



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

May 9, 2015

His Holiness Pope Francis
Casa de Marta
Vatican City Rome
00120
Italy

Your Holiness, Pope Francis,

My name is Valentin Lopez and I am the Chairman of the Amah Mutsun Tribal Band. Our historic and continuous Tribe is comprised of the documented descendants of the indigenous peoples who were taken to Missions San Juan Bautista and Santa Cruz along the central coast of California during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. I am writing to request a meeting with Your Holiness in order to present and discuss our Tribe's opposition to the canonization of Fr. Junipero Serra as well as to request that the Papal Bulls relating to the conquest of indigenous peoples, be rescinded. We respectfully request that this meeting take place before the end of July.

On February 24, 2015, I wrote Your Holiness on behalf of the Amah Mutsun to voice our Tribe's opposition to the canonization of Fr. Junipero Serra. We received no response to this letter (see Attachment 1). Our letter presented in detail the reasons for our opposition to Serra's canonization and asked that Your Holiness reverse the decision to name him as a saint. We also asked that Your Holiness rescind the Papal Bulls that resulted in the conquest, colonization, exploitation, and domination of indigenous peoples in California as well as throughout the world.

My letter was circulated widely and as a consequence, I was invited to speak at the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues (UNPFII). In my speech before the latter on April 24th, I spoke of our Tribe's opposition to the canonization of Fr. Junipero Serra and requested that the Catholic Church reject and rescind the Papal Bulls (see Attachment 2).

While in New York for the UNPFII session, I, along with Antonio Gonzales, (AIM West), Oren Lyons (Onondaga Nation), and Dr. Christine Grabowski (Grabowski and Associates, LLC, met with Monsignor Grech from the Permanent Observer Mission of the Holy See to the United Nations on April 23rd. Our delegation discussed the impact of the missions on all California Indians as well as how the California missions were far more brutal and coercive than the efforts to convert Indians to Christianity elsewhere in the United States. The delegation also spoke of the opportunity the Catholic Church has to show moral leadership by not canonizing Fr. Serra and by rescinding the Papal Bulls. We presented Monsignor Grech with the recently released book, "A Cross of Thorns: The Enslavement of California's Indians by the Spanish Missions," by Elias Castillo.

Immediately following my presentation to the United Nations on April 24th, I was approached by Katherine M. Ball, Legal Advisor, Permanent Observer Mission of the Holy See to the United Nations. After assembling our delegation, we met with Ms. Ball and we again discussed the reasons for requesting that Fr. Serra not be

canonized as well as for requesting that the Papal Bulls be rescinded. We also provided Ms. Ball with a copy of "A Cross of Thorns."

Prior to writing the February 24th letter, our Tribe had written to Your Holiness on two previous occasions. The first was written on August 29, 2013 and introduced our Tribe, including a discussion of our spirituality during the pre-contact period. We noted our Creation story and how our people were very spiritual and worked hard to fulfill Creator's mandate that we take care of Mother Earth. We also discussed the force and brutality that our ancestors experienced at the missions. In total, approximately 40% of all California Indians died during the mission period. We set forth as well our Tribe's need to heal from the historic trauma wrought by mission policies and practices and we presented, as an attachment, several steps that the Church could take to help our members heal. Finally, we asked for a formal apology from you, Holy Father, on behalf of the Catholic Church during a mass that would be held in California. Our Tribe received no response to this letter (see Attachment 3). Our letter was accompanied by letters from Bishop Quinn (Retired), Sacramento Diocese and Dr. Donna Schindler, tribal psychiatrist.

In our second letter, dated April 25, 2014, we talked about the cruelty of Fr. Junipero Serra toward California Indians, (see Attachment 4). We noted further that while the Amah Mutsun were trying to work with the Catholic Church to help California Indians heal from their trauma, the Church itself needed to heal from its role as perpetrator of the brutal California mission system. Once again we requested that a mass of apology be offered by Your Holiness on behalf of the Catholic Church and that it be held in California.

The world community has recognized you, Holy Father, as having moral authority to speak on several issues and on behalf of the poor and the disenfranchised. For example, Your Holiness has spoken about the need for all to be accorded respect and dignity and has publicly acknowledged well documented truths such as the genocide of Armenians in Turkey and climate change. Because of this, many indigenous people, including Native Americans, have supported your efforts throughout the world.

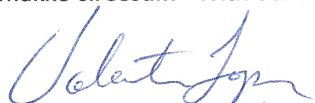
However, to our Tribe – and we are sure that many people throughout the world think likewise – it is a complete contradiction for the Catholic Church to espouse such positions of moral authority today while continuing to support historic Papal Bulls that denied basic human rights to non-Christian peoples and that were responsible for the suffering and deaths of tens of millions of indigenous peoples world-wide.

It therefore seems to us that now is an opportune time to rescind the Papal Bulls so that the Catholic Church can move forward on a foundation of genuine respect, dignity and truth. The Church can put into action what it espouses.

Finally, we would like to emphasize that this letter is not written with anger or hatred. Our goal has always been to have the truth told regarding Fr. Junipero Serra and the Papal Bulls. We have always carefully distinguished our opposition to Serra and the Papal Bulls from the Catholic Church as we have members who are Catholic and we will not interfere with their faith.

We pray that you will consider and grant our request for a meeting. We look forward to your response.

makke-sireesum - With our heart,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Valentin Lopez".

Valentin Lopez, Chairman
Amah Mutsun Tribal Band
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