

# Our Sacred Heart Story with the Potawatomi People in Kansas, 1841-79

"Our Sacred Heart Story with the Potawatomi People in Kansas, 1841-79"  
Session 2 – Panel Response - Feb. 16, 2022

Kristi Laughlin Responds to Jerilyn DeCoteau and reading Maureen Chicoine's book  
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I have been struggling all week to find the words to describe my reaction. Words seem wholly inadequate when responding to the devastating truth of the history of genocide that Jerilyn shared with us, AND when grappling with our own religious involvement in that mission.

But I will share **the 5 words** that describe what has been moving through my heart over the last two weeks:

The first word is **Ignorant**: Before Jerilyn's presentation, I have never heard before this lucid narration of US policies that governed our relationship with indigenous peoples. I was aware of the Indian wars, the Trail of Tears, broken treaties, the impact of diseases like small pox. Yet I still never really comprehended the systematic cultural destruction - through Allotments, or through compulsory boarding schools. That families for generations were ripped apart.

This leads me to my second word: **Sorrow**. Listening to Jerilyn, I imagined my own 11 year-old son, and the gut wrenching scenario of government agents compelling me to relinquish him. I think we heard from Jerilyn that at one point, 8 out of 10 native children were in Boarding schools? This reality of kids being deprived of their own parents, and parents unable to raise their own children leaves me speechless. It is hard to grasp the magnitude of the personal and collective sorrow that families and tribes experienced and still do.

My third word is **Mystified**. And I want to spell this with an "I" - M-I-S-S-Tyfried. How did we, our religious ancestors, our churches, MISS that all of this was antithetical to the gospel? How did we so confuse European culture with the message of Jesus? How did we accept the slogan and philosophy of "Kill the Indian, save the man?"

I was struck by several incidents in Maureen's book of total "misses":

- a) You all may remember when Maureen describes the angst of the Pottawatomi as they contemplate the reality of having to be relocated yet again, from Sugar

Creek to Kansas. She notes they were unsettled and even despairing and reluctant to go. And yet the Jesuit Superior and other religious leaders determined that “it would be in their best interest to do so.” The religious focused on the opportunity to escape the influences of Liquor, and the promise of an expanded school from the government. What a MISS in listening to what the tribe wanted and needed, in pursuit of their agenda.

- b) Another disturbing “miss” revealed in the book is related to Edmond, the enslaved man who helped the Sisters at Sugar Creek to build their home. We learn that Sr. Lucille determines NOT to inform Edmond of his free status there in Indian Country, denying him this information & the ability to choose his freedom.

This leads me to my 4th word: **Complicity**. I am definitely moved by the love, the earnestness, the sacrifices of the RSCJ in serving the Potawatami. And Sr. Maureen noted that they did respect and honor them as children of God, and didn’t see them as inferior. And Philippine apparently thought they could be good candidates for the Society. Nonetheless, their worthiness still seemed contingent on how they adapted to our Western ways. And at the end of the day, all the missionaries were instruments of the overarching project of cultural eradication.

... I wonder still, in what ways do we remain complicit today? All of us as Christians and US residents?

Finally, a fifth word I am sitting with is “**Repent**” . True repentance according to the Bible is **a transformation in thinking that leads to a change in action**. We need to repent of racism and white supremacy that is in so many ways integrated into much of our religious, social and spiritual programs & paradigms. This is what contributes to the “blind spot” in our history and in our present day.

I am very glad for this series, for this conversation, and glad to be confronted with this truth. I am eager to be on a collective journey of repentance.

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## A Litany for Those not Ready for Healing

By Dr. Yolanda Pierce

Original Found here: [Xavier University Prayer resources](#)

Dr. Yolanda Pierce - offered a prayer in the wake of the killing of George Floyd. Her sentiments spoke to me. I offer a modified version of her prayer in light of our conversations.

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Let us not rush to the language of healing, before understanding the fullness of the injury and the depth of the wound.

Let us not speak of reconciliation without speaking of reparations and restoration, or how we can repair the breach and how we can restore the loss.

Let us not rush past the massacres and forced marches of mothers, fathers, children, aunties, and elders.

Let us take in how many children were stolen by government agents and the generations of families destroyed.

Let us not be afraid to sit with the ugliness, the messiness, and the pain...

Let us not offer clichés to the grieving, those whose hearts [have been] torn asunder.

Instead...

**Let us mourn** the indigenous men and women, who were hunted down, deemed to be “hostiles” because they did not want to leave their home, their land.

**Let us lament** the loss of children who died in boarding schools, far from their homes, buried in unmarked graves.

**Let us weep** at a religious educational system that demonized indigenous language and culture, confusing the gospel with European culture.

**Let us call** for the mourning men and the wailing women, those willing to rend their garments of privilege and ignorance, and sit in the ashes of this nation's original sin.

Let us listen to the suffering of those who have not been heard.

Let us be humble and honor the pain, rage, and grief of our indigenous neighbors and friends.

Let us pray with our eyes open and our feet firmly planted on the ground

God, in your mercy...

Show me my own complicity in injustice.

Convict me for my indifference.

Forgive me when I have remained silent.

Equip me with a zeal for repentance and right relationship.

Never let me grow accustomed or acclimated to unrighteousness.

*(modified version by Kristi Laughlin, in honor of the conversations had as part of "Our Sacred Heart Story with the Potawatomi")*