



The Episcopal Diocese of Southwestern Virginia

The Right Reverend Mark A. Bourlakas, Bishop

July 26, 2024

Dear Members of Virginia Congressional Delegation,

I write to you today as the bishop of a diocese that has made a conscious effort to focus on racial reconciliation and building Beloved Community. The recent efforts to replace Columbus Day with Indigenous People's Day seeks to cast a more honest light on our country's colonial past while also working to give long overdue recognition to the tremendous contributions the Native American people have made, and continue to make in the United States.

We are blessed that the headquarters of the Monacan Indian Nation is in Amherst County of our Diocese and the location of St. Paul's Episcopal Mission on Bear Mountain. The Monacan Nation is one of the eight indigenous tribes of the state of Virginia. Our Annual Convention celebrated with the Monacan people their being granted Federal Recognition status in January of 2018. Our Diocese is proud to have a long relationship with the Monacan people, the collaboration is one that enriches our common life.

It is with the Monacan people in mind that I implore you to support the designation of Indigenous Peoples' Day as a legal holiday in place of Columbus Day and the endorsement of US House Bill 5822 and US Senate Bill 2970. We cannot fully undo the injustices of the past but we can continue to strive to strive for justice. The designation of Indigenous People's Day is absolutely a step in the right direction.

The Rt. Rev. Mark A. Bourlakas
Bishop Diocesan