

Testimony in Support of HB 1488

Submitted by Rev. Grace Murray

Pastor & Teacher at People's United Church of Christ, Fargo, ND

Greetings to Chairman Weisz and the members of the Human Services Committee:

HB 1488 would establish a truth, healing, and reconciliation commission to report to the legislature. This commission would give space to hear and understand the complicated history of the Native Americans of North Dakota (the first peoples of this land on which we live) and the state of North Dakota. I come as a person of faith and a member of the United Church of Christ. The ancestors of the United Church of Christ have a similarly complicated history with indigenous peoples. Historically, we, along with other European Christians dealt in a false theology that it was our manifest destiny to bring "the Word of the Lord" to the noble peoples that are the original inhabitants of the Great Plains. The United Church of Christ has recognized the injustice of that ideology and have begun the work of telling the truth of our own complicity in the subjugation of and physical, emotional, social, and spiritual harm to Native American people. In 2007, the United Nations adopted a resolution entitled United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. Following this the World Council of Churches requested its members to adopt its Statement on the Doctrine of Discovery Impact on Indigenous Peoples, the United Church of Christ, the Episcopal Church, and the Council of Bishops of the United Methodists have done so. In 2013, the National Synod of the United Church of Christ passed a resolution repudiating the Doctrine of Discovery. The following year, the Northern Plains Conference of the United Church of Christ responded publicly by passing a resolution repudiating the Doctrine of Discovery as well. In this resolution, which is included with my testimony, we acknowledge the harm done and our need to approach members of the Native Nations to seek forgiveness.

As part of this commitment to truth, healing, and reconciliation, we have some hope of rebuilding the Memorial Congregational Church of Parshall. Tragically, an arsonist destroyed this historic structure in April 2019. The purpose of rebuilding would be to develop an interpretive center and a reconciliation center. Additionally, the Northern Plains Conference, prior to the pandemic, had begun to reach out to other churches to host and participate in Reconciliation Workshops. These workshops would have the purpose of gathering people across the Northern Plains Conference to enter into mutual engagement to find common ground on issues that tend to divide us. While our desire to engage in such a process is not exclusive to the purposes of HB 1488, you can see that our commitment is to participate in the process of truth, healing, and reconciliation as a way of life for us and all the people of the state of North Dakota.

It is only right that we begin this work in support of indigenous persons in North Dakota by recognizing as a state and a people the ongoing harm to Native American people brought about by the Doctrine of Discovery and its lingering remnants. Gathering the stories of the

effects this has had on indigenous people and responding to the harm visited upon them by making recommendations for healing is critical to preserving our common humanity.

As a pastor and teacher, I am called to seek the path of justice for all. As the descendant of colonizers, I seek forgiveness and desire to make amends for any harm to the first peoples of North Dakota that I, or my ancestors, have been complicit in. As a citizen, I have to call upon you as representatives of this great state to act with justice. I respectfully ask that you HB 1488 forward with a "Do Pass" recommendation.

Thank you for your attention and your consideration.

Rev. Grace Murray

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