

Signpost

Kateri Circles Vol. 7 Issue 5

May



St. Tekakwitha Opening prayer:

God of all nations and peoples. You have filled Your Creation with

Your mighty presence. Through Your handiwork You speak to our heard words that satisfy our every desire.

You called Your servant the Mohawk maiden Saint Kateri Tekakwitha to embrace the Gospel of your Son Jesus Christ to do Your will and to serve others with the gifts You gave her.

May she who held tight to the cross of Your Son through her short life marred by sickness, suffering and persecution, be our intercessor during our own trials. May her embrace of the Catholic faith and her openness to sharing Jesus with others inspire us to be new evangelizers to all cultures and peoples.

Amen

Who do we need to bring in the circle?

Who do we need to pray for:

Family members who are sick. Family members who have died. Struggles that we are facing.

Let us bring our joys and sufferings into this circle.

Direction:

Spring

East

Yellow

Sin - Apathy, Sloth

Fruits of the Holy Spirit - Faith/Goodness/Modesty

Gifts of the Holy Spirit - Understanding/Piety

Topic:

**Pastoral Framework
Sacred Spaces and Images**

In many areas, Native Peoples with Catholic missionaries are responsible for the most significant sustained construction of Catholic sacred sites throughout the Americas. In many cases, our historic churches are the only visible landmarks associated with Native Peoples. Because of this, these spaces are sacred for many reasons. Cultivating a pastoral sensitivity and awareness of the contribution of Native Peoples to the founding of many Catholic communities across the U.S. is essential when seeking a pastoral relationship with regional Natives. These holy places, built by the hands of Native Peoples, remain, in many examples, the spiritual and economic heart of the community. Indigenous People's remarkable contribution to our faith has served generations of Catholics from all over the world.

The orientation of Catholic church buildings offers an opportunity to connect to the importance that some Native communities assign to the Four Directions: East, South, West, and North.¹ For example, many Catholic churches are oriented so that the altar is to the east, since we traditionally look to the Risen Christ in the East.² This Catholic practice finds an echo in the Navajo belief that houses should be built with the front door facing the East, toward the rising sun of the new day.

Ideally, the construction of churches and chapels will reflect connections between Church requirements and cultural practices. Psalm 123 declares, "To you I raise my eyes, / to you enthroned in heaven." The church building should be a space set apart from the mundane and

¹ Many Indigenous communities use the Four Directions to orient themselves to the Divine. See Tekakwitha Conference, "Prayer in Four Directions," accessed April 17, 2023, tekconf.org/prayer-in-four-directions.

² See Pope St. John Paul II, *Oriente Lumen* (Apostolic Letter to Mark the Centenary of *Orientalium Dignitas* of Pope Leo XIII), May 2, 1995, no. 28, www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/apost_letters/1995/documents/hf_jp-ii_apl_19950502_orientale-lumen.html.

designed to draw people's eyes to heaven. It should be beautifully adorned with images relevant to the people it serves. Such adornment could include images of saints of great importance to the congregation³. As the Second Vatican Council tells us:

The Church has not adopted any particular style of art as her very own; she has admitted styles from every period according to the natural talents and circumstances of peoples, and the needs of the various rites. Thus, in the course of the centuries, she has brought into being a treasury of art which must be very carefully preserved. The art of our own days, coming from every race and region, shall also be given free scope in the Church, provided that it adorns the sacred buildings and holy rites with due reverence and honor; thereby it is enabled to contribute its own voice to that wonderful chorus of praise in honor of the Catholic faith sung by great men in times gone by.⁴

As bishops, we encourage local churches to engage Indigenous artists when commissioning sacred art and iconography for churches and chapels, especially in communities where Indigenous groups have a significant presence.

Commentary:

One of the most important aspects of Native spirituality is the connection to the land. When I worked in the Navajo Nation, the people would often talk about the church being the land between the four sacred mountains. The land is considered holy and part of the aspect of the divine. That is why land, architecture and environment are so important to Native inculturation.

Because of the limit of space, the Framework only gives a few examples of why this is so important, however there are many other examples of the land having a significant role in Native spiritualities. From this reverence of the land comes the idea that other aspects of the environment have a direct relationship to how we worship. If the church building seems as foreign to the lives of the Native community then the other aspects of worship may be wanting. The church building itself needs to be as comfortable and as relevant as the prayer life of the people that go there to worship.

One of the most important keys to inculturation is the use of Native art and artists. Artist that come from the Native culture that is expressed in the workshop space are an invaluable resource to enhance the response of the Church to the Native culture. It is not just what is depicted in statues, stained glass and paintings, but it is also the artist that is commissioned to do the work. There is a vast difference in churches that have reached out to the parishioners cultures through art than those who have not.

Discussion Questions for the Pastoral Framework:

- 1) What aspects of land and environment from your culture can be brought into the church setting?
- 2) What artist from your culture have been invited to express the divine?
- 3) What aspects of your parish church building reflects your culture if any?
- 4) What are the good examples of environmental enculturation that I can learn from? What are the resources?

Discussion Questions for the Church and Indian Country Podcast:**Closing prayer:**

From the Black and Indian Mission Office:

God of all nations and peoples. You have filled your creation with Your mighty presence. Through Your handiwork You speak to our hearts words that satisfy our every desire.

You called Your servant, the Mohawk maiden Saint Kateri Tekakwitha to embrace the Gospel of your Son Jesus Christ, to do Your will and to serve others with the gifts You gave her.

May she who held tight to the cross of Your Son throughout her short life marked by sickness, suffering, and persecution, be our intercessor during our own trials. May her embrace of the Catholic faith and her openness to sharing Jesus with others inspire us to be new evangelizers to all cultures and peoples. May she who sought our Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament lead up to similar reverences for the Eucharist so that, like Saint Kateri, our last words may be, "Jesus, I love You." Amen.

Notice:

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Rev. Mike Carson