

## **Censure of John Chivington**

The Clergy of the Rocky Mountain Conference of The United Methodist Church  
adopted the following Resolution on June 10, 2016  
*at the Rocky Mountain Annual Conference*

**In an effort to acknowledge historical wrongs; as an act of repentance to promote healing between our people and the Cheyenne and Arapaho peoples we have wronged and disrespected; we, the Clergy Session of the Rocky Mountain Annual Conference of The United Methodist Church, as we meet on June 10, 2016, to pass on the character of clergy, a responsibility we fulfill every year, do denounce the actions of John Chivington and do publically declare that his character did not and does not meet the moral standards of United Methodist clergy members of the Rocky Mountain Annual Conference.**

**We confess that our Church leaders did not condemn the evil perpetrated on Cheyenne and Arapaho families of Sand Creek at the time the Massacre was committed, and we have shamefully not condemned the deeds of Chivington, and the Church, for over 150 years. We now take ownership of the evil and horrific actions we have committed against native peoples in the name of Christianity and acknowledge that Native Americans are still suffering for our past acts of commission and omission.**

**We therefore condemn the actions of Reverend John Chivington against indigenous peoples and censure his character.**

### **RATIONALE**

In 1864 The Methodist Episcopal Church, predecessor to The United Methodist Church embraced the prevailing mindset of the time in America including the precepts of the Doctrine of Discovery, Manifest Destiny and the Bible which white Christians believed gave them “the right of conquest”, an admonition “to subdue the earth”, a duty to convert non-believers to Christians, and a conviction that their culture was superior to all others.

The belief of Americans that they were exceptional, God’s chosen people and that America was the new Promised Land cast indigenous peoples as savages, less than human, in need of civilization and Christianization and considered them a barrier between whites and their dreams of owning land and being free.

John Milton Chivington, an ordained elder in the Missouri and Arkansas Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church and a presiding elder (district superintendent) of the Rocky Mountain District of the Kansas and Nebraska Conference, left the ministry and requested a fighting commission in the United States Army to help handle the “Indian problem”.

Colonel John Chivington, driven by personal aspirations of being awarded a Brigadier General's commission and becoming a United States congressman became frustrated with not being able to kill Indians and with his commission with the army about to expire; did plan and secretly carry out, without the knowledge of his superiors and ignoring the protest of other military officers a murderous attack on Black Kettle's peaceful Indian Chief's encampment near Fort Lyon, Colorado where they had been promised the protection of the United States Army against such an attack.

Colonel Chivington was a desperate man of flawed character, hoping for glory on November 29, 1864, with no intention of sparing the lives of any Native Americans regardless of age, or sex; and threatening officers who opposed him with hanging and court marshals; carried out one of the most brutal acts of savagery in United States' history;

Chivington's soldiers killed approximately 230 persons, three-fourths of which were women, children, and elderly men and wounded an additional 200 persons; offering no mercy to anyone including women begging for their lives and the lives of their children. Soldiers cut a fetus from the belly of a woman and scalped her and her unborn child. They followed fleeing persons for five miles up the riverbed of Sand Creek shooting native people with rifles and howitzer canons. Then after the massacre, soldiers scalped and mutilated the bodies of the dead taking body parts as souvenirs, which they later displayed in a celebratory parade through Denver where the murderers were praised as heroes.

Chivington was never punished for his actions and never expressed regret or asked for forgiveness for his role in the murders of native peoples. The Methodist Church allowed him to continue his ministry. In 1868, four years after the Sand Creek Massacre, he was appointed as a Church Extension Agent.

Prior to and in the aftermath of the Sand Creek Massacre the representatives of the Methodist Episcopal Church utterly failed to uphold the gospel values of respect for human life and all creation, justice for all peoples, and self-giving love and hospitality to strangers and instead acted as agents of death rather than protectors of life; engaged in colonization, the taking of native lands, displacement, assimilation through boarding schools, and genocide of indigenous people and their cultures