

Missing and Murdered Indigenous Persons Day:
Our Faith Compels Us to Seek Justice and the Dignity of Every Human Being

We, the Alaska leaders from the Episcopal Church, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA), the Presbyterian Church (USA), and the United Methodist Church, write with heavy hearts following the tragic discovery of nineteen-year-old Kelly Hunt's body in a Spenard neighborhood in Anchorage; yet another beloved child of God who had been missing for months and whose life ended too soon. This loss underscores the ongoing crisis of violence against Indigenous women, girls, and Two-Spirit people in Alaska and across the United States. As we approach May 5, the National Day of Awareness for Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Relatives (MMIWR), we call for justice, action, and steadfast solidarity.

Kelly Hunt, a young woman from Shaktoolik, is one of countless Indigenous lives that were stolen too soon in our communities. In Fairbanks, Sophie Sergie, a 19-year-old whose life was taken violently in 1993, and whose murder remained unsolved for over 30 years, remains a lasting reminder of our moral obligation to seek justice and respect for the dignity of every human being, and the moral crisis that abides in our communities. Native women face murder rates up to ten times the national average. In Alaska, these cases are part of a pattern of unresolved disappearances and deaths. This crisis stems from centuries of systemic violence, forced removals, racism, and land seizures, legacies our faith compels us to confront. We urge individuals and organizations to amplify Indigenous voices, honor the missing, and dismantle structures of injustice, echoing God's call to "do justice, love mercy, and walk humbly" (Micah 6:8).

The May 5th observance of Missing and Murdered Indigenous Persons, established in 2017 after Hanna Harris's murder on the Northern Cheyenne Reservation, has grown into a national movement of marches, education, and demands for accountability. We call on all faith communities to participate in acts of prayer and remembrance this May 5—there will be a gathering sponsored by the Fairbanks Native Association at the Golden Heart Plaza at noon May 5th. Furthermore, we urge Alaskan political leaders, religious leaders, police, and all residents to advocate for and prioritize thorough investigations of crimes against Indigenous people, systemic reforms like improved jurisdictional coordination of law enforcement agencies, and support for Indigenous families. Our churches stand ready to partner in grief support, awareness events, and policy advocacy.

Kelly Hunt's death is not isolated. It is a call to action. Silence perpetuates harm; action honors the divine image in every life. We call all people of faith to lift their voices in prayer and advocate for justice.

Faithfully,

The Rev. Kristi McGuire, Conference Superintendent, Alaska Conference of the UMC
The Rev. Tim Oslovich, Bishop, Alaska Synod (ELCA)
The Rev. Elizabeth Schultz, Executive Presbyter, The Presbytery of Yukon (PCUSA)
The Rt. Rev. Mark Lattime, Bishop, Episcopal Diocese of Alaska