

A Call to Prayer at a Time of Apology

February 6-8, a Renewal and Healing Event will take place in Utqiagvik (formerly Barrow). It will be led by the Presbytery of Yukon and the Utqiagvik Presbyterian Church. Keynote speakers, Lucy Apatiki of Gambell, and Dorothy Bekoolok of Shaktoolik, will provide teaching on the healing of Historical Trauma.



Lucy Apatiki

On Feb 8, PCUSA Stated Clerk J. Herbert Nelson II, and retired PCUSA Stated Clerk Gradye Parsons, will be present to give an apology for the ways the church often colluded in the damaging acts that brought about the historical trauma we will be learning about.

The trauma they will be talking about has its roots in the Doctrine of Discovery. The Doctrine of Discovery was a deeply flawed ethical statement given by 16th Century Christians to justify colonialism and its oppression of non-Christian people. The doctrine caused Christian governments to falsely justify their actions in taking land from non-Christian people and claiming it as their own. According to this doctrine, the indigenous residents were to be treated however the government deemed necessary to keep the land and its resources, which included killing them, enslaving them, and eliminating their languages or cultures.

Unfortunately, the Doctrine of Discovery became a part of law in the U.S.A. through a Supreme Court case in 1823, and has continued to set legal precedent to the present day.

Because Alaska became a part of the United States at a later date than most parts of the country, our history is somewhat different than that of other regions. It is also true that the history of the church in the Presbytery of Yukon is different than in Southeast Alaska.



Dorothy Bekoolok

Indeed, early missionaries are remembered with great respect in our presbytery. Horatio Marsh, Samuel Spence and Henry Greist learned the Iñupiaq language and helped translate hymns and raise up indigenous leaders. Marsh and Greist were

medical doctors, as was John Gambell on St. Lawrence Island. Their medical help was indispensable in showing care and providing help when western disease inevitably moved into the region, and the gospel they proclaimed was, by all accounts, received with joy.



J. Herbert Nelson II

Still, the spiritual blindness embodied in the Doctrine of Discovery has shaped the way most Anglo-Americans have thought and acted toward people of other cultures and ethnic backgrounds throughout our history. In Alaska, Presbyterians who sought to do good still participated in shaping policies across the state and taking actions that showed the racist and paternalistic attitudes of the majority culture. Cultural practices like drumming and dancing were deemed “heathen” or “savage” and were forbidden; families were split as children were sent to boarding schools, where even the Alaska Native languages were sometimes considered too “heathen” to express Christian thought. In many ways the churches participated in the racist and paternalistic practices that characterized the culture of the day.

Christians are called to repent and seek forgiveness when we become aware of our sin. In this case the apology is particularly important.

**A three-fold definition of historical trauma: In the initial phase, the dominant culture perpetrates mass trauma on a population in the form of colonialism, slavery, war or genocide...In the final phase, the initial population passes these responses to trauma to subsequent generations, who in turn display similar symptoms.*

--Michelle M. Sotero, at the University of Nevada--

The impact of historical trauma is especially fresh for Alaska Natives. For decades, horrific levels of suicide, violence, sexual violence and substance abuse have plagued us. It is time for the healing to begin, and it is time to work for improved relationships throughout the church and throughout our state.

We ask for prayer as people gather in Utqiagvik for this event. Pray for those lead the event, and for all who attend...to the glory of God.



Gradye Parsons

Stated Clerk of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)

The Arctic Slope Regional Corporation has provided a grant to allow travel for one person from each congregation in the Presbytery to attend.

The historical trauma they are talking about proceeded from Western culture's attitudes toward non-Europeans and non-Christians. Those attitudes justified everything from slavery, to dispossessing indigenous peoples from their lands, to programs aimed at shaming people and stripping them of their non-European cultural identity.

since we now know that trauma that is not adequately grieved is passed on to future generations. The healing of historical trauma can be greatly enhanced by the offering of an apology. We therefore ask for your prayers for all who will be present.