

In support of Standing Rock
A statement from the Rt. Rev. J. Scott Mayer
November 4, 2016

This week, more than 500 clergy from 20 denominations - Christians, Buddhists, Muslims and Jews - joined the Water Protectors at the Standing Rock Reservation in their effort to stop the Dakota Access Pipeline (DAPL) from further desecrating and intruding on historic Native American sacred burial lands and water. Many of them were Episcopalians.

The clergy were there in response to an appeal from the Rev. John Floberg, an Episcopal priest who has served for 25 years as the supervising priest of the Episcopal churches of Standing Rock Reservation in North Dakota. It all came together on very short notice: he posted the appeal on Facebook on Sunday October 30, asking clergy to “gather to stand witness to water protectors’ acts of compassion for God’s creation, and to the transformative power of God’s love to make a way out of no way.” By November 3, more than 500 clergy from across the United States had shown up.

The assembled clergy processed with prayer and song to the Cantapeta Creek bridge, a focal point in the events of the past few weeks. They formed a Niobrara Circle of Life around the sacred fire that burns 24 hours a day in the center of the Water Protectors’ camp.

Why did all these religious leaders feel compelled to do this? Why did our own presiding bishop, the Most Rev. Michael Curry, call us all to stand in solidarity and prayer with the people of Standing Rock?

It certainly is not because they oppose all pipeline construction.

It is because at the heart of this event lies something sacred.

It is because this particular pipeline in this particular place will be a desecration. It is not too strong a statement to say it would be akin to running a pipeline through the Arlington National Cemetery.

Why “Water Protectors”?

What is happening at Standing Rock is an unprecedented gathering of U. S. tribes joined by indigenous and non-indigenous people from as far away as Hawaii and Ecuador.

The spiritual system of the Lakota (Sioux) people, like that of nearly all indigenous people, focuses on nature and connectedness. Earth-based cultures are tied to places, so for them there is no separation between their spirituality and their environment—they are one and the same.

The Water Protectors at Standing Rock are people of the land. They have rejected what they consider a western, colonial mindset of protest for a more life affirming approach - protection, not protest.

People protect what they love. People protect the powerless, those people and things which have no voice in our culture. The Lakota people believe the earth and its ecosystems have no voice. They believe they need protection and preservation and that it is a holy duty to do this.

They have grounded their protection of the sacred lands and water in prayer, the most powerful thing they have.

Recent History

The Lakota have a good case. The pipeline was shifted in the direction of the Standing Rock Reservation away from Bismarck, N.D. when the residents there complained of concerns about water contamination by leaks. Federal regulators agreed it was a potential [threat](#) to that city's water supply. The underground pipeline would transport 470,000 barrels of crude oil a day

What is a threat to a city of predominately white people also is a threat to the Lakota nation. In their case, the pipeline threatens not only their water supply but also sacred burial lands. The new route approved by the US Army Corps of Engineers crosses sacred sites and burial grounds on unceded tribal territory; 38 miles of the proposed pipeline cuts through territory that still belongs to Native Americans, based on an 1851 treaty signed at Fort Laramie in Wyoming.

The Standing Rock tribe say they were not adequately consulted. A coalition of 1,200 archeologists also signed a letter submitted to the White House, warning that the pipeline's new route would desecrate ancient burial grounds.

Standing with Standing Rock

For the Lakota and other Native Americans, both the sacred land and the water are at stake now. For them, the Missouri River and all the tributaries that flow into it, including the Cannonball River that runs by the camps, are sacred.

They call water the first medicine. They believe water has memory. When people speak or sing to it during a ceremony, the water holds on to what it hears and will later share it.

The Episcopal Church understands the sacramental role of water. We proclaim water as a source of life. Scriptures, our baptismal rites, our rituals are rich in both the use of water and reference to its significance.

I join Presiding Bishop Curry in his call for prayer for Standing Rock. But perhaps we can do more. Perhaps we can find a way to a good outcome for all concerned.

Could The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers explore rerouting of this pipeline, following recommendations of the Department of the Interior, the Environmental Protection Agency, and the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation for further study and investigation of environmental impacts?

Because these tribes are sovereign nations, could the relevant state and federal governments engage in peaceful consultations with the tribal governments to find a mutually satisfactory solution?

Could Congress explore legislation that requires federal agencies to get meaningful tribal input into infrastructure-related reviews and decisions and to ensure the protection of tribal lands, resources, and treaty rights?

People of good will have great power. Let us use the "transformative power of God's love to make a way out of no way."

Ways to stand with Standing Rock

There are several ways to stand with Standing Rock on a personal and congregational level. These links will take you to sites with practical ways to help.

<http://standingrock.org/>

<http://canadians.org/blog/ear-plugs-standing-rock>

<http://time.com/money/4551720/how-to-help-standing-rock-sioux/>

<http://www.clergyclimateaction.org/resources>

<http://www.powwows.com/2016/09/07/10-ways-can-help-standing-rock-sioux-fight-dakota-access-pipeline/>

[Read the Episcopal News Service story here.](#) [And here.](#)