



Native American Episcopalians in Minnesota

Historical Highlights

Minnesota was still a territory in 1851, the vast majority of its inhabitants from the Ojibwe and Dakota tribes, when the United States purchased two million acres from the Dakota Nation for potential farming and settlement. Two years later, The Rev. James Lloyd Breck established a mission and school in St. Paul and over the next six years established missions on Gull Lake and Leech Lake in the northern part of the state. The federal government then appointed him as the official teacher for the Mississippi Ojibwe.

In 1859, Henry Benjamin Whipple became Minnesota's first Bishop. He was an outspoken advocate of Indian administration reform (1859-1901).



Confirmation of Dakota Indians at Fort Snelling by Bishop Henry Benjamin Whipple

Although controversial seen through a 21st century lens, Bishop Whipple courageously modeled Gospel values to the Dakota and Ojibwe, earning the name "Straight Tongue" from the Dakota.

During the Dakota War, 303 Dakota men were sentenced to death. Bishop Whipple appealed to President Lincoln to commute their sentences. He was able to save all but 38, who were hung in the largest public execution in US history. The picture to the left represents Bishop Whipple and the tragedy of those 38 who haunt him as 38 tears, shaped like nooses. It is representative of the mixed legacy of the intersection of Christianity with our Native American brothers and sisters. [Learn More](#)



"The 38 Tears of Bishop Whipple"

The Rev. Canon Robert Two Bulls, Ogala Dakota
Director of Minnesota Committee on Indian Work
https://www.episcopalcafe.com/thirty_eight_tears/



Enmegahbowh. Icon by The Rev. Johnson Loud, Anishanaabe/Ojibwe

In 1867 Bishop Whipple ordained Ojibwe, Enmegahbowh, which means “The One Who Stands before His People,” the first Native American to become an Episcopal priest. Having co-founded the mission at Gull Lake with The Rev. James Breck prior to ordination, he joined forces with Bishop Whipple to minister to many of Minnesota’s Native missions and served the White Earth Reservation until his death 44 years later.

Current Highlights

The ECMN’s first churches began on Dakota and Ojibwe tribal lands. Today, ten percent of ECMN “altars” (a word one Dakota priest used to describe church), are in Indian country. Nine of the ten are located on reservations. Some weave Native traditions into Christian practices. Today, as they deal with challenges and disparities, members of these Native American Episcopalian faith communities yearn to grow their faith and long for leadership training in their local and cultural context.

As one Native American priest put it, “People who are brave enough to express a calling are people who will live, love, and be on those reservations. They need to be mentored and know the life and practices in an inculturated way. They need to understand their faith within their context.”

Gospel Based Discipleship is an essential spiritual practice among the ECMN’s Dakota and Ojibwe communities. Designed to engage people in groups or individually with the Gospel on a daily basis, it asks a series of three questions about the Gospel of the day. To learn more check out these links:

<https://allsaintsindianmission.com/gospel-based-discipleship/>

https://www.episcopalchurch.org/files/NAM_a_disciples_prayer_book.pdf

On the bottom of the next page you will find a picture of the Ojibwe Hymn Singers. These singers represent three reservations in Northern Minnesota: Leech Lake, Red Lake and White Earth. Our ministry is to support families at wakes and sometimes funerals. Their hymns are prayers put to tunes of familiar music. (Source: 2019 Ordination Service Bulletin)



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Department of Indian Work Episcopal Faith Communities:

- **St. Peter's Episcopal Church**, Cass Lake, Leech Lake Reservation
- **Messiah Episcopal Church**, Prairie Island Indian Community
- **All Saints Indian Mission**, Minneapolis
- **Bishop Whipple Mission/St. Cornelia's**, Lower Sioux Reservation, Morton
- **Samuel Memorial Mission** White Earth Reservation, Naytahwaush
- **St. John's Episcopal Church**, Leech Lake Reservation, Onigum
- **Breck Memorial Mission**, White Earth Reservation, Pine Point, Ponsford
- **St. Antipas Episcopal Church**, Red Lake Reservation, Redby
- **St. Philip's Episcopal Church**, White Earth Reservation, Rice Lake
- **St. Columba's Episcopal Church**, White Earth Reservation
- **Gilfillan Memorial Church**, S. Lake, Leech Lake Reservation



Ojibwe Hymn Singers, representing 3 reservations in Northern MN:
Leech Lake, Red Lake, White Earth