

## Using Our Prophetic Voice (aka Speaking Out)

Native Americans are just one percent of Minnesota’s population. It’s often difficult for their voices to be heard without allies of all races stepping forward. Their issues often are not popular, such as enforcing their treaty rights to fish. Religious and spiritual communities have an opportunity and obligation to speak on behalf of Native Americans with a voice of moral authority. True, religious communities cannot speak out on each and every issue of the day, but there are times when that voice is sorely needed.

Here is one example where the voices of religious communities were important. They spoke up about the violence and injustice that was occurring at Standing Rock as water protectors tried to stop the Dakota Access Pipeline. Those taking a stand included the United Church of Christ, The Episcopal Church, the Presbyterian Church USA, the Unitarian Universalist Association, the Mennonite Central Committee, the Minnesota Annual Conference of the United Methodist Church, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, the Sisters of St. Joseph of Carondelet, and others. While ultimately it did not change the outcome, it was an importance space for religious communities to be an ally.



Here are other areas where the voice of religious communities could make a difference

**Enbridge Line 3:** Canadian energy transportation giant Enbridge has proposed a new and larger tar sands crude oil pipeline through northern Minnesota. It threatens the environment by crossing the Mississippi River and passing by wild rice areas. It violates treaty rights by crossing vast areas of land where the Ojibwe retain rights to hunt, fish and gather. The Minnesota Public Utilities Commission will vote on the pipeline permits in April. The Ojibwe need religious communities to speak against both the project’s environmental harm and its impact on treaty rights, just as they did at Standing Rock.

**Access to Sacred Spaces:** Native communities often face challenges in getting access to traditional sacred spaces for ceremony. Sometimes, these beautiful spaces have been turned into state or national parks. One local example is Cold Water Springs. The Dakota people say this is one of their sacred spaces. Authorities have even questioned whether the space is “sacred,” based on the lack of a written record; they do not value the Dakota people’s oral history. Today, Dakota people need a federal permit to hold ceremony at Coldwater Springs. How might religious communities support Native efforts to get easier access to their sacred places?

**Offensive Public Art:** We have art in public spaces that continues the narrative of the Doctrine of Discovery and Manifest Destiny. A prime example is the mural “Discoverers and Civilizers Led to the Source of the Mississippi” in the Minnesota Senate Chambers, which depicts the forced conversation of Native Americans. The mural flies in the face of our deeply held value of Freedom of Religion, yet was left in place during the recent major Capitol renovation. There needed to be – and still needs to be – voices of religious authority speaking out against these offensive images in public spaces.