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From Intention Into Action

DULUTH, MN – The elected leadership in the Northeastern Minnesota (NE MN) Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of America (ELCA), in collaboration with Together Here Ministries, has resolved to gift \$185400 + \$100 + \$1100 to the Minnesota Chippewa Tribe. The funds are from a portion of the proceeds on the synod's sale of land that was originally inhabited by Anishinaabeg (Chippewa, Ojibwe) in the City of Duluth.

\$185400 + \$100 + \$1100 honors the treaties made between the U.S. government and Ojibwe nations in 1854, 1855, and 1866 that ceded the land making it possible for settlers to build lives, establish communities, and benefit economically in the area. The NE MN Synod and many of its members have benefitted and continue to benefit, either directly or indirectly, as a result. In the meantime, Tribal communities are still bearing a great cost to their traditional ways of living and cultures.

Reflecting on the significance of this unanimous vote, Steven Teff, a lay leader from Grand Rapids, shared his excitement: "When I first heard this, I felt like this was not truly happening because it's one of the first times that action has been added to what was said as being the right thing to do."

Understandably, there will be questions in the NE MN Synod about how this action may be received or understood. Sue Lyback, a lay leader from Lake Mille Lacs area, responded to the announcement by stating, "My reaction is indeed very favorable and supportive, but also guarded. I'm not sure people fully understand what the word 'reparation' actually means, and I am concerned that it may raise many questions and some defenses among those who hear it. That said, I am grateful for the leadership within our Synod."

This gift will present opportunities for synod churches and church members to reflect on what it means to be in relationship with God and one another and how we relate to our collective history. The amount of \$185400 + \$100 + \$1100 will provide opportunities to learn about, learn from, and be in deepening relationship with Indigenous Peoples and Tribal nations here and now. Along those lines, Theresa Jacobson, a lay leader from Duluth, stated the following about the decision: "My hope for my community is for us to get a better understanding that just because we are not personally responsible for the suffering of others in history, and today, does not mean we are not benefiting from their suffering."

At the root of reparations is repairing, or better yet, re-pairing: a bringing back together that which was violently separated. This re-pairing refers both to the fractured relationships between Tribal and settler communities, as well as the breached trust that has resulted from violation of treaties.

The motivation behind this action is two-fold: to accept responsibility for participation, active or passive, in the harm done to Tribal communities; and to begin to learn how to be good neighbors who can live well together. In commitment to re-pairing, the NE MN Synod will embark on a continued journey of engaging in learning, listening and relationship building between diverse people groups and communities.

Repairing the damage done in any relationship takes time. This is particularly true when trust has been broken countless times across multiple generations. We view the presentation of these funds as a first step on a long journey.

This is a natural outpouring of the ELCA's understanding of God, our baptismal identity, and our theology. After the Synod Council vote, Rachel Berry, Vice-President of the NE MN Synod Council, shared her reflection on the deliberation and final decision. "This is sacred space. We are asked to journey into an intentional relationship, which means we must listen, learn, give without conditions, and open ourselves up to be transformed." Berry continued, "I believe this is our call as God's people in NE MN Synod to more fully live into God's commandment to love God and love our neighbors and boldly cherish the sacredness in each of us."

Bishop Amy Odgren noted, "We know that this amount is just the beginning in repairing generations of damage we have done to our relationships with the Anishinaabeg. This is a significant step toward the ongoing work we are committed to do."

Inquiries regarding this action can be made to Bishop Amy Odgren or Deacon Colleen Bernu, Synod Minister of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion, at colleen.bernu@nemnsynod.org or (218) 724-4424.

*The purpose of the **Northeastern Minnesota Synod** is to nurture a Christ-centered climate conducive to healthy, mission-focused congregations and their ministries throughout the world.*

***Together Here Ministries** creates space for transformational change through listening, learning, and relationship building among diverse peoples and communities. Formed in response to NEMN Synod's commitment to the repudiation of the Christian doctrine of discovery, Together Here expanded in 2019 to include the implementation of the ELCA's Strategy for Authentic Diversity.*