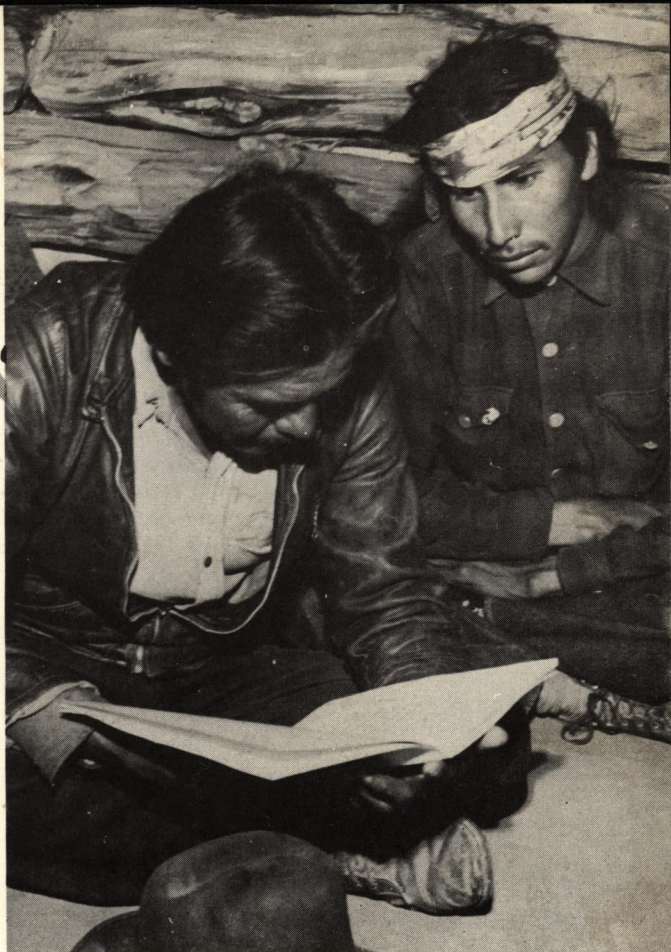


National Council of the
Churches of Christ
in the United States
of America



Wilma Wilcox

A Pronouncement on

Indian Affairs

"It is expedient as well as right that we should move now for justice and help for American Indians. Nearly every day some refugee from Europe or Asia assures us that the United States is the hope of the oppressed people of the world. Are we as just, compassionate, careful and wise as we should be to bear this burden with fidelity? Have we achieved at home what we are asked to do abroad?"

HAROLD E. FEY
THE CHRISTIAN CENTURY
March 2, 1955

PRONOUNCEMENT ON INDIAN AFFAIRS

Historic Concern of the Churches

The communions constituent to the National Council of Churches of Christ in the U.S.A. and the National Council's Division of Home Missions have long been concerned for the welfare of Indian Americans. In their missionary outreach to Indian Americans they have preached the Gospel, provided schools, conducted hospitals, rendered services to families and communities and labored persistently in behalf of justice.

Suggested Standards for Federal Policy

Because of this historic interest and contribution the National Council of Churches expresses certain concerns and proposes certain standards in respect to recent trends and actions of the Federal Government in relation to its responsibilities towards our Indian fellow citizens. We are mindful of the very long trustee-relationship which the national government has sustained to these original Americans and the moral obligation to see that any transition is made in an orderly and deliberate way with full participation by the Indians affected.

Importance of Deliberate Action with Indian Participation

We note a major trend in recent years toward the development of proposals for the termination of federal trusteeship and services. The last session of the Congress actually passed bills affecting six groups. In the consideration given to such legislation in the Eighty-third Congress, it became evident that members of tribes for whom tentative decisions had been made were not prepared to accept the responsibilities. We deplore the haste with which the recent termination bills have been drawn up, and, in certain cases, enacted.

Safeguarding of Democratic Rights

A primary objective of our democratic society is that Indian people along with all other American citizens shall have opportunities for self-development in family and religious life, in education, employment, and for participation in the benefits of housing, medical care, public services and accommodation. Indians can and should be helped to participate more fully in the benefits and responsibilities of the American community. We recognize that America has been enriched by the Indian cultural heritage and that the values thus brought into our society should be conserved. We therefore affirm the necessity for assuring to each Indian tribe or band the right to preserve, to the extent consistent with the general welfare, its own cultural identity. In any actions terminating its special relationship to Indian tribes, we believe that the Federal Government has a responsibility to act in accordance with objectives stated in this paragraph.

Cooperative Social Planning

Careful social planning is necessary to make the transition a just and equitable one, so that the termination of federal trusteeship and services does not become a program of abandonment. Such planning should take into consideration the special problems which arise as a result of the varying social, economic and cultural conditions that exist among the Indian tribes or bands. In keeping with the democratic principle, this planning must be accomplished by full consultation and by decisions reached through cooperative effort on the part of the Federal Government, the Indian tribe or band, state and local governments and voluntary agencies.

Specific Considerations

In the light of the more general concerns stated above the National Council of Churches believes that the following specific considerations will contribute to the orderly transition of Indian tribes or bands from trusteeship status to full participation in community life.

Protection against Treaty Abrogation

1. Legislation to terminate trusteeship should protect the Indian tribe or band against unilateral government abrogation of contracts or treaties which exist between the tribe or band and the Federal Government. Therefore provision should be included in such legislation for the renegotiation of such contractual agreements.

Involvement of Indian Tribe or Band in the Planning Process Preliminary to Termination Legislation

2. Legislation and the administrative procedure of government agencies should provide for consultation and negotiation between federal officials and representatives duly authorized by the Indian tribe or band. In this way the social and economic problems which confront the tribe or band during the transition period may be handled equitably. The tribe or band should have an opportunity to develop plans or a program for administering its own affairs either as a group or as individuals as the tribe or band itself may decide.

Inter-agency Action on Federal and State Levels

3. Negotiations should be carried on between the Bureau of Indian Affairs and other agencies of the Federal Government as well as with state and local governmental agencies to work out mutually acceptable arrangements. These should guarantee that the customary governmental services shall be fully available to Indians without segregation or discrimination. Federal services should not be terminated until such arrangements have been made.

Expansion of Programs for Economic Protection and Self-development

4. Programs should be continued and greatly expanded:

For the development and use of reservation resources;
For a solution of the fractionated land problem in a way that protects the Indians' interests;
For the development of those social and economic skills that make possible normal adjustment to employment; and
For assisted voluntary relocation.

Expansion of Broad Educational Programs

5. Greatly increased attention should be given to programs for fundamental education and health education. These programs should conserve the values of family life and be in harmony with accepted principles of education.

Development of Program of Community Education

6. Programs of education for the entire community are necessary to develop an understanding of the changing status of Indian tribes or bands and its effect on Indian American families and individuals.

Responsibility of the Churches

The National Council of Churches believes that the churches have a particular responsibility through their interdenominational and denominational agencies to contribute to a constructive process of change as Indians face new adjustments to the American community. Every step possible should be taken to prepare local congregations to understand the problems and to maintain mutually helpful relationships between Indians and others in the community.

Adopted March 3, 1955 by the General Board of the National Council of Churches on recommendation of the Division of Home Missions.

With relation to Indian Americans, churches constituent to the National Council
work together through the Division of Home Missions to:

coordinate denominational Indian work

guide interdenominational groups in communities
with a growing population of Indian newcomers
from reservations

provide an interdenominational religious ministry
in off-reservation government Indian boarding
schools

join interested denominations in sponsoring Cook
Christian Training School in Phoenix, Arizona,
to prepare Indian leaders for work with their own
people

provide executive service for the National Fellow-
ship of Indian Workers

provide a medium for denominational representa-
tives to keep abreast of legislative developments
affecting Indian Americans and to arrive at a
common church policy

channel denominational relationships with public
and private agencies concerned with Indian
Americans

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