



Rocky Mountain Synod

Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

God's work. Our hands.

June 2016

In a showing of historic unity and leadership, the Bears Ears Inter-Tribal Coalition has called upon President Obama to permanently protect the historic, cultural, and spiritual legacy of ancestral Native American lands by establishing a Bears Ears National Monument on 1.9 million acres in southeast Utah. The Coalition is comprised of leaders from the Navajo Nation, Hopi Tribe, Ute Mountain Ute Tribe, Pueblo of Zuni, and Ute Indian Tribe. This proposal is significant because it represents a movement toward healing for land and people, including significant leadership roles for these five tribes in the future stewardship of the land. The United States will benefit significantly from having a Bears Ears National Monument that conserves and celebrates more than 100,000 sites of archeological and anthropological significance, including petroglyphs, burial sites, and ancient cliff dwellings.

The Lutheran witness of the gospel with American Indian and Alaska Native people has a history of more than 350 years. The Lutheran witness was seen among the Cherokee as they walked the infamous trail of tears and continues all the way to the Northern shores of Alaska's Inupiat Eskimo people. The membership of American Indian and Alaska Native people in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) is nearly 5,000 strong and our office for American Indian and Alaska Native Ministries works closely with 30 native congregations around the country.

Relationships with American Indians and Alaska Natives in the ELCA are firmly grounded in reconciliation and the mutual building up of the saints — people of all backgrounds, tribes, regions, communities, congregations and unique needs. Together, we work with a common vision to proclaim the good news of Jesus Christ, share in the ministry of word and sacrament, participate in God's work of reconciliation in the world and creation, seek justice for all people and celebrate diversity within Christ's unifying love. In our shared work, we strive to nurture and uphold the dignity of American Indian and Alaska Native people, their congregations and communities, and the church.

Our national parks and monuments are an extraordinarily powerful tool for the people of the United States to tell our collective story. It is critical to ensure that the story fully includes the historic and current contributions and wisdom of native people. Rooted in, and in continuity with, our Lutheran faith and ministry, it is with great hope and joy that we support the Bears Ears Inter-tribal coalition's recommendation for a Bears Ears National Monument.

In faith,

Bishop Jim Gonia

Rocky Mountain Synod, ELCA