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Press Release

# Our United Methodist Church Refuses to Recognize Columbus Day

## Church Calls for a Reconsideration of the History of the Americas

[City, ST], [Click to select date]:

For decades there has been a growing awareness of the complicity of the Christian church in the historical crimes against humanity committed during the settlement of the Americas. As leaders of the United Methodist Church humbled themselves to listen to the historical experience of Native American descendants of those who faced both direct and indirect violence as a result of church stances, a desire to ask for forgiveness rose throughout the leadership of the church. Recognizing that respectfully requesting forgiveness requires real personal and structural change, our church began a journey of turning around to face the truth of what has happened and what needs to change.

Using the language of our tradition, we embarked on what we call the Act of Repentance. More of a journey than a single act, this effort has church leaders kneeling before Almighty God and our Native American brothers and sisters to acknowledge the violence and greed of our past.

* We acknowledge that there were Methodist Christians directly responsible for mass murders of Native American people as happened in the case of John Chivington’s instigation of the Sand Creek Massacre.
* We acknowledge efforts of the church to erase Native America culture from the minds and hearts of Native children by forcibly removing children from their homes and placing them in boarding schools.

As leaders of the church listened to the pain that has resulted from these historical acts, many became aware that trauma has historical and generational consequences. Many of the Native Americans in our communities today are still experiencing pain because of what was done to their ancestors.

At the latest gathering of the leadership of the Upper New York Conference of the United Methodist Church it was decided that a refusal to celebrate the legacy of Christopher Columbus was an appropriate step toward the possibility of healing the church’s relationship with Native Americans. Recent critical scholarship has enhanced our understanding not only of the writings found in Columbus’ own journal but also drawn attention to the work of contemporary observer named Bartolome de Las Casas. De Las Casas noted not only Columbus’ brutality, but also highlighted the intentional structuring of an exploitive and enslaving economy resulting in the deaths of millions. Other explorers and conquistadors built on the social and economic architecture Columbus envisioned and created untold suffering in the Americas. As part of our continuing efforts to change our behavior and humble ourselves, the Upper New York Conference of the United Methodist Church now rejects the celebration of Columbus Day. In the words adopted by delegates of our 2015 conference gathering, “be it resolved that ‘Columbus Day’ will no longer be recognized by the people of The Upper New York Annual Conference of the United Methodist Church.”

This Sunday our local United Methodist Church will be holding a special liturgy of repentance so that we can join in the effort to bow our hearts before God and our Native American brothers and sisters. We hope you can join us in coming before God to imagine and begin to build a more healthy world.