

General Assembly Overture from Grand Canyon Presbytery

On calling on the Presbyterian Church USA to support a robust initiative to repair critical infrastructure needs of the churches, manses, social halls and properties in the Historic Native American and Alaskan Native mission field of the PC(USA).

The Presbytery of Grand Canyon overture the 223rd General Assembly (2018) of the PC(USA) to direct the General Assembly Mission Agency to provide an assembly wide inventory documenting the physical needs of Native American Churches and Chapels and creating an ongoing fund for urgent and immediate repairs and improvements.

This is a call for preparation of a comprehensive on-site inventory by all responsible parties, agencies, groups and persons working with Native American churches to document what facilities and the conditions of those facilities on our Native American church and chapel properties, and in the process clearly identify what is required and mandatory by current codes and regulations, to bring the properties up to those current codes and health and safety standards for their continued use. Because these conditions have largely been ignored, conditions of facilities are deteriorating rapidly. The property assessments shall be done during that time between the 223rd (2018) and 224th (2020) General Assembly meetings. The comprehensive report shall be comprised from the on-site inventories and shall indicate what repairs need to be completed for congregation use.

The PC(USA) has identified 98 Native American Churches in the denomination. Inventorying the 98 campuses is manageable over the two-year assessment period. A formal assessment of churches/chapels in the Synod of the Southwest was launched in 2016. An assessment of ten (10) churches and chapels in Presbytery of Grand Canyon's northern bounds was completed in nine (9) months. The assessment process, as completed and critiqued, provides a guide for future and expanded inventories in PC(USA) with the following components:

- 1. Inventory -- Intentionally working together, evaluation teams would use survey forms that allow for both check-offs and narratives of the situation of each church. Teams should include synod and presbytery staffs, Native American ministries committees, Native American Congregations and special task forces. Focus would be on immediate safety and health repairs needed to stop leaking roofs, build-up of mold, buckling walls, collapsing retaining walls, dangerous furnaces, stoves, refrigerators, air conditioners, deteriorating fences, parking lot pot holes, graffiti and abandoned buildings.**
- 2. Report -- Findings of the inventories will be reported to all responsible parties during the two years between meetings of General Assembly and a report would be made to the 224th General Assembly in Baltimore, Maryland, in 2020. To be of value, this report must contain estimates of the identified repairs and improvements. Of equal value is the necessity to provide a mechanism to prioritize the repairs and improvements and the associated estimated costs.**

3. Research – Results of the surveys will be used for further research and given to the Presbyterian Foundation to designate and earmark funds for the Historic Native American and Alaskan Native Mission Field. The creation of such funds must be used to educate members across the PC(USA) in quest of generous gifts and support. Research should make note of any funds given for Native American and Alaskan Native missions that may have been redirected by the judicatories of the G.A., the Presbyterian Foundation, Synods and Presbyteries to mission works in other fields. That would reaffirm the integrity of our church and our gift-giving.

4. Repair – A means must be established to match identified projects with teams of volunteers capable of making the repairs, including Presbyterian and non-Presbyterian groups looking for such mission work. This is an invitation to the PC(USA) itself to marshal its churches and volunteers to furnish their labor, materials and funds for mission work projects, especially to start with the most pressing and immediate needs.

5. Establish and Fund -- This overture calls for using current, previous and future funds to further the ministry of Jesus Christ to Native American and Alaskan Native peoples in the U.S., including Alaska and Hawaii to establish an ongoing fund to meet the needs for urgent and immediate repairs. Health and safety repairs/improvements are in desperate need to enable continued use of the facilities by congregations and public who visit the churches. It calls for planning long-term physical maintenance of the Historic Native American mission fields, as well as qualified staff needs.

RATIONALE

The Presbyterian Church (USA), most notably during the 19th and early 20th centuries in its predecessor denominational form through the Board of National Missions, was a model at dispatching missionaries and leaders to remote areas to share the story of Jesus Christ. The missionaries established many mission churches in the Southwest with one-third of those located on Native American reservations with these churches still in existence today.

Collapsing structures, leaking roofs, unstable walls, deteriorating plumbing and electrical, dangerous furnaces, stoves and refrigerators, pot-holed parking lots and graffiti-covered walls are some of what our Native American sisters and brothers confront on their churches campuses today. Air-conditioning systems are problematic, fences around property are falling down and out-buildings are too decrepit to use. Church members' safety and health are jeopardized by continued use of crumbling structures. Often needed major repairs cannot be made – and are not made – because the congregations lack the resources. For example, there are no funds for new roofs or furnaces. Such repairs would serve to revitalize and sustain the Native American churches, which often are remote locations, lacking trained clergy and under-attended by tribal members. It is a fundamental responsibility to maintain what we built if we plan to go forward and continue to advance the work and message of Jesus Christ.

Native American churches are not alone in occupying facilities sorely in need of repairs, upgrades and even total replacement. A look across the landscape of Presbyterian facilities would uncover some woeful examples of immediate structural and maintenance needs. For

thirty-three years (1879 to 1912), there were twenty-four (24) Presbyterian churches started. Some of these Presbyterian church structures are still in use today and are in need of repairs and improvements. Of these twenty-four (24) churches, eight (8) are Native American Presbyterian churches with structural ages ranging between one-hundred five (105) and one hundred twenty-eight (128) years. This overture recognizes that reality.

The gifts and heritage of Native American churches have been celebrated in ceremonies in recent years. The PC(USA) has determined there are 98 Native American congregations and chapels, most on reservations. The largest number of churches and chapels, 26, are in the Synod of the Southwest. A total of 21 presbyteries and seven synods boast Native American constituents.