and remain today in the land settlers now call the State of Maine, suffered and experience an ongoing colonial invasion supported by the concept the Doctrine of Christian Discovery and Domination that gave legal and moral support to an immoral occupation and genocide. Our Diocese in 2007 via Resolution #2 and the Episcopal Church through Resolution D035 in 2009 repudiated the Doctrine of Christian Discovery and Domination.

At the 172nd Convention of this Diocese in 1991, those voting instructed “all its members and congregations...to get to know the Native American people of Maine; to learn about their histories, cultures, values, and yearnings, and join with them...” At that same convention people voted to create a committee to assist in this effort. This body was originally known as the Native American Project and eventually became the Committee on Indian Relations that Bishop Lane appointed me to lead on February 15, 2017.

The Committee on Indian Relations has dutifully executed that charge given to us in 1991 and subsequently amplified by Diocesan resolutions passed in 1992 and 1993. We have formed strong relationships with Wabanaki citizens and their governments. What we have learned during the Committee on Indian Relations’ 29 years of existence is that the Wabanaki yearn for what all God’s children want – freedom. They want their inherent right to self-determination recognized and respected. They want to fulfill their duties and responsibilities to all of creation in this beautiful place now called Maine. To live as people of this land which they indisputably are they need their governmental powers freed from the continuing colonial oppression of the State of Maine.

The Executive Council of the Episcopal Church resolved in February 1989 that “the Episcopal Church respect and affirm the dignity of Native Americans and call upon its member dioceses to analyze and reflect upon differing effects that Colonialism has brought to our various people – colonizer and colonized.” Faithful to that call the Committee on Indian Relations has done that analysis. The Maine Indian Claims Settlement Act is perpetuating the colonial oppression of Wabanaki Peoples disregarding the inherent dignity of the Wabanaki and turning away from Christ’s Great Commandment to love our neighbor.

A legislative task force comprised of state legislators, all five Wabanaki Chiefs, and ex-officio members from the Governor’s Office, Office of the Attorney General, and the Maine Indian Tribal-State Commission identified 22 consensus recommendations to address some of the most egregious problems in the Maine Implementing Act, the state portion of the Maine Indian Claims Settlement that only has effect because it was later ratified by Congress. This point is important to understand because Congress has ultimate power to legislate on matters relating to Indian Tribes, not the states.

I offer the powerful testimony given by State Representative Thom Harnett in support of LD 2094. Rep. Harnett, a member of the Judiciary Committee, the Maine Legislature’s committee of jurisdiction when it comes to the Maine Indian Claims Settlement Act, and a retired lawyer with a distinguished career in the Office of the Maine Attorney General, testified earlier this year:

I stand here today in this Augusta building knowing that I am on land that was never mine. It is land that was taken from those who were here before us. We all stand on land that was taken. If we do not acknowledge that, we are denying reality. I also know that we cannot rewrite that history. Our past cannot be undone even if we would want it to be so. However, if we do not confront that history, we are doomed to perpetuate our past mistakes and will never come to grips with the pain and loss it has caused to the people who make up our First Nations. What we

can do is chart a different and more just future, a future that names those mistakes that we have made and recognizes that we can and must do better.

...When a living document is not working, and the last 40 years show us that it is not, you return to the table and make it right. The Land Claims Act has not truly benefited the Tribes and, as a result, neither our First Nations nor the State of Maine have reaped the rewards that a healthy relationship could produce. When our Tribes are recognized as Sovereigns, we will all benefit.

LD 2094 encompasses the 22 consensus recommendations reached by the task force comprised of State and Wabanaki representatives. I recognize that the 129th Legislature will end December 1. When I originally drafted this resolution, it would have permanently put the Diocese of Maine on record in support of the Task Force changes. Our chancellor ruled that this Convention cannot bind a future Convention in that manner. Nonetheless, I urge you to support this resolution so the Wabanaki will know that we stand with them in support of their dignity, their freedom, and as people loved by the God that created all of us.