

The following is excerpted from: Giving Away Our Hearts: Native American Survival, by Thom White Wolf Fassett. Women's Division General Board of Global Ministries, The United Methodist Church 2008 pp. 27 and 28

Since the beginning of immigration to North America, Christians have told Native people that Christians have a superior or "correct" understanding of God. They believed that Native people worshiped the things of creation and told them that the mountains were not sacred, nor were the streams, the forests, the birds, the animals or the plants. Though a harsh observation, the immigrants immediately set about proving that these life forces of creation were not sacred by despoiling, colonizing and eliminating them. Is it any wonder that we are currently... facing environmental emergencies?

Our (Native ed.) oral histories and stories teach us lessons poignantly valuable today as we attempt to understand ourselves in the twenty-first century. We (Native people ed.) were told in the creator's original instructions that we have been provided with all the things necessary for life. We were told to show respect for all of the beings of earth. We were told that our life exists beside the tree of life and that our well being depends on the well being of the Vegetable life. We are close relatives of the four-legged beings. Because we honor all of life, living things belong to our spiritual universe. The Creator enters into and sustains the acts of creation. The spiritual universe, then, embraces the creation that produces and sustains life. We are a part of that creation and our duty is to support life in its relationship with all living beings.

In the teachings of the elders from the Longhouse (Haudenosaunee), of the Six Nations Iroquois, we learn that human beings are to walk about on the earth in a manner that expresses great respect, with affection and gratitude toward all the manifestations of the Creator. We give a greeting and offer thanksgiving to the many supporters of our lives- corn, beans, squash, the winds, the water, the sun, (and ed.) all living beings who work together on this land. When people cease to respect and express gratitude for these things, all of life will be destroyed and human life as we know it on this planet will come to an end.

Our roots are deep in the lands where we live. The elders say that the soil is rich from the bones of thousands of generations. All of us were created in these territories and on these lands. It is our duty to take care of them because from these lands will spring future generations. Caring for the earth is not a project of the Sierra Club or other environmental organizations it is a way of life. (1)

1. Supreme Court Justice William Douglas wrote a minority opinion in the case of Sierra Club v. Morton which declared that Nature has the right to be defended as though it were a human being.