



Amah Mutsun Tribal Band of Costanoan/Ohlone Indians  
*Historically known as "San Juan Bautista Band and San Juan Band" Indians of California*

PO Box 5272 | Galt, CA 95622

August 39, 2013

Your Holiness, Pope Francis

My name is Valentin Lopez and I am the Chairman of the Amah Mutsun Tribal Band. The Amah Mutsun Tribal Band is comprised of the documented Native American descendants of Mission's San Juan Bautista and Santa Cruz in California. The Amah Mutsun are a federally unrecognized Tribe. Our federal recognition was terminated when a federal employee reported that, "These Indians have been well cared for by Catholic priests and no land is required." Both the archivist of the Monterey Diocese and the priest at Mission San Juan Bautista Church have written letter refuting this claim.

At the time of first contact with the Spaniards and Catholic priests our ancestors were very spiritual. It is our belief that the Creator specifically choose our people to care for and protect "Popoloutchum," our traditional tribal territory. To care for Mother Earth our people developed deer clans, bear clans, fish and bird clans and many more. The responsibility of these clans was to learn to care for and provide for the creature of their name sake. This information was shared with other tribes because all Indians shared the same responsibility. The Indians also cared for the land. The Indians used fire as a tool to manage the land; fire increased seed production for birds, produced new soft shoots for deer and elk, and catastrophic fires were prevented.

At first contact the priests forced the majority of our ancestors against their will to go to the mission. There are documented instances where Indians refused to go to the mission and the military commander ordered that the Indians be killed and their remains scattered. The remains of many Indians, including women and children, are still visible on the surface of the ground. Once at the mission the Indians became the property of the church. They could not speak their language, husbands and wives could not stay together because they were not married by the church, children were taken away because the priests believed that the Indians were not effective parents. There are documented instances where the children were given to known pedophiles. The Indians could no longer practice their cultural and religious ceremonies. Consequently, the Indians could no longer fulfill their responsibility to the Creator. The Indians became a slave labor force for both the church and the Spaniards. There are many incidents of brutality, Indians being beaten to their death, women and children being raped by soldiers and more. A priest reported in 1823 that 19,421 Indians died at Mission San Juan Bautista. The life expectancy for Indians at Mission Santa Cruz was less than two years. During the mission period approximately 40% of all California natives died. The catholic church and the Spanish government maintained during this period that their goal was to return the land to the Indians, this did not happen.

During the Mexican period, 1833 -1848, the Indians remained a slave labor force. The lands they were to care for were transformed into huge swaths of grazing grasses for large herds of horses, cattle, sheep, etc. The Mexican Government stated that their goal was to return some of the land to the Indians, this did not happen.

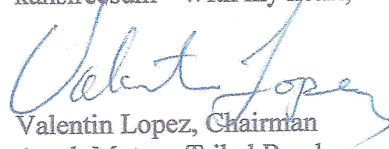
During the American period the Governor of California signed an Executive Order to exterminate all Indians in 1851, bounties of \$.25 - \$5.00 were paid for every dead Indian. During this campaign over \$1,500,000 was paid for military excursion to find and kill Indians. In addition, thousands of Indians were killed during the California gold rush period. There was no law against killing Indians. California also passed laws that legalized the kidnapping and selling of Indian children. A law that legalized indentured servitude was also passed. Indentured servitude is slavery and there are reports of Indians being indentured into the 1930's.

Today many of our Tribal members still suffer from the effects of this historic trauma. Suicide, drug and alcohol addiction, identity issues, trust, self esteem, ability to love, and many other ills still exist. Our history and our suffering are ignored and neglected by both the United States and the Catholic church. The Amah Mutsun juxtapose our traumatic history to that of the genocide of the Jewish people or the sexual abuse of altar boys. And yet, no one acknowledges our history. There is scant or no mention of Indians at the mission; and if there is, it usually presents that the Indians loved the mission and they were treated like children. The history books of our schools do not present the true history of California Indians. The books usually report on the benefits of the pioneer spirit and the heroic figures who overcome incredible obstacles (killing Indians and stealing their land) to achieve greatness.

As Tribal Chairman, I have a responsibility to help our members restore balance to their lives. To restoring balance our members must first heal their minds, hearts, bodies and souls. It is for this reason that I write this letter. I ask you, Holy Father, to please read the letter that was written to Bishop Wilkerson and Bishop Clark. This letter presents some very specific steps that the church can take to help our members heal. This letter includes the request for a formal apology to the current day descendants of California mission tribes. If the apology occurred during a mass in California offered by you, Holy Father, that would be a very large step in our healing process.

Holy Father, we thank you for any consideration you give to this letter. Should you have questions or care to discuss this letter please feel free to contact me at your convenience.

kansireesum - With my heart,

  
Valentin Lopez, Chairman  
Amah Mutsun Tribal Band  
(916) 743-5833