

[RGJ-09] On Directing the Office of the General Assembly to Issue Apologies and Reparations for the Racist Closure of the Memorial Presbyterian Church, Juneau, Alaska

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Committee: [RGJ] Race and Gender Justice
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Recommendation

The Presbytery of the Northwest Coast, in unity with and support of the Northern Light United Church (“NLUC”) and its Native Ministries Committee, overtures the 225th General Assembly (2022) to work to eliminate all forms of white supremacy and racism in its institutions and, specifically, to meaningfully address the wounds inflicted on Alaska Natives, who were directly impacted by the sin of the unwarranted 1963 closure of Memorial Presbyterian Church,[1] a thriving, multiethnic, intercultural church in Juneau, Alaska, by taking the following actions directly and through the Office of the General Assembly:

1. In keeping with the spirit to “confess complicity and repudiate the Doctrine of Discovery” as called for in “The Doctrine of Discovery: A Review of Its Origins and Implications for Congregations in the PC(USA) and Support for Native American Sovereignty (2018),” adopted by the 223rd General Assembly, acknowledge and apologize for the harms inflicted by:

a. Acknowledging culpability and silence regarding the closure of the Memorial Presbyterian Church and the resulting harm to the community.[2]

b. Acknowledging and confessing that Alaska Presbytery’s stated justification for closure—to halt segregation by establishing a “strong and united church of all races and classes”—merely substituted assimilationist racism for the previous practice of segregationist racism. While Memorial Church was established to serve the Tlingit community, it had evolved under Dr. Soboleff’s leadership into a multiethnic, intercultural church whose members were callously and ironically directed by the Alaska Presbytery[3] to join the nearly all-white Northern Light Presbyterian Church, today’s Northern Light United Church (“NLUC”).

c. Acknowledging that the cessation of National Mission Board funding for Memorial Church—funding that was still being provided for other predominantly white Presbyterian churches in Southeast Alaska—left the Memorial Church congregation without viable options for continuance.

d. Offering posthumous apology, acknowledgement, and confession in public ceremony, attended by national and regional church officials, to the late Rev. Dr. Soboleff Sr., who served as Memorial Church’s pastor for 22 years, for the act of spiritual abuse committed by the Presbyterian Church’s decision of closure, which was sadly aligned with nationwide racism toward Alaska Natives, Native Americans, and other people of color.

e. Offering further apology for closing Memorial Church without national church leaders offering ceremonial protocols, expressions of regret, or formal acknowledgements of the thriving nature of Memorial Church. Dr. Soboleff was left by himself to announce the closure of Memorial Church, a closure that had been engineered by the Board of Missions and Alaska Presbytery.

f. In similar vein, providing written apology to Dr. Soboleff's family, Memorial Church's members and their descendants, and the Alaska Native communities profoundly impacted by the ministry and outreach of Memorial Church through communications directed to the family members, the member churches of the Alaska Presbytery in 1963 (or their successors), the Grand Camp of the Alaska Native Brotherhood and Sisterhood, the federally recognized tribes in Southeast Alaska, and the Alaska Federation of Natives. The positive role Memorial Church played in Juneau and throughout the region extended far beyond the formal membership of the Memorial Church congregation.

g. In addition to these public ceremonies and written communications, calling upon national and regional church representatives to hold private meetings with the family of Dr. Soboleff and the Alaska Native members of NLUC, along with Native leaders in the larger Juneau community.

h. Taking each of the actions identified in close collaboration with NLUC Native Ministries Committee and other Native leaders to assure that they are carried out in accordance with Tlingit protocol.

2. Demonstrate repentance through meaningful reparative actions, without which words of apology ring hollow, including the following:

a. Increase available resources and opportunities for Alaska Natives and other Indigenous people to pursue ministry in the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A) [PC(USA)] and other positions of church leadership, including providing scholarship funds and mentorship for these individuals, and

b. Uphold "primarily people of color congregations" in the PC(USA) that, to this day, continue to be "marginalized by a structure that is not responding to the voices of its people of color for inclusion and equity," by adopting the Racial Equity Advocacy Committee's "A Resolution Addressing the Lack of Installed Pastoral Leadership in People of Color Congregations in the PC(USA)."[4]

c. In keeping with the Native American Coordinating Council's proclamation of "The Decade of Confession and Repentance" in which the PC(USA) "turns around and walks in the other direction" from the Doctrine of Discovery, direct the Presbyterian Mission Agency to donate, in the name of Memorial Presbyterian Church, \$100,000 to the Sealaska Heritage Institute for Indigenous language revitalization efforts.[5]

d. Direct the Presbyterian Mission Agency to donate \$200,000, in the name of Memorial Presbyterian Church, to the Presbyterian Foundation Native American Church Property Fund, and urge presbyteries and congregations of the PC(USA) also to donate in the name of Memorial Presbyterian

Church or present and past churches of other Native Americans and other people of color important to them.

e. Encourage, and take active measures, to renew the collective commitments of the PC(USA), including presbyteries and congregations, to:

i. dismantle systemic racism;

ii. amplify the voices of clergy and lay members of churches “primarily people of color congregations”; and

iii. develop and enhance models of engagement and accountability for the national church and presbyteries in their interactions with churches of “primarily people of color congregations” so that difficult decisions about support and funding are made in a spirit that recognizes the importance and contributions of these congregations to the PC(USA), which outweigh superficial considerations of their membership numbers or perceived lack of financial resources.

f. Provide financial resources to, and engage with, the City and Borough of Juneau, directly or through the Presbytery of the Northwest Coast and NLUC, for a highly visible recognition of Memorial Presbyterian Church to be placed at the church’s former location. This recognition would be conceived and approved by the Native Ministries Committee of NLUC, in collaboration with local partners, to encourage recognition of the vitality of Memorial Church and the harm caused by its closure.

[1]Members of Memorial Presbyterian Church most often referred to their church as “Memorial Church,” as it is most commonly referred to now.

[2]https://www.presbyterianmission.org/wp-content/uploads/Doctrine-of-Discovery-Report-to-the-223rd-GA-2018-FINALIZED-COPY_As-Approved.pdf

[3]Alaska Presbytery, a predecessor to the Northwest Coast Presbytery, served all the Presbyterian churches in Southeast Alaska, which included Northern Light Presbyterian Church.

[4]<https://www.pc-biz.org/#/search/3000584>

[5]Native American Coordinating Council Report to GA 224, recommendation 4.g.: “Invest in the revitalization of Indigenous languages by committing resources to support tribal efforts to revitalize Indigenous languages as they see fit.”

Rationale

Introduction

In 1963, Alaska Presbytery, with the concurrence of the Presbyterian Church's Board of National Missions, closed Memorial Presbyterian Church in Juneau, Alaska. The forced closure of this thriving, multiethnic, intercultural church was an egregious act of spiritual abuse committed in alignment with the prevailing white racist treatment of Alaska Natives, statewide, and of Native Americans, nationwide.

Juneau and virtually all of Southeast Alaska is Lingit Aani, the homeland of the Tlingit. The Tlingit people's connection to the land is sacred, with an individual's identity being tied to their clan's ancestral lands. With disrespect for the Tlingit people and their communal ownership of land, Russians, English, and Americans explored, occupied, assumed individual ownership under Western law, and extracted riches from Lingit Aani. European-American history in Lingit Aani is a "history of theft." [1] The Presbyterian Church participated in this settler-colonial history in Alaska, as elsewhere: "To Christianize is to Americanize, and to Americanize is to Christianize." [2] The closing of Memorial Presbyterian Church, and the subsequent sale of its property, furthered the consequences of white encroachment, as both land and spiritual well-being were lost.

In response to these disruptive events and their continuing effects, Indigenous communities, including Christians and non-Christians, continue to seek justice, which must include repair and equity in Southeast Alaska and beyond. As the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples affirms, humanity is faced with an "urgent need to respect and promote the inherent rights of Indigenous peoples which derive from their political, economic, and social structures and from their cultures, spiritual traditions, histories and philosophies, and especially their rights to their lands, territories, and resources." [3]

To date, the full extent of the damage inflicted on Indigenous communities has yet to be repaired by Presbyterians. The PC(USA) must acknowledge its errors and recognize the Alaska Native and Native American values it trampled. One step in this process is to offer apology and reparations for the forced closure of Memorial Presbyterian Church. [4]

History of the Presbyterian Mission Churches in Juneau with Emphasis on Memorial Presbyterian Church [5] and Its Closure

In 1881, Presbyterian missionaries began evangelism efforts in Juneau at Auk Village, a former summer village of the A'akw Kwáan of the Tlingit Nation. White miners had converged in 1879 at the summer village in their quest for gold. The initial evangelistic revival attracted both miners and Natives, but the church's mission work soon segregated; by the end of the decade, two churches were established, one for Natives and another for whites. The emphasis at the white church [6] was to minimize the debauched behavior of the miners. The focus of the Native (Tlingit) church, (the congregation that became Memorial Presbyterian Church), founded in 1887 in the A'akw Village, now known as the Juneau Indian Village, was the same as that of all missionary activity among Indigenous inhabitants of the continent: to "Christianize and civilize the Indians" (Minutes, UPCUSA, 1875, Part I, p. 541).

The ministry and witness of the Presbyterian church in Juneau remained segregated for the next 50 years; minutes and papers from the White and Tlingit congregations make scant mention of each other. The only direct reference to the possibility of cooperative work was in 1905 during Northern Light Presbyterian Church (NLPC, the white church, now NLUC) pastorate of James Kirk, when “a proposal was made to unite all White and native [*sic*] work in Douglas and Juneau under one minister. The NLPC session, however, decided that ‘consolidation was not for the best interests of the church and therefore inexpedient.’”[7]

The missionaries’ “Christianizing and civilizing” efforts among Indigenous populations in Alaska and elsewhere were accomplished by suppressing Native languages, forcing converts to cease cultural observances and traditional practices, and requiring Native people to adopt European names and customs.[8] In Juneau, Presbyterians touted their success in so doing, citing “progress ... to eradicate the elements of evil from deep-seated pagan tradition and putting in their places the laws of love and brotherhood of man.” The missionaries not only proclaimed Christ; they also preached white ways, and the rejection of Tlingit culture. “No more moccasins, no more canoes, and no more totem poles ... the Alaskan native [*sic*] has made more rapid transition from the primitive state to civilization than any other people in our history.”[9]

The missionaries assumed they were being “successful” in eradicating Tlingit culture and practice. In reality, Tlingit people proved resilient and translated their values and traditions into the Christian forms that had been thrust upon them. Within the forced segregation of Native church life, Native Christians infused Christian practices with Native wisdom. Their Christian faith continues to be steeped in and blended with Native cultural values that were later codified in a list of “Southeast Traditional Tribal Values”[10] that were developed by Tribal Elders and based largely upon the work of Dr. Walter Soboleff.

Despite rampant, pervasive racism and discrimination in Juneau, personal kindnesses were shared among Native church members and the white missionaries, and community life grew. Tlingit elder Lillian Collier was baptized in the Juneau Indian Village Presbyterian Church, and she recalls being invited along with other village youth to the missionaries David and Mary Waggoner’s home and being served blueberry juice and other refreshments.

Tlingit elder Marie Olson also has fond memories of the Waggoners, relaying that “they were really beautiful people with the Natives.” Ms. Olson went on to explain that the Waggoners were a loving couple and very welcoming.[11] They were glad to see Alaska Natives coming to the church. They shared good food with the church community and given the context of the Depression years, the sharing of food was particularly appreciated. Ms. Olson added that the Russian Orthodox, the Salvation Army, and the Memorial Presbyterian churches were multiracial, and the three denominations intermixed with no animosity among them. Memorial Church was also the meeting place for the local Alaska Native Brotherhood and the Alaska Native Sisterhood in their early years.

On the systemic level, however, early Presbyterian missionaries sought to replace traditional Tlingit practices with customs that mirrored their own white Presbyterian lifestyles. Consider the words of David Waggoner:

The missionaries have been tearing down the old social life and traditions of the people for years. The time has come when we must give them a new social life, one in harmony with Christianity.[12]

Carrie Willard, another missionary affiliated with the Juneau mission, in an interview with the *Home Mission Monthly*, reported that the missionaries needed to sponsor frequent meetings to keep the Natives from backsliding, to instruct them in hygiene, as well as love and marriage, and to teach them what “a true home is.” In order to keep them focused on newly imposed Christian ways, Willard acknowledged that they needed to “afford them such social pleasure as might compensate for the loss of their old-time feasts and friends.”[13] Despite the missionaries’ attempts to extinguish traditional ways, Native parishioners infused church life with the Tlingit value of respect. Many Tlingit families privately maintained Tlingit spirituality values enabling, generations later, a revitalization of the Tlingit culture and a restoration of the traditional practices.

The importance of the Tlingit Church grew even larger when the church, newly renamed Memorial Presbyterian Church, moved to a new site at 8th and E (now Glacier Ave.) Streets[14] (current location of Juneau’s downtown fire station), and called in 1940 its first (and only) Native pastor, the Rev. Dr. Walter Soboleff Sr.[15] During Dr. Soboleff’s 22-year pastorate, congregational life flourished. Under his leadership, the Memorial Church grew to be a vibrant congregation, not only ministering to its members but also serving the whole Native community. Dr. Soboleff conducted numerous baptisms and marriage ceremonies. He supported a vital youth ministry. Memorial Church members and descendants living today recall a variety of activities for youths.

The influence of Memorial Church also extended throughout Juneau, and notably, the congregation began attracting non-Native as well as Native members,[16] even as it continued to be a vital hub for the Native Community. Dr. Soboleff was an active participant in church and community life throughout the region. His pastoral presence and community leadership were keys to this growth both within and beyond the Native community.[17]

By the 1950s, the national Presbyterian Church appeared to be trying to catch up with the inclusive ministry of Memorial Presbyterian Church, albeit with no recognition of the work of Memorial Church. In 1955, the General Assembly officially renounced segregation, called on formerly segregated presbyteries and synods to merge, and urged congregations to open their doors to people of all races.[18] The General Assembly’s directives were resisted by many white congregations, including Juneau’s NLPC. A Tlingit elder relayed a painful instance of discrimination to local Juneau historian Kathy Kolkhorst Ruddy. The man was praying one day in the NLPC sanctuary, and when the pastor saw him there, the pastor told him to go pray at the Tlingit church. [19]

Even in the face of NLPC resistance, Alaska Presbytery responded to the national church call for integration by proposing the creation of a “strong and united church of all races and classes”[20] in Juneau. But instead of featuring Memorial Church as a model of an already integrated church, Alaska Presbytery pursued a white supremacist, assimilationist response to integration by increasing support for the ministry of NLPC and withdrawing support from Memorial Church. In 1959, in response to a proposal from NPLC,[21] it recommended that the NLPC and Memorial Presbyterian Church congregations “be encouraged to continue cooperative efforts and to hold common meetings and combined enterprises, so that mutual understanding and respect and good will may be nurtured.”[22]

The Memorial Church congregation was wary of this recommendation[23] because simultaneously, the Alaska Presbytery, over the objection of the Memorial Church session,[24] granted permission for NPLC to sell its extant building and move into the same neighborhood as Memorial Presbyterian Church.[25] These actions boosted momentum for the Memorial Church’s eventual closure.

During the same time that the national denomination was lending NLPC more than \$200,000[26] for its new building, it was reducing mission support for Memorial Church and pressing it toward self-sufficiency. In 1962, despite Memorial Church's efforts to increase financial support from congregants, and amid its celebration of 75 years of ministry, the Presbyterian Board of National Missions announced that it would cease funding Memorial Presbyterian Church. Further, the Alaska Presbytery recommended the closure of Memorial Church and church members to join NLPC parishioners in their new building, built with presbytery approval just up the street from the Memorial Church facility. (NLPC was a predecessor of what is now Northern Light United Church, a PC(USA)-United Methodist Church union congregation.) The recommendation to close came despite the growth of the Memorial Church congregation. During the same time period when white church officials were deciding to dissolve the congregation, Memorial Church was adding 14 pews to its sanctuary, confirming 6 young people, and receiving 9 additional new members.[27] This was not a congregation in decline. Nevertheless, neither Dr. Soboleff nor the Memorial Church session had an opportunity to negotiate funding options with the Board of National Missions nor was there consideration given to alternatives to Memorial Church's closure.[28]

Instead of dissolution, parishioners had every reason to anticipate a robust future for Memorial Presbyterian Church, guided by the "rare and consecrated leadership of Dr. Soboleff." [29] Their expectations were given voice through members of the session who were quoted in a history prepared for the 75th anniversary observance, held only a few months before the closure plans were revealed:

We, as members of the session, greatly appreciate the services and spirit of our pastor throughout this and past years, especially as evidenced by the growth and spiritual life of the church. All members are urged to pray that such conditions will continue.[30]

But the prayers and expectations of the parishioners were for naught.

The offense of Memorial Church's closure was compounded by how it was handled. In prior years, national and regional church leaders were known to visit Memorial Church, but when Dr. Soboleff announced at a called congregational meeting in December 1962 that a presbytery meeting had been called to vote on closing the church, no national or regional leaders were present to explain the rationale, to express their sorrow for the closure, or to acknowledge through ceremony the profound role the church had played in the lives of its thriving congregation.

Adding further confusion and consternation to the situation, the presbytery's announcement of Memorial's closure proposal was accompanied by the news that it was issuing a call to Dr. Soboleff to serve as "evangelist-at-large" in the Presbytery. His responsibilities would include serving the churches and logging camps of Southeast Alaska and coordinating ministry in congregations without pastors.[31] The funding for the position came from the Board of National Missions, the same entity that cut funding for Memorial Church.

The timing of these two announcements prompted some church members, and the public in general, to assume that the Memorial Church was closed due to Dr. Soboleff's acceptance of the new job with the presbytery. In fact, Dr. Soboleff was not seeking a new position. The callous way in which the national church and Alaska Presbytery engineered the demise of Memorial Church was a traumatic affront to a people who

value mutual respect, acknowledgment, and dignity in relationships. Tlingit culture is steeped in the protocols of ceremony, and the abrupt closure without ceremony demonstrated both a lack of awareness of, and disrespect for, Alaska Native norms and practices.

Alaska Presbytery's intent to close Memorial Church was not made public until early 1963. Memorial Church elders had resisted the December proposal, delaying its implementation. The departure of Dr. Soboleff, their beloved pastor, demoralized the congregation, leaving many members disillusioned with or outraged toward the national church. But Memorial Church session members remained advocates for their church and the continuance of its ministry.

After Dr. Soboleff began his new position in January 1963, Alaska Presbytery appointed Edward Holborow, the newly called pastor of NLPC, to moderate the Memorial Church session. The ending of Memorial Church's ministry was increasingly viewed as inevitable, and discussion was held during the congregation's January 16, 1963, annual meeting about merging with NLPC rather than acquiescing to the presbytery's plan to dissolve the congregation. No decision was made to support the merger, but the meeting minutes noted that it would nonetheless be an unlikely outcome because a motion to dissolve Memorial Church was expected to pass at the presbytery's spring meeting.[32]

At a subsequent congregational meeting, the Memorial Church session introduced a motion of support for the presbytery's closing of Memorial Church, with an accompanying recommendation that Memorial Church members unite with NLPC. Many in the congregation opposed this; the motions narrowly passed, 17 to 14.[33] Subsequently, Memorial Church's closure was euphemistically described as a union with NLPC,[34] but in actuality, the institutional life of Memorial Church was terminated when the presbytery dissolved its session and sent the congregation's records to the Presbyterian Historical Society.[35]

Alaska Presbytery could have approached the quest for a "strong and united church of all races and classes" in Juneau differently. Instead of summarily closing Memorial Presbyterian Church, it could have:

- acknowledged that Memorial Church was already a multiethnic, intercultural church from which the whole presbytery could learn about intercultural ministry;
- consulted with the Memorial Church session to explore various possibilities for its future;
- proposed merging Memorial Church and NLPC as a union of equals;[36] or
- considered closing either NLPC or the Memorial Church, and publicly assessing the pros and cons of each closure.

Instead of doing any of these things, Alaska Presbytery closed Memorial Church and told its members to join NLPC. Nearly half of the membership refused to do so, citing bitterness regarding the closure and/or not being comfortable attending the previously all-white church. At the end of 1962, Memorial Church had 196 members, [37] of whom only 100 transferred to NLPC. Five years later, only 48 former Memorial Church members remained on the NLPC roll. The presbytery's actions failed to produce the strong and united Presbyterian witness in Juneau that it claimed to have sought.

The closing of Memorial Church occurred because of white supremacist racism under the guise of the ostensibly noble pursuit of integration. The devastation it wrought on the Alaska Native community in Juneau and throughout Southeast Alaska reverberates to this day. It has caused enduring trauma and anger for Memorial Church members and their descendants, and for Juneau's Native community. The forced closure removed a place of spiritual and communal refuge for scores of members and friends in a climate of local and national exclusion and marginalization. It deeply wounded Native believers, as well as Memorial Church's members of Asian-Pacific Islander and European descent. It cut off a spiritual lifeline to souls of all ages and ethnicities that extended throughout Southeast Alaska.

The enduring pain caused by the closure coexists, sometimes uneasily, with the positive influences and cherished memories of the congregation's ministry. Dr. Soboleff's adult children have shared that even though

many of the elders and members of the church have gone on ... family ties of membership in the Memorial Church still exist. The hurt has undoubtedly been passed on to our present generation. People still speak of Dr. Soboleff's amazing pastoral work by telling stories about 'when our family went to Memorial Church, we ...' Everyone's story is positive and genuine. Dr. Soboleff and the Memorial Presbyterian Church [are] still vivid in our minds.[38]

The heartfelt recollections underscore the continuing sense of loss and betrayal experienced by Memorial Church families. The disrespectful, disingenuous, and obfuscated manner in which the unilateral closure decisions were made and presented not only devastated Memorial Church members but they also sowed confusion and fostered silence within the NLPC congregation and in the community at-large. White church leaders either fundamentally misunderstood what Memorial Church meant to the Native community, or they were willfully ignorant. There was no attempt to explore how Native experience and values could be carried forward into a new multiethnic, intercultural church. White church leaders thought that since they had imposed European Christianity on Native Christians, the Memorial Church members would welcome the end of segregation and be glad for the chance to worship with European Christians at NLPC. This racist reasoning is even more egregious in light of the fact that Memorial Church had already become a multiethnic, intercultural church.

Several years after the congregation's dissolution, the Memorial Church building was razed as a part of Juneau's urban renewal. This spatial loss extended the spiritual harm caused by the Memorial Church's closure as once again Native land was appropriated for white dominant culture use.

The lack of transparency about incidents such as the closing of Memorial Church continues to impede contemporary efforts to embrace multiethnic, intercultural church life at national, regional, and local levels. Decades of avoiding the truth about the closure of Memorial Church and the complicity of the local white NLPC, the Board of National Missions, and the Alaska Presbytery has deeply hampered relationships between Native and non-Native members.

Dr. Soboleff is fondly remembered in the national church, the Alaska Presbytery, and throughout Southeast Alaska, but the wrong of removing him from the Memorial Church pastorate has gone largely unacknowledged. NLUC claims Memorial Church as one of its predecessor congregations and supports the work of its own Native Ministries Committee, but it has struggled to this day to confess and address the devastating actions of

NLPC, its white predecessor Presbyterian congregation and its namesake. NLUC has not publicly acknowledged and addressed the manner in which the presbytery approved NLPC's move into Memorial Church's neighborhood and its subsequent closure. The claim that Memorial Church is a predecessor of NLUC belies the fact that there was no Memorial Church left with which NLPC could have merged. Not facing the racism embedded in the closure decision has hindered the development of authentic multiethnic, intercultural church life at NLUC. "The deafening silence of White Presbyterian leaders and congregants regarding the abrupt closure of the Memorial Church is a disruptive force to Tlingit spiritual wellbeing as well as a barrier to living in harmony with White Presbyterians." [39]

Despite recent efforts at investigating and telling the story of Memorial Church, including supporting this overture, NLUC's legacy as a community of faith and justice has been marred by decades of inaction regarding the closure of Memorial Church. These institutional failures inhibit NLUC's ability to live out its stated mission and have tarnished its local Christian witness in the community at-large.

Without a full accounting of the racist, white supremacist ecclesial history that led to actions such as closing Memorial Church, and without understanding the enormity of what the loss of centers of Native church life meant and means for the Native community, Native contributions remain tangential rather than central to current church life and leadership. This overture is a step toward both addressing the festering wound caused by the closing of Memorial Presbyterian Church and to a renewed commitment to a multiethnic, intercultural future for the PC(USA) at the national, regional, and local levels. [40]

Legacy of Rev. Dr. Walter Soboleff Sr.

Walter Soboleff, born to a Tlingit woman and a father of Russian and German descent in Killisnoo, Alaska, received a scholarship to the Presbyterian-related University of Dubuque to study for the ministry. After completing degrees in the undergraduate college and graduate theological seminary, he returned to Alaska in 1940 to assume the pastorate of Juneau's Memorial Presbyterian Church. Soboleff, the second ordained Alaska Native Presbyterian minister [41] in Southeast Alaska, was the first and only Native pastor of Memorial Church.

Due to official and unofficial segregation, Memorial Presbyterian Church was considered the "Native" church because Natives were not welcomed in many "white" churches, including Northern Light Presbyterian Church (now NLUC). Under Dr. Soboleff's leadership, Memorial Church quickly grew. And in a remarkable witness against the segregation of the time, Dr. Soboleff asked the membership of the church to consider inviting other people besides Natives to participate, and they readily agreed. As non-Natives started to join, Memorial Church became one of the few desegregated churches in Juneau.

Dr. Soboleff's ministry was the first to travel to the airwaves, allowing Natives and non-Natives throughout Southeast Alaska, and as far away as the Yukon Territory, to hear his Sunday sermon in Tlingit and English. Even when the Memorial Church budget was tight, the congregation supported this ministry, citing the importance of the fishermen out on their boats being able to attend worship. He also provided the radio station's newscasts in Tlingit. The daily newspaper in Juneau featured ads inviting men to the weekly Prayer Luncheon and women to the Women's Church Society activities. The youth met monthly with Dr. Soboleff (hot dogs served), with Catholic youth from the surrounding neighborhood also attending at times.

Dr. Soboleff built and maintained relationships and extensive networks of support in Juneau, and throughout Alaska. He served on the board of directors of the American Red Cross, chaplain with the Territorial Legislature, and in various positions with the Alaska Presbytery. In 1951 he began a 20-year term with the Alaska National Guard, serving as chaplain and officer. Like him, many Alaska Natives from the villages served in the Alaska National Guard. He was a Mason and belonged to the Lions Club. He helped the Lions establish the annual Gold Medal Basketball Tournament, which continues to bring 20-plus teams and hundreds of fans from the villages to Juneau for a week of play. Monies raised went for college scholarships, and the church housed some of the teams. A Girl Scout troop met weekly at Memorial. Dr. Soboleff's long involvement in the Alaska Native Brotherhood/Sisterhood (the Native civil rights organization), from its early years to his terms as grand secretary and grand president, helped this organization achieve its goals of furthering the social and economic development of Native people.

For Dr. Soboleff, community involvement was an expression both of his Christian faith and his Tlingit spiritual practices. For him there was no contradiction between being Christian and Tlingit. Throughout his life, he lived the Tlingit value of *Haa Shuká*, the honoring of and feeling connected to the ancestors and recognizing one's responsibility to future generations. As chair of the Sealaska Heritage Board of Trustees, he guided the institute's staff in the development of programs and curricula that celebrate Alaska Native ancestors, perpetuate Native languages, and inspire the revitalization of Southeast Alaska Indigenous cultures. Native youth throughout Southeast are making regalia, dancing traditional dances, and singing clan songs in Tlingit. Dr. Soboleff was a wise, gentle, and humble leader whose grasp and promotion of traditional Tlingit culture was inspiring.

After accepting the direction from the Alaska Presbytery to leave Memorial Church even amid its closure, Dr. Soboleff served as evangelist-at-large for the presbytery, providing pastoral leadership for small churches in small communities throughout Southeast Alaska. In 1970, he became the first director of the Native Studies Program at the University of Alaska Fairbanks. After retiring, he returned to Southeast Alaska (dividing his time between Juneau and Tenakee Springs), providing leadership in the Native community and actively participating in church and community life.

Also, during this time period, he was named pastor emeritus of NLUC, where he remained an active participant and his wise counsel was sought by Native and non-Native members alike. He preached on many occasions, regularly participated in worship and other church activities, and encouraged others to get involved.

Dr. Soboleff received numerous honors, including being named Alaska Federation of Natives Citizen of the Year in 1989, and in 1999 being designated president emeritus of the Alaska Native Brotherhood Grand Camp. Numerous facilities have been named for him, including the Angoon Airport and a University of Alaska Southeast classroom building that houses the School of Arts and Sciences.[42] After his death, the Sealaska Heritage Institute named its stunning heritage center the Walter Soboleff Building ("WSB") in recognition of his lifelong contributions to perpetuating Tlingit culture. The WSB is "a physical manifestation of *Haa Shuká* and all the ideals he held dear." [43]

Even with these widespread accolades and recognitions, the forced closure of his beloved Memorial Presbyterian Church remained an unresolved sadness for Dr. Soboleff. A cruel irony of the closure is that Dr. Soboleff was well-known in the community at-large as a "culture broker," [44] an intermediary who could bring

understanding between the Native and non-Native societies. What the world recognized, however, remained oblivious to the church. The immeasurable value of the ministry of Memorial Church under Dr. Soboleff's leadership was unacknowledged, whether out of ignorance or willfulness, by denominational leaders.

Neither the displaced members of Memorial Church nor Dr. Soboleff, who remained a figure of dignity and peace amid systemic racism and indignity, received an apology nor any form of restitution from the Presbyterian Church before he "walked into the forest" on May 22, 2011, at age 102.

Investigation into the Closure of the Memorial Presbyterian Church

In March 2011, two months before Dr. Soboleff's death, then-NLUC pastor Rev. Dr. Phil Campbell talked with him about the closing of Memorial Church. Pastor Campbell was struck by how pained Dr. Soboleff was about the closure, almost 50 years after it happened. It was obvious the wound had not been healed, nor had the injustice been addressed. With the support of the Native Ministries Committee and the Church Council, Rev. Campbell began scouring the historical records of Alaska Presbytery, the Board of National Missions, Northern Light Presbyterian Church (now NLUC), and Memorial Church to learn more about the circumstances. He presented preliminary findings at Sealaska's Walter Soboleff Day observance in 2015,[45] and he began talking with the NLUC church council about how to repair the damage caused by the closure of Memorial Church.

In 2017, the NLUC congregation engaged in visioning exercises, and identifying appropriate ways to address Memorial Church's closure was one of the topics discussed. In reviewing the vision plan, one of the groups[46] recommended pursuing hand-carved Tlingit house posts for the church lobby. In the August 2017 minutes, NLUC church council went on record supporting the house posts idea and reported that Rev. Campbell expanded the idea to include official reconciliation over the closure of Memorial Church.

With council's support for the house posts, the Native Ministries Committee decided to further investigate the closure, realizing that learning this history would pave the way for developing pertinent themes for the house posts, including the story of Memorial Church. Joaqlin Estus, Tlingit, a nationally recognized journalist, a reporter for *Indian Country Today*, and a former member of NLUC, was recruited to interview Memorial Church members. Native Ministries directed Ms. Estus to ask Memorial members about their memories of the church and the circumstances surrounding its closure. Ms. Estus wrote an article, "Segregation of Faith," for the Alaska Federation of Natives annual meeting edition of *First Alaskans Magazine* (October 2019). It summarizes her and Rev. Campbell's research on the closure of Memorial Church and speaks to the resulting pain experienced by the many Memorial families.

Native Ministries also funded Rev. Campbell's travel to the Presbyterian Historical Society in Philadelphia to access the Alaska Presbytery and Memorial Presbyterian Church records. He summarized his research on the Memorial Church closure in the March 2018 NLUC newsletter.

After reading Ms. Estus's article, Rev. Faith McClellan, the current pastor at NLUC, consulted with the Northwest Coast presbytery executive, Dr. Corey Schlosser-Hall, about submitting a formal overture regarding the closure of Memorial Presbyterian Church. Native Ministries met with Dr. Schlosser-Hall about writing an

overture, and he wholeheartedly supported the idea, as did Native Ministries liaison and council member, Lillian Petershoare. The NLUC council voted unanimously to back a Native Ministries Committee recommendation to seek reparative action, through an overture requesting an apology and other reparations from the PC(USA).

Additional Context

In Juneau, the 1960s were particularly challenging times for the local Tlingit community. The white man's legacy of encroachment on Indigenous lands exhibited itself in numerous ways in the capital city and in Douglas (which later became incorporated in the Borough of Juneau).

Consider:

- The condemnation and burning of houses in the Douglas Indian Village beginning on May 4, 1962. The Douglas Indian Village had been working with the Corps of Engineers and the Bureau of Indian Affairs to obtain a village harbor until the City of Douglas intervened by clearing the land of homes for purposes of constructing a city harbor.

- On February 1, 1962, the State of Alaska and the City as plaintiffs successfully brought to the U.S. District Court an action of quiet title regarding the tidelands of the Juneau Indian Village.

- The Forest Service in 1964 established a campground on A'akw Kwáan burial sites.

- In the mid-1960s and early 1970s, the City of Juneau implemented President Lyndon Johnson's Great Society program and began an urban renewal effort focused on 23 acres of filled tidelands that included 140 homes (130 were considered "substandard") owned for many years primarily by Alaska Native and Filipino/Native families. This neighborhood on 7th, 8th, and 9th streets and beyond surrounded Memorial Church. Many in the neighborhood attended the church prior to its closure in 1963. Despite protests by the Alaska Native Brotherhood and Sisterhood, the homes were razed (Memorial Church was also razed and the land sold). Although owners were compensated, it wasn't enough for some who had to move in with relatives or others who had to move out and live in trailers, which necessitated buying an automobile. Urban renewal essentially displaced a tightly knit ethnic neighborhood along with their church.[47]

Concurrently, local, state and federal governments in Juneau were appropriating Lingit Aani, and disrespecting sacred burial grounds in the process. The federal district court stripped the tidelands from the Juneau Indian Village for community development and private purposes. At a time when Juneau Tlingits were suffering monumental assaults on their ancestors' graves sites and property losses that hugely impacted their livelihoods and subsistence way of life, the comforting and encouraging words of their pastor might have helped them cope, were it not for the Presbyterian Church choosing to close Memorial Church amid of all of this profound loss. It is hard to overstate the devastating impact of the closure. Surely the presence of its ministry would have made a positive contribution to Native life, and to Juneau as a whole during the era of devastating social change and upheaval in the 1960s and beyond.

Theological, Spiritual, and Social Justice Imperatives

In his book, *Stamped from the Beginning*,^[48] Ibram X. Kendi documents the historical evolution of racist and antiracist ideas and actions. He identifies the existence of two types of racism: segregationist racism and assimilationist racism. With segregationist racism, the dominant class separates itself from those it deems inferior. The distance serves to ensure that dominant white systems and structures are not exposed to or compromised by social contact with Black and Indigenous people and groups. Assimilationist racists believe that Black and Indigenous people of color can “evolve” into full humanity by becoming like white people and adopting white ways. Antiracism affirms the inherent worth of all people, culture, and systems and does not establish separate structures or believe in the inferiority or superiority of any group of people.

An examination of the history of Presbyterian Church missionary practices reveals that the first practice was segregationist racism. In Juneau, this led to the establishment of two congregations, one for whites and one for Natives.

In the 1950s when the national Presbyterian Church repented of segregation, it did not embrace antiracism. Instead, it instituted assimilationist racism with the accompanying assumption of the superiority of white Christianity. Thus, when segregation ended, the Presbyterian Church dissolved the congregation originally established to minister to Natives so that Native Presbyterians could go to the white church and learn white church ways. In 1963, Memorial Church was closed for the same reason it was established by Presbyterian missionaries 76 years earlier: white supremacist racism. The congregation was opened by racist white supremacy expressed through segregation. It was closed by racist white supremacist assimilationist racism operating under the guise of integration.

The presbytery’s and the Mission Board’s theological reflection on their actions was notably shallow. They rushed to embrace an integrationist goal of establishing in Juneau a “strong and united church of all races and classes,” without seriously addressing the damage wrought by centuries of forced segregation. White church leaders failed to heed the warning of the prophet Jeremiah who spoke out against those who seek to sweep under the rug the trauma caused by the history of discrimination:

They treat the wound of my people as if it were nothing: ‘All is well, all is well,’ they insist, when in fact nothing is well. They should be ashamed of their detestable practices, but they have no shame; they don’t even blush! (Jeremiah 6:14–15a, CEB)

In treating the wound without proper care, national and regional church leaders did not embrace the church’s calling. As the Body of Christ, “every action the church takes in the world must be as representatives of our Lord, Jesus Christ. Racism is a sin and is not only a life-negating offense against humanity; it is also an affront to God and goes against the life-affirming, inclusive ministry of Jesus Christ.”^[49] It is a denial of the radically egalitarian vision that the Apostle Paul offered the church in Galatia:

You are all God's children through faith in Christ Jesus. All of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek; there is neither slave nor free; nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. Now if you belong to Christ, then indeed you are Abraham's descendants, heirs according to the promise. (Galatians 3:26–29, CEB)

The vision of Galatians was already operative at Memorial Church, but the lenses of white church leaders were clouded by white supremacy that kept them from seeing this truth.

Thankfully, the church has not stood still. Four years after the closure of Memorial Church, the General Assembly adopted the Confession of 1967 that furthered the church's commitment to racial justice, to ending discrimination, and to seeking reconciliation:

God has created the peoples of the earth to be one universal family. In his reconciling love, God overcomes the barriers between sisters and brothers and breaks down every form of discrimination based on racial or ethnic difference, real or imaginary. The church is called to bring all people to receive and uphold one another as persons in all relationships of life: in employment, housing, education, leisure, marriage, family, church, and the exercise of political rights. Therefore, the church labors for the abolition of all racial discrimination and ministers to those injured by it. Congregations, individuals, or groups of Christians who exclude, dominate, or patronize others, however subtly, resist the Spirit of God and bring contempt on the faith which they profess.[50]

In the spirit of the Confession of 1967, this overture provides redress for the domination and patronization of Memorial Presbyterian Church that brought contempt on the faith that church leaders espoused.

The Confession of 1967 also provides guidance for the church's missionary endeavors. It acknowledges that the "Christian religion [is]...distinct from God's self-revelation, [and] has been shaped throughout its history by the cultural forms of its environment." It further declares that "Christians find parallels between other religions and their own and must approach all religions with openness and respect. Repeatedly God has used the insight of non-Christians to challenge the church to renewal." [51]

The cultural humility called for by the Confession of 1967 was absent from the church's missionary encounters with Tlingit people, as it has been across the globe throughout the history of church life. Non-European cultures and worldviews are vibrant and profound; they are not devoid of spiritual depth and understanding. In the case of Memorial Church and Juneau, Tlingit values and spiritual insights contributed invaluable to the community's life. Key Tlingit spirituality concepts are explicated by Lillian Petershoare:

Our Tlingit elders and culture bearers teach us that everything has spirit, both the inanimate and animate, with all things being worthy of respect. From a young age, we are taught to live in harmony, maintaining social and spiritual balance between eagles and ravens. [52] Coastal Tlingits belong to either moiety based on their maternal lineage, while inland Tlingits belong to the wolf or crow moiety.

As Tlingits, we practice *Haa Shuká*, knowing that we are connected to our ancestors and future generations.[53] Our traditional values instill in us a responsibility to ensure that our descendants know what it means to be a Tlingit and to “imitate their ancestors” (embrace Tlingit lifeways).

We believe our ancestors’ spirits are among us. In ceremonies to remove the grief of those who have lost a loved one, we speak of our ancestors as being with us—comforting and healing our sorrow. For example, Jessie Dalton of Hoonah in one of the finest recorded oratories, cried out, “Yes how very much it is as if they’re [the ancestors] revealing their faces.”[54] Later in the same speech, she refers to the mourners’ father’s sisters (ancestors for whom the clan crest is the Tern) as being terns flying over those who are grieving, letting their down fall like snow (bringing peace and comfort) and taking the grief back to their nests.[55] Another example of reinforcing our ancestors’ presence: Elder Dorothy Peters Coronell shared in a recorded interview, “We never lose them; they are all here in our hearts.”[56]

Because we carry our ancestors (*Haa Shuká*) in our hearts, and believe that their spirits are among us, Dr. Soboleff’s heartbreak over the closure of Memorial Church is a pain that remains and reverberates deeply within us. It is an offense that yet remains unresolved. As we speak of the closure, our pain is communicated in our choice of words and in the passion behind the words.

Our understanding of God is enhanced when we are able to view the creator through the lens of all cultures. During the segregation era, and later during the assimilation push, white church leaders and missionaries failed to recognize the profound cultural contributions of the Tlingits. Tlingit and other Indigenous spiritualities contribute to authentic multiethnic, intercultural church life.

Only in recent years has the PC(USA) begun to articulate a commitment to antiracism as it seeks to embrace the future as a multiethnic, intercultural communion. With regard to how this commitment addresses PC(USA) history and relationships with Native Americans, Alaska Natives, and Native Hawaiians, in 2016, the General Assembly offered a general apology for its complicity in the promotion of the Doctrine of Discovery and its participation in systemic racism against Indigenous peoples, stating:

We know that apology is only a first step in the larger hope of repentance and reconciliation. We seek the guidance of relationships ... as we seek to identify and act on restorative practices and policies at the relational, communal, and national level.[57]

The redress for the closure of Memorial Presbyterian Church called for in this overture is one step of repentance and restorative practice that will demonstrate the General Assembly’s commitment to repairing damage caused by white supremacy, and to the pursuit of ongoing healing and reconciliation within church and society. Without reparative actions, the words of apology ring hollow. The response called for in the recommendation section of this overture will provide demonstrable, national commitment to the church’s antiracist posture with regard to relationships with Native people in Juneau and Southeast Alaska.

Actions by NLUC and the Presbytery of the Northwest Coast

The efforts of the Office of the General Assembly and the Presbyterian Mission Agency will join local and regional efforts undertaken by the Northern Light congregation and the Northwest Coast Presbytery.

The Congregation of the Northern Light United Church (“NLUC”), the successor to the Northern Light Presbyterian Church, recommended by the NLUC Council, has adopted Resolution 2021-01, Regarding Acknowledgment, Apology, and Reparations to demonstrate its repentance and intent to pursue healing and reconciliation within our church, community, and society.

It is NLUC’s profound belief that that we must each, individually and collectively, take action and that the best advocacy at the General Assembly for passage of this overture will be proof that this isn’t a request being made only for someone else to take action, but rather a request that the General Assembly join us all in taking this action.

Actions taken by the Northwest Coast Presbytery, as a successor body of the Alaska Presbytery for PC(USA) congregations in Southeast Alaska, to acknowledge its culpability and silence regarding the closure:

- a. Supporting the efforts of the NLUC referenced above;
- b. Supporting the Alaska cluster of churches in Southeast Alaska in their efforts to remain viable, to welcome members from all cultures, especially Alaska Native cultures, and to encourage and train lay leaders, accordingly;
- c. Taking affirmative, transparent, and open steps to assure that, when the presbytery considers difficult decisions about the future of local congregations, the presbytery’s resources will not be allocated in ways that favor predominantly white churches or disfavor primarily people of color congregations; and
- d. Using the proceeds of the sale of the Sitka Presbyterian Church building to fund a Native Resource Center for Southeast Alaska, consistent with the Native American Coordinating Council’s recent recommendations.[58]

Conclusion

Actions always speak more loudly than words. This overture is a plea that the General Assembly join NLUC and the Presbyterian of the Northwest Coast in their tangible actions to provide reparative justice.

In proposing this overture, members of the NLUC Native Ministries Committee have sought to heal our ancestors, heal ourselves, and heal the land on which the Presbyterian missionaries, the Board of Missions, and the Alaska Presbytery committed the offenses outlined herein, with special focus on the Memorial Church closure.[59]

Now is the time for all parties to deal honestly with the past and together undertake the obligation and opportunity to improve the future.

[1]Statement by Clarence “Butch” Laiti, president of Douglas Indian Association, a federally recognized Indian tribe in Juneau, Alaska, during a “Juneau Voices” interview.

[2]In the documentary, “Blest Be the Tie That Binds, Presbyterian Missions in Southeast Alaska,” and retired teaching elder Janice Stamper used this phrase attributable to: Guinness, Os. 2010. *The Last Christian on Earth: Uncover the Enemy’s Plot to Undermine the Church*. Baker Books. See also: Mauro, Hayes Peter. 2019. *Messianic Fulfillments: Staging Indigenous Salvation in America*. University of Nebraska Press.

[3]United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, <https://undocs.org/A/RES/61/295>.

[4]In 1991, Alaska Presbytery adopted a resolution that stated “we deeply regret the church’s part in the destruction of native artifacts and the church’s part in the loss of native languages.” It made no mention of the closing of Memorial Church, and it offered no reparations. The following year, a resolution was presented at the presbytery’s annual meeting that declared the church’s ministry had brought “many positive results to the Native American communities ...” In subsequent years, both resolutions were posted on the Alaska Presbytery website. It is unclear what ongoing impact either resolution may have had on the presbytery's life and work.

[5]When established, the church was called the Tlingit Presbyterian Church or Tlingit Native Presbyterian Church, with variant spellings of Tlingit. In 1933, it was renamed First Presbyterian Church, and in 1940, Memorial Presbyterian Church. It was sometimes also referred to as the Juneau Indian Village Church or the Tlingit Church. These names are interspersed in this rationale to correspond to the historical events being discussed. After adopting this last name, it was commonly referred to as Memorial Church.

[6]When established, this church was called the Log Cabin Church. By 1899, it had been renamed the Northern Light Presbyterian Church (NLPC). After uniting with Juneau United Methodist Church, it was renamed Northern Light United Church (NLUC). In this rationale, it is interchangeably referred to as NLPC or NLUC, per context.

[7]Mayberry, Genevieve. Circa 1941. *Northern Light Presbyterian Church: A Brief Historical Narrative*, p. 14.

[8]*Mission and Ministry with Native American Peoples: A Historical Survey of the Last Three Centuries*, p. 6.

[9]Mayberry, Genevieve. 1962. *Diamond Jubilee, Memorial Presbyterian Church*, p. 4.

[10]Southeast Traditional Tribal Values—Our Way of Life:

Discipline and Obedience to the Traditions of Our Ancestors

Respect for Self, Elders, and Others

Respect for Nature and Property

Patience

Pride in Family, Clan and Tradition is found in Love, Loyalty, and Generosity

Be Strong in Mind, Body and Spirit

Humor

Hold Each Other Up

Listen Well and with Respect

Speak with Care

We Are Stewards of the Air, Land, and Sea

Reverence for Our Creator

Live in Peace and Harmony

Be Strong and Have Courage

[11]The positive experiences of Ms. Collier and Ms. Olson at the Tlingit Church stand in marked contrast to the hostile reception a Native man subsequently received at NLPC referenced in footnote 24. Although these encounters with the Waggoners are fondly remembered and are rightly affirmed, their individual actions did not diminish the systemic racism practiced by dominant culture structures in both church and society. Ms. Collier's and Ms. Olson's quotes originate from telephone conversations with Lillian Petershoare.

[12]*Home Mission Monthly*, PHS, 1907, as cited in Alison Ruth Parry's "Their works do follow them: Tlingit women and Presbyterian missions." 1997.

[13]Ibid, 1883.

[14]The Board of Missions purchased the property for \$1,600 in 1938 from Mrs. Matilda Madsen Streed. Memorial Church member, Mrs. Marie Oswald, and her siblings also donated a portion of their adjacent parcel in order to enlarge the church site.

[15]In 1952, Dr. Soboleff received a doctorate of divinity from the University of Dubuque. He was also granted a doctorate of humanities by the University of Alaska in 1968.

[16]Mayberry, *Diamond Jubilee*, p. 8.

[17]See "Legacy of Rev. Dr. Walter Soboleff Sr." in this rationale for more on Dr. Soboleff's positive impacts.

[18]Efforts at the judicatory level were led by the Committee on Segregated Synods and Presbyteries. The efforts were not welcomed by some due to white supremacist assumptions about how integration should proceed. The Dakota Presbytery, "reorganized in the 1880s as a Native American presbytery, independent of geographic boundaries" (<https://www.history.pcusa.org/collections/research-tools/guides-archival-collections/rg-375>, accessed 1/20/2021), resisted efforts to be joined to the Black Hills Presbytery, citing "lack

of active efforts on the part of White churches and presbyteries toward understanding...” See 1955 Minutes of the General Assembly of the United Presbyterian Church in the United States of America, pp. 105–7, and follow up reports by the Committee on Segregated Synods and Presbyteries to succeeding GAs through 1962.

[19]Interview with the late Kathy Kolkhorst Ruddy, <https://www.aanyatxu.org/kathy-rudy>; accessed December, 30, 2020.

[20]Letter from Alaska Presbytery to presbyters, November 24, 1962.

[21]Minutes of Alaska Presbytery, September 18, 1958.

[22]Minutes of Alaska Presbytery, April 13, 1959.

[23]The Memorial Presbyterian Church Session expressed its disinterest in the presbytery’s merger proposal as it rightly viewed it as a precursor to withdrawing support for the Memorial Church and privileging Northern Light. In January 1959, the Memorial congregation voted to oppose merger with NLPC, Memorial Presbyterian Church Congregational Meeting minutes, January 7, 1959.

[24]Minutes of Memorial Presbyterian Church Session, April 3, 1958.

[25]Minutes of Alaska Presbytery, April 15–21, 1958; September 18, 1958; April 13, 1959.

[26]Minutes of Alaska Presbytery, November 8, 1960. Initial plans called for a bigger facility from the one built. The congregation failed to raise sufficient money, so the building was scaled back.

[27]Memorial Presbyterian Church Presbyterian Session minutes, March 6 and April 20, 1962.

[28]At a called meeting of the Memorial Church congregation on December 2, 1962, members expressed their displeasure with the presbytery’s intent to close the church and the way it was being handled: “While some members were against any move to discontinue this congregation, the unanimous feeling was that no matter what happened, it should not be done with so little notice and without consulting ... our wishes.” The Memorial Presbyterian Church’s elder delegate was directed to inform the presbytery that the Memorial Presbyterian Church rejects the proposal for dissolution. (Congregational meeting minutes, December 2, 1962)

[29]Mayberry, *Diamond Jubilee*, p. 9

[30]Ibid.

[31]*Daily Alaska Empire*, December 12, 1962, p. 1.

[32]Memorial Presbyterian Church Annual Meeting minutes, January 16, 1963.

[33]Memorial Presbyterian Church Congregational Meeting minutes, February 10, 1963.

[34]*Daily Alaska Empire*, "Two Churches Unite," February 14, 1963.

[35]Minutes of Alaska Presbytery, April 1963.

[36]A decade later, NLPC institutionally merged with the "white" Juneau United Methodist Church. A joint committee from the congregations met for months to negotiate terms of a merger of equals. The churches formally united in 1974 and adopted a new name, Northern Light United Church. Records of both Northern Light Presbyterian Church and Juneau United Methodist Church remain in the possession of Northern Light United Church.

[37]Memorial Presbyterian Church 1962 Annual Report.

[38]Correspondence with Janet Soboleff Burke, December 4, 2020.

[39]NLUC Native Ministries Committee member and overture coauthor Lillian Petershoare, February 7, 2021. Other overture coauthors are Maxine Richert, Myra Munson, Tim Lash, and Phil Campbell, consultant.

[40]For a listing of steps being taken at presbytery and local levels that accompany the actions called for in this overture's recommendations, see the conclusion of this rationale.

[41]To date, very few Alaska Natives have been ordained. In Southeast Alaska, in addition to Dr. Soboleff, Edward Marsden, Tsimshian, was ordained in 1898; George Betts, Tlingit, was ordained in 1943; and Henry Fawcett, Tsimshian, was ordained in 1963. The dearth of Alaska Native ministerial leadership is an ongoing challenge for the PC(USA). The need to support Alaska Natives preparing for ministry and other church leadership roles is addressed in the overture's recommendation, reparative action 2.a.

[42]The impact and significance of Dr. Soboleff's life and ministry have been widely attested. "A Century of Soboleff," *First Alaskans Magazine*, February/March 2011, is an example.

[43]"A Retrospective View of Dr. Walter Soboleff," Sealaska Heritage Institute, <https://vimeo.com/146973605>, November 13, 2015.

[44]Correspondence with Dr. Rosita Worl, President, Sealaska Heritage Institute, February 4, 2021.

[45]“A Retrospective View of Dr. Walter Soboleff,” Sealaska Heritage Institute.

[46]NLUC 2014–2018 Visioning Work Plan, Native Ministries and Purple Group additions, Activity 1.1, May 9, 2017.

[47]Metcalf, Kimberly L., ed. 2008. *In Sisterhood: The History of Camp 2 of the Alaska Native Sisterhood*.

[48]Kendi, Ibram X. 2016. *Stamped from the Beginning: The Definitive History of Racist Ideas in America*. Bold Type Books.

[49]Correspondence with NLUC Pastor Faith McClellan, February 9, 2021. Rev. McClellan recommended that the overture include the theological affirmation of the church as the Body of Christ, noting also that the church’s true vocation is “with the guidance of the Holy Spirit, to proclaim God’s justice, mercy, forgiveness, and reconciliation to a broken world.”

[50]The Confession of 1967 (Inclusive Language Text, 2002). Office of Theology and Worship, Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), 9.44a.

[51]The Confession of 1967 (Inclusive Language Text, 2002). Office of Theology and Worship, Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), 9.41, 9.42.

[52]Correspondence with Dr. Rosita Worl, February 4, 2021.

[53]Dauenhauer, Nora Marks, and Richard Dauenhauer. *Haa Shuká, Our Ancestors*, pp. 28, 29.

[54]Hoonah, Jessie Dalton. 1968. As translated in Dauenhauer’s *Haa Tuwunáagu Yís, for Healing Our Spirit*, p. 245.

[55]Ibid., p. 251.

[56]Dorothy Peters Coronell James interview conducted by the late David Katzeek, Sealaska Heritage Institute, for the Latseen Leadership Training Program.

[57]Offering an Apology to Native Americans, Alaska Natives, and Native Hawaiians, https://www.pc-biz.org/#/search/6350_

[58]Native American Coordinating Council Report to GA 224, recommendation 4.c.: “Encourage mid councils to disburse a portion of the proceeds to Native American ministries when buildings or property are sold, symbolic of good stewardship”; and recommendation 5.e.: “Creation of Native American centers, programs, and resources outside of reservations.”

[59] Lillian Petershoare, February 7, 2021.

Concurrence

Eastern Oklahoma Presbytery

Presbytery of the Inland Northwest

Santa Fe Presbytery

Seattle Presbytery