
United Methodist Church Donates to National Native American Learning Center

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NEW YORK-- The United Methodist Church has donated \$50,000 to the National Park Service for the development of the Sand Creek Massacre Learning Center. Located in Eads, Colo. near the Sand Creek Massacre National Historic Site, the center will feature education materials to help visitors understand the impact of the massacre and its relationship to contemporary issues worldwide.

"The Sand Creek National Historic Site is a sacred place," said the Rev. Stephen Sidorak, general secretary of the General Commission on Christian Unity and Interreligious Concerns, a United Methodist agency with offices in New York. "I am proud that the church is providing seed money that will be matched by the National Park Service. This history needs to be told."

The United Methodist Church has a shocking connection to Sand Creek. On Nov. 29, 1864, Colonel John Chivington, a Methodist minister, led the attack on a Cheyenne and Arapaho encampment along the banks of Sand Creek. At least 165 were killed, mostly women, children and the elderly.

In 1996, The United Methodist General Conference, the denomination's top legislative body, expressed regret for the Sand Creek Massacre and issued an apology for the "actions of a prominent Methodist." The donation to the Sand Creek Massacre Learning Center was authorized in 2008.

"This effort is only a single step in a very complex and emotional journey for our church," said Sidorak. "We have played an unfortunate role in history in regards to Native Americans and our recognition of our involvement is long overdue."

The initial

phase of the Learning Center has begun through combined funding support. The United Methodist donation will go towards

research materials as well as tools needed to set up "virtual" connections between the center and other institutions, including United Methodist-related Iliff School of Theology, tribal colleges in Oklahoma, Montana and Wyoming, and the extensive archives, libraries, and museums that house the Sand Creek Massacre research materials.

"One of Sand

Creek's many legacies is its importance to remind us of the consequences of cultural, political and ideological conflicts that continue to plague the world today," said Alexa Roberts, superintendent of the Sand Creek Massacre National Historic Site. "The Learning Center will enable descendants, visitors and researchers to study the causes and consequences of this tragedy and its relevance to contemporary events in the hope of preventing similar occurrences in the future. "

The United

Methodist Church will continue in partnership with the Sand Creek Learning Center by joining tribal representatives, research institutions, representatives from the State of Colorado, and others on its governing board.

The United

Methodist Church is also preparing for an Act of Repentance to Indigenous Persons to take place at its 2012 General Conference in Tampa. The service is intended to be an acknowledgment of wrongs done to indigenous persons and the beginning of a process to heal relationships between indigenous communities and the church.

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