

Statement on Native Peoples of Michigan

In the name of the two million Catholics of our state, we, the Roman Catholic Bishops of the seven Dioceses of Michigan, wish to pay tribute to the Native peoples of our state, recognizing their contributions to the growth, development, and well being of our Church in Michigan. In the continuing spirit of the Jubilee Year, and as we observe the 300th Anniversary of Catholic missionary presence and activity in Southeast Michigan, we wish to remind all the citizens of our state of the significant role the Native American people have played on our history.

About 11,000 B. C., Paleo-Indians were already living here in what is known as Michigan. Members of the Algonquin Indian nation were among the first people of faith to inhabit this land. Many of our Native sisters and brothers embraced Catholicism as it was introduced by European settlers in the 17th century; for example, the archives of the Diocese of Grand Rapids record the baptism of native peoples among the very first members of the faithful there.

Our Jubilee remembrance of the gift of land resonates with the traditional respect of native peoples for the good earth. There is also a close connection between the ritual practices of Native spirituality and our own Catholic sacramental ritual practices. The basic values of the traditional Native American religions also resonate quite well with the principles of our Catholic social teaching.

On this feast day of Blessed Kateri Tekakwitha, we rejoice in the faithful example of our Native American sisters and brothers. We affirm their many contributions to the growth of the faith in Michigan and we commend their special role in upholding all those things which we call sacred.

His Eminence Adam Cardinal Maida
Archbishop of Detroit

Most Reverend Patrick R. Cooney
Bishop of Gaylord

Most Reverend Robert J. Rose
Bishop of Grand Rapids

Most Reverend James A. Murray
Bishop of Kalamazoo

Most Reverend Carl F. Mengeling
Bishop of Lansing

Most Reverend James H. Garland
Bishop of Marquette

Most Reverend Kenneth E. Untener
Bishop of Saginaw

Issued on the Feast Day of Kateri Tekakwitha
July 14th, 2001