

1/25/2021

Barbara Searls
Native Ministries Chairperson,
Northern Light United Church

Dear Barbara,

The Overture Subcommittee is pleased to submit the following documents for your review:

- Overture on Seeking Apology and Reparations for the Racist Closure of Memorial Presbyterian Church. The overture is in two parts, the “Recommendation” upon which the Presbyterian General Assembly acts, and the “Rationale” that provides supporting documentation for why the action should be taken;
- Timeline: Presbyterian Missionary Activity, Juneau, Alaska including the Establishment and Closure of Memorial Presbyterian Church 1887-1963;
- The Overture Subcommittee’s mission statement and three agreements which guided us in our work (not part of the official overture package); and
- Summary of Overture on Seeking Apology and Reparations for the Racist Closure of Memorial Presbyterian Church in Juneau.

We were honored to prepare these draft documents designed to bring relief to the late Dr. Soboleff, his family, former members of MPC and the Native community of Southeast Alaska. The Overture also requests that the Presbyterian Church (USA) acknowledge and repent of its assimilationist systemic racism that led to Memorial's closure, and to make tangible reparations to accompany and give substance to its apology.

As we progressed through 17 Zoom meetings and countless hours of research, discussion, writing, re-writing, networking and discovery, it became apparent that racism led to the closure of MPC and to its merger, without equal status, to Northern Light. Records affirm the vitality of MPC, the multiethnic intercultural congregation and the servant leadership of Dr. Soboleff.

Since the discovery of gold in Dzantik’i Heeni (known also as Harrisburg, Rockwell and Juneau) to the mid 1960’s and beyond, the Indigenous peoples, the

A'akw Kwaan, T'aaku Kwaan, and other Alaska Natives who migrated into the area have been repeatedly displaced by the City, the State or others encroaching on Lingit Aani and disrespecting their cultures. MPC's closure in '63 happened within the context of the Douglas Indian Village being condemned and burned in '62, the Juneau Indian Village losing its beach via quiet title to the City, State and a private individual in '62, and the Forest Service establishing a campground over Aak'w Kwaan graves in '64 (the City constructing Gastineau School over T'aaku and other Native graves in '57). Butch Laiti, President of Douglas Indian Association astutely refers to these actions as a "history of theft."

In documenting local Presbyterian history, the work of the subcommittee often became emotionally challenging. We adopted and leaned on agreement number 3: we commit to taking leadership from the most impacted members of our subcommittee, the Native Ministries Committee (NMC) and community members.

The drafting of the overture is a first step. Subject to NMC consideration, next steps could include:

- Sending a draft to Corey Schlosser-Hall and Dean Strong at the Northwest Coast Presbytery (as approved by NLUC Council at its January meeting). Corey and Dean have offered to review the draft overture in preparation for consideration by the General Assembly.
- Corey and Dean's comments will come back to whomever NMC directs for further action.
- Depending on the extent of comments from reviewers, it may be necessary for NMC to delegate further editing to individuals for a final review by NMC.
- When NMC is satisfied with the Overture, it can send it to Council for its review.

When Council is satisfied it can authorize sending the overture to the NWCP for action by the Presbytery at a leadership meeting. If approved, NWCP will send the overture to the General Assembly.

We respectfully submit our work and look forward to your response, and the input of all the NMC members. We thank you for scheduling a NMC meeting in early February to discuss the overture documents, additional potential reparative actions

and next steps. We hope that all members of NMC will be present, particularly including the Alaska Native members.

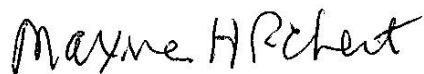
Sincerely yours,



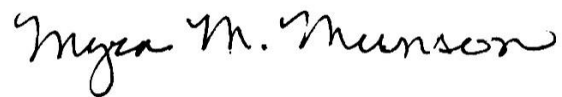
Lillian V. Petershoare
Co-convener



Tim Lash
Co-convener



Maxine H. Richert
Secretary



Myra M. Munson



Phil Campbell
Consultant

Enclosures

Cc: Pastor Faith McClellan

Overture Subcommittee, Alaska Native Ministries, NLUC

Mission Statement:

Call upon the Presbyterian Church USA to issue an apology to the late Doctor Walter Soboleff and his family and to the Alaska Native membership of the Memorial Presbyterian Church (MPC) for the unwarranted and unilateral closure of the church. Many of the elders and members of MPC have gone on, however, family ties with MPC members still exist. The hurt of the closure has been passed on to present generations. People still speak of Dr Soboleff's amazing pastoral work by telling stories about "when we went to Memorial Church, we...". Everyone's story is positive and genuine. Dr Soboleff & the Memorial Presbyterian Church is still vivid in our minds.

Agreements:

1. We commit to taking care of ourselves and one another. We acknowledge that difficult responses and feelings arise in this work, and that they do not equally affect all members. Any affected member(s) are free at any time to pause, take a break, and/or share their responses or feelings that arise during our work.
2. We commit to focus our attention, for at least the first 60 minutes of each meeting, on the text of the overture. We make this commitment to ensure that the overture will be written to meet the required time frames, which forms the primary responsibility of our subcommittee.
3. We commit to taking leadership from the most impacted members of our subcommittee, the Native Ministries Committee, and our community at large. (See: <https://beautifultrouble.org/principle/take-leadership-from-the-most-impacted/>)