



**Healing Turtle Island: An Event of Cultural
Reconciliation Between The Collegiate Church
and the Lenape**

Transcript of Event

November 27, 2009

Charles Morris:

Good morning and welcome. My name is Charles Morris and I serve as Senior Minister of Ft. Washington Collegiate Church and President of the Consistory of the Collegiate Church of the City of New York, established in 1628, with one of our early churches on this very site.

There have been many important gatherings in the history of this great city. We think our gathering here ranks among them, as we mark the first observance of Native American Heritage Day, as signed into law by President Barack Obama in June of this year.

Today, we also enact an historic healing ceremony between the Collegiate Church and representatives of the Lenape Indians, who were here long before the arrival of Henry Hudson and the Dutch who followed.

It gives us great pleasure to conclude the many events this fall noting the 400th anniversary of Hudson's landing with an event of truth, reconciliation and healing.

On this day, the Collegiate Church acknowledges publicly the role it played in the cultural marginalization and physical dispersion of the Lenape people, and expresses and celebrates our commitment to move forward with our Native American brothers and sisters in friendship and partnership.

I invite you to join with me and open yourselves to the Great Creator's spirit and grace. Please pray with me:

God ... and Universal Spirit ... Grant us the courage to face the truth, the compassion to love one another, and the wisdom for mutual respect and understanding.

Kindle in us the spirit of brotherhood and sisterhood, that we might forge new and sustained relationships.

May our highest intentions come together in this place and then scatter to the four winds, touching all our people.

Shed grace upon our actions here today as we make this covenant together.

With peace and blessings ... Amen.

It gives me great pleasure to introduce Paula Pechonick, Elder of the Delaware Tribe of Indians, and Curtis Zunigha, Elder and former Chief of the Delaware Tribe of Indians in Oklahoma, who will lead us in a traditional prayer of thanksgiving, and remind us of life in this place before contact with the European settlers.

The Lenape before 1609

An address written by Curtis Zunigha to the Collegiate Church of New York on the occasion of the event known as "Healing Turtle Island," held in New York City on Friday, November 27, 2009. Delivered by Curtis Zunigha and Paula Pechonick of the Delaware Tribe of Indians from Bartlesville, Oklahoma.

The Lenape were a peace-loving people seeking to live in harmony with the natural world. In our language, we called ourselves "the original people." Many other tribal people regarded the Lenape as "the Grandfathers" for their ancient wisdom and spiritual reverence. They greeted the European explorers as guests, honoring them as dignitaries. What many of the visitors didn't realize was our ancestor's cultural heritage that was practiced for thousands of years. There was a world of the spirit. It combined sophisticated concepts, beliefs, rituals, and ceremonies under a structured leadership of men and women.

Our teachings brought a community and its individuals into a meaningful harmony with the land, the waters, the animal life, and the seasons. They sought to align their lifeways with nature's central rhythms.

Our creation story tells of a great turtle rising from the depths of the great water. From its back sprung the great tree of life and its back grew to be this North American continent, that which we call Turtle Island. The lands the Lenape occupied extended from this island of Manhattan through Eastern Pennsylvania and all of New Jersey down into the state of Delaware.

Because of this vast homeland, our ancestors lived as a large, interrelated network of independent bands and villages, where political and linguistic influences often overlapped in complicated ways. This collection of communities was known as *Lenapehoking*.

Our ancestors possessed great knowledge long before European arrival. We had knowledge of botanical science, horticulture, social structure, commerce and trade, communications systems, and expertise in acquiring life-sustaining resources from the forests and the waters.

These woodlands were abundant with wildlife whose pelts and skins would soon be coveted by European traders. Seventy-five years after contact with the Lenape, nearly half of all exports from the colonies in New York and Pennsylvania were from the fur trade.

The Lenape long embraced the arts, music, dance, jewelry and ornaments as part of our lifeways. We had a system of government and a system of social management by clan leaders and linguistic differences.

As a peace-loving and spiritual people, our ancestors were not the owners of the land but the stewards of it. Appointed by the Creator through divine creation to care for this gift called *Manahatta ... Lenapehoking ... Turtle Island*.

We could never sell the land any more than the winds, the clouds, and the great waters. Our misunderstanding of European ways led us, eventually, to a path away from all that the Creator provided for our existence.

We stand before this assembly today remembering our ancestors, their songs and sacrifices, their triumphs and tragedies, and their admonition to honor the gifts of the Creator and the path shown to our people for eternal existence.

Paula Pechonick:

I am honored to introduce you to Medicine Crow, Principal Chief of the Sand Hill Band of Indians and award-winning flute player, who will lead us in a piece he wrote for this occasion called "Reconciliation." He will be accompanied on drum by Ron Holloway, Chair of the Sand Hill Band.

Medicine Crow:

The hand of friendship and reconciliation was extended to me in the process, and it is my privilege to offer him to you: Rev. Robert Chase is the Founding Director of Intersections, a permanent global peace initiative of the Collegiate Church of New York. Bob will be reading an historic statement and official resolution, unanimously adopted by the Consistory of the Collegiate Church.

Robert Chase:

Today, we pay homage to forces greater than ourselves that exist in the human spirit: the greater spirit of unity, wholeness and truth that surrounds and embraces us all.

Here, at the foot of Manhattan Island – the place called *Manahatta* by the Lenape people – there has been a steady "Trail of Hope," interrupted by historical events long ago. Now, a people who call themselves the Collegiate Church of New York seek to remember, recognize and renew a connection with this spirit and the people of its original deep expression, our Native American brothers and sisters.

Four hundred years ago, a voyage here by a few of our ancestors became the symbol of great change to all of our ancestors. The journey of a single explorer, Henry Hudson, opened a gateway for a new culture and history.

Following Henry Hudson was the Dutch West Indies Company, complete with its own customs, laws and policies. Coming less for religious freedom and more for the abundance of resources, the company poured through this gateway and formed a company town they called New Amsterdam. The company town had a company church. The Collegiate Church, established in 1628, has been and continues to be part of this history.

As traveling preachers, who moved collegially among congregations in Brooklyn, Manhattan and Staten Island, we were the conscience of this company.

We were the first Christian church to permanently settle at this gateway. On this site, the well-traveled path of our Native American brothers and sisters met the gateway's first fort, Fort Amsterdam, built to serve our newly-arrived ancestors. The trail is known now as Broadway – and by what we do here today, again as the “Trail of Hope.”

In spite of the ways of life of those here before us, the Dutch West Indies Company began the steady imposition of its own culture on Native peoples.

Our forbears often had good intentions, engaging in acts of kindness, expressions of remorse, and compassion for lives lost and lands taken; but there was also ill will, great cruelty, acts of indignity and degradation, all with life-altering consequences through the generations.

We, the Collegiate Church, remember our part in these actions.\

Despite being a faith of brotherhood and sisterhood and love for neighbor, our actions towards you, our Native brothers and sisters, caused great suffering under the imposition of this new culture and its accompanying economic and legal systems.

We, the Collegiate Church, recognize our part in your suffering.

We took, borrowed and bartered from you, our brothers and sisters, viewing you more often as a resource rather than a people with whom to be in relationship. Our actions set into motion a radical altering of an entire way of life.

With pain, we, the Collegiate Church, remember our part in these events.

We consumed your resources, dehumanized your people, and disregarded your culture, along with your dreams, hopes, and great love for this land.

We express sorrow for our part in these actions.

The Lenape people and their kin wished for and envisioned good health and a continuation of their lives upon this great land. They farmed, they fished, and they hunted. They built homes and they made trails across this great land. They gave thanks – and they give thanks today in

places far from their original homes – for the earth and the sun, for the streams, lakes, rivers, ocean, clean air, and for all gifts of sustenance and life provided for them by our common and our truly Great Creator.

We honor your vision and wish to walk together on this new “Trail of Hope.”

Examining our history for live-giving renewal in our present day, the Ministers, Elders and Deacons of the Reformed Protestant Dutch Church of the City of New York, known now as the Collegiate Church of New York, remember the past, recognize our role in it, and renew the present with you. Intersections, a signature initiative of the Collegiate Church of New York, along with her Collegiate colleagues, seeks social justice, peace and reconciliation and has engaged in important relationships with Native American communities in the New York metropolitan region. This relationship building between our communities is establishing a spirit of collaboration and advocacy.

In the many commemorations of the 400th anniversary of Henry Hudson’s voyage, Native peoples’ voices have not been sufficiently heard. Today, we seek to provide a corrective balance. We wish to also acknowledge the influences of Native American people on early Dutch life and on the present-day vibrancy of this city. Native American beliefs, customs, and abiding spirit continue to have invaluable lessons for our society. Many of the difficulties in our own culture are in need of your wisdom.

We place ourselves in your teaching.

Moving forward together, we wish to continue to renew and deepen our connection, advocacy and support of your peoples, including financial and programmatic resources to the many Native American communities in this, the largest urban Native American population in the United States. We wish to persuade other individuals, organizations and communities to engage in these important efforts.

We humbly request an invitation into a lasting partnership with you.

Extending further into the future, our intention is to develop ongoing and sustained relationships with you, our Native American brothers and sisters. We have much to learn and much to offer each other’s cultures and traditions.

Therefore, we, the Ministers, Elders, and Deacons of the Consistory of the Collegiate Church of New York, on behalf of our members, pledge to honor this relationship as we move forward together in the spirit of wholeness that this day represents.

This offering reveals our heart. We open ourselves to your response and our wish for relationship with you. To share the beginning of this, it gives me great honor to present Ron Holloway, Chairman for the Sand Hill Band of Indians, who will offer a statement of response.

Ron Holloway:

Over 400 years ago, European explorers came to the shores of this land and declared that they were here to colonize, to subjugate, and to convert the indigenous population. They set up their homesteads, businesses and churches right on this very spot.

This new world was “discovered” and, as the rulers of Europe had already agreed, it was to be divided into sections, the results of which were devastating.

Some scholars estimate that there were close to 28 million Natives living on this continent at the time.

I repeat: some scholars estimate that there were close to 28 million Natives living on the continent at the time.

Today, there are less than 1 million full-blood indigenous Natives. Obviously, something devastating happened to these original inhabitants.

What happened is that the Native populations were suppressed by a political and religious will of which they could never begin to conceive. Two different ideologies clashed, the results of which were devastating and, to this day, the effects can still be seen and felt.

There are still some who view American Indians as second-class citizens in our own lands. This is not surprising, considering our peoples were not even granted U.S. citizenship until 1924. Further, it was not until the 1970s that Indians were legally allowed to practice our own religion.

American Indians were so far removed from the collective conscious of this country, it took acts of Congress to obtain even these basic “rights” that most of us take for granted.

No one ever apologized, no one voluntarily returned what was taken from us, or even offered restitution. Instead, as the country expanded, every treaty was systematically broken, and the Indians were relegated to reservations to be removed from the public eye.

That is what makes today so very special. Today, the descendants of the original explorers who landed here have come to the descendants of those who have always been here, and openly apologized for their responsibility in policies that so decimated our peoples. They have extended their hands in friendship to chart a new course of race relations, to usher in a new era of healing and reconciliation that can only have beneficial results for the whole of humanity.

For when humans come to understand their commonality: that all are equal under the eyes of our Creator; that neither skin color, race, nor even religion are a reason to elevate one man above another; then healing and harmony can go forth.

A 19th-century author wrote:

Certainly, there are many evils and bad passions, and much hate and contempt and unkindness everywhere in the world. We cannot refuse to see the evil that is in life. But all is not evil. We still see good in the world. There is good amidst evil. The hand of mercy leads wealth to the hovels of poverty and sorrow. Truth and simplicity live amid many wiles and sophistries. There are good hearts underneath gay robes and tattered garments also. And there is no beauty like a firm faith in God, whatever your religious belief, as well as a faith in our fellows, and ourselves.

It is to this faith in our own deity, in our fellows, and in ourselves that we celebrate today. On behalf of all Lenape that live, and have lived in *Lenapehoking*, and my ancestors, I wholeheartedly accept this apology, and offer of reconciliation. I extend my hand in brotherly affection for all to see.

*exchange of gifts

Carmen Ketcher:

My name is Carmen Ketcher. I am a member of the Western Delaware Nation in the State of Oklahoma. I am pleased to share with you the ceremony of our bonding.

For many, the step to receiving such words and intentions is long and seemingly insurmountable.

I've been asked to respond personally about this step and what this event means to me. I invite your consideration.

My initial thought was that we were being asked to forgive. But, why should we? What's in it for us?

Then I began to read about forgiveness and talk to Elders and search my heart. And I learned that to really forgive, you must dig deeper or the same old thoughts come back. To forgive completely is to be totally relieved – relieved enough to go into a deep sleep and wake up feeling so lighthearted and refreshed that you awake whistling and laughing.

When I dug deep into my heart and soul, I found I could say, "Yes, we forgive you of the atrocities that were committed on our Native brothers and sisters." But do not forget that we

are alive and well and many times walking beside you. We are not just those Indians you read about in your classrooms and libraries.

We are progressive, we are knowledgeable, we have a heritage to be proud of, and we are not the only ones living with a past. Let's move forward, let's be the generation to move mountains of feelings and heal. That is my wish and prayer.

In honoring this statement and response, it is fitting to say that in many nations, reconciliations, agreements, treaties, commitments and partnerships are sealed with contact, witnesses, and an exchange of items of significance.

To witness this new relationship, we cordially invite representatives from each community to join us here.

In our tradition, a physical gesture and the element and exchange of wampum enacted this sacred bond.

Through the ages and in this moment, wampum has among its virtues the ability to link and connect people. It has the ability to make an exchange between people sacred. Two wampum strings, made in the sacred tradition for this occasion, are offered to each other.

You have just witnessed the exchange of wampum strings, noting the sacred exchange between the Collegiate Church and the Lenape people. Now, I would like to present a symbol of sacred exchange for our future.

The children who stand here before us represent the future generations going forward. Gerrith Ketcher, my grandson, is wearing a traditional longbone necklace with a shell. He will place it around the neck of Sophia Lecata, representing the Collegiate Church; and Sofia will place a traditional Dutch charm necklace around the neck of Gerrith. This is an opportunity for us to mark a new beginning: a child of the Lenape people and a child of the Collegiate Church in their exchange will forge a new solid entity, not looking back, and marking the start of what will be.

May we reflect on this moment by listening to Iron Feather as they place a traditional drumming circle.

The bringing of two communities together is deeply embodied in the person of Christopher Paul Moore. Chris' life is one of devoted advocacy and honoring of those less visible. He is Elder with the Ramapough-Lenape and an Elder in the Collegiate Church of New York and a sustaining presence in this effort today.

Chris Moore:

Going forward. We have learned today that this is not a new world. It is an ancient world. And it is a new day.

The four winds are still here.

From the East, again we feel the Rippowam; from the South, the Rockaway.

West, we feel the Raritan. From the North, we feel the Ramapough. It is a new day.

The sun is still here.

Again we are upon the Helape Chen Kwalas – the place where the sun is born.

Before you leave today, walk with me to Pearl Street; the shells that our ancestors left to honor the sun are still here. They are beneath the sidewalks, but they are still here.

If you have a shell, like this one, at home, put one in your window to give back the light, give back to the sun, which has given us so much. It is time we give back to the earth, and to the sun, and to our waters, and to the sky. It is a new day.

We see clearly the trails of Turtle Island. The one we call Broadway we now call the “Trail of Hope,” and it goes North: to the Mohawk, Haudenosaunee, and Inuit.

East to the Shinnecock, Pequot, Wampanoag, Narragansett, Micmac.

South, the trail goes to Powhattan, Mexico, Carib, Taino, Arawak, Inca.

West to Delaware, Minsi, Cherokee, Osage, Sioux, Apache, and to all our brothers and sisters of Turtle Island.

The trail goes to South America, the Caribbean, and to all of our brothers and sisters of these United States of America. It is a new day.

Going forward, the Collegiate Church will promote the cultural awareness of Native Americans. The Collegiate Church will promote the learning, the understanding, and the appreciation of Native American culture in our churches, and within private and public schools in New York City. Native American arts, and music, dance and stories, will be part of the Collegiate emphasis on understanding our history, learning from our neighbors. Collegiate Church will partner with the Native American Children’s Museum.

We stand today in the place of the ancient Council fires.

We stand today in the place of the first Collegiate Church.

Our thanks go to all those who have gone before; and to everyone who is on this stage today and who is in the place.

Our thanks on the trail go this day to mothers of the Lenape.

To Nora Thompson Dean

To Roberta DeFreese Fields

To Norma DeFreese Moore

To all mothers.

Glory upon all Turtle Island!

Glory to Gitchi Manito!

Glory to our Great Creator!

This is a new Day!

Friday, November 27, 2009

Leading the way forward is the wisdom of our Elders. And it pleases me to introduce you to Hadrien Coumans. Hadrien is a Lenape spokesperson and adopted member of the White Turkey/Fugate Delaware Family who will offer a statement and prayer for the future by Delaware Tribal Member, arts advocate and Elder Joe Baker.

Hadrien Coumans:

James T. Campbell, associate professor of American civilization, Brown University, poses a fascinating question in an essay entitled, "Navigating the past: Brown University and the voyage of the slave ship *Sally*, 1764-65," when he asks:

What happens if we see our past whole? How might we take full ownership of our history, not only of those aspects that are gracious and honorable, but also of those that are grievous and horrifying? What responsibilities, if any, rest upon us in the present as inheritors of this mixed legacy?

Healing Turtle Island, an event of cultural reconciliation between the Collegiate Church and the Lenape, represents one attempt to answer this question.

In response to this historic occasion, I ask each of us to reflect on the common achievements and opportunities among efforts to link our communities to advance cultural development and social justice.

It is time to move beyond the resurgent “divisive rhetoric” that has long divided us as a people. What are we contributing to further democracy and the public good? What responsibility rests upon us today to ensure that future generations have a strong foundation for cultural expression? Can we, as Lenape people, create a collective voice for the transmission of culture by reclaiming our place in the dialogue of Manhattan? A physical place – let’s call it the Lenape Center – outside the academic institutional structures, traditional museum practices, and tribal political systems that often work against community voice.

A Center that takes full advantage of the cultural milieu and artistic practices of the city, whereby, creating a stage for relevant, compelling, and transformative strategies to amplify and integrate our contemporary stories and traditions.

Such a place will require the participatory action and collaborative work of both Native and non-Native partners. Partners in this endeavor will need to privilege a different approach and be prepared to ask tough questions: How do we create concrete strategies that address the key issues involved in current community challenges? How have the historical systems that define us changed, and what is driving their change? How has the public image of the “Indian” been defined according to a very narrow, elite and exclusive view that may not largely exist? Finally, how do we turn our own and our various public’s attention to the real concerns for our communities today, including plausible and sustainable solutions?

In order to navigate the future, we will need to convince ourselves and others that simply fighting to retain the remnants of the status quo will neither ensure the endurance of traditional knowledge practices nor build a platform for a vibrant future. We can no longer afford to hunker down in hopes of a bright future. The future will depend upon our ability to innovate – a Lenape Center in Manhattan is one such example. A place that will ensure we move into the future in a united effort, on our ancestral homeland, beyond all boundaries, as one people.

In closing:

Wicheminen dilich nemenen wemi keku

(I ask that our hearts are home to good thoughts and our eyes)

Weltek ok welinakotu

(Will see everything that is good and beautiful)

Na ne lekech

(Amen)

Sharing a meal together is a final and first step in moving forward. It is found in all traditions. It is customary and honorable to serve first our Elders.

And we invite you also to join us in nourishment and friendship.

Thank you all for coming and giving witness to our prayer.

Wanishi.

During our meal, we invite any families with children to join us here at the stage. New York resident, noted children's author, and Director and Founder of the Native American Children's Museum Yvonne Dennis has written a book, and we would like to make one available to you.

Also, we invite the Designated Chief, Elder, or representative from each Band of Lenape to come forward to receive a leather pouch containing a wampum bead, a piece of Delft pottery representing the Dutch culture, a leaf of unprocessed tobacco, and a red cloth so that you might return to your people with this symbolic expression of the day.

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