

# **NATIVE AMERICAN PROTOCOLS, ARCHDIOCESE OF LOS ANGELES**

## **INTRODUCTION**

The Archdiocese of Los Angeles acknowledges that the Native Americans of California are the First People of the Land and that the boundaries of the Archdiocese of Los Angeles are established on the traditional indigenous lands sacred to the people of four Native American Nations. These people were the builders of the historic missions that are today under the care of the church in the Archdiocese of Los Angeles.

The Archdiocese recognizes that these tribes hold a special relationship with these missions built by their ancestors – Mission San Gabriel, Mission San Buenaventura, Mission Santa Barbara, Mission San Fernando, and Mission Santa Ines, Mission San Juan Capistrano (now under the care of the Diocese of Orange), as well as with the sub-station mission church of Our Lady Queen of the Angels, Nuestra Señora La Reina de Los Angeles (La Placita). For these reasons the Archdiocese honors a special relationship with the people of the Chumash, Tongva, Tativiam, and Acjachemen Nations.

In addition, the Archdiocese recognizes that over 150,000 self-identified urban Native Americans representing over fifty American tribes live in the county of Los Angeles, the largest assemblage of urban Native Americans in the United States, and that these urban Native Americans are deserving of special recognition and pastoral concern. (The actual Native American population in the County of Los Angeles is probably between 200,000 and 250,000).

The Archdiocese, in consultation with representatives of the indigenous Native American people who have a traditional presence in the Archdiocese, wishes to set forth common understandings and a participatory framework for the Church of Los Angeles, its institutions and faith communities to respect and honor within its structure, regulations, practices and liturgies the sacred traditions and practices of the Native American peoples. The resulting protocols are intended to offer guidelines and parameters for the shared faith community to welcome and include diverse indigenous traditional perspectives that can enrich the prayer, faith, traditions and ceremonies of the Church and its institutions and facilities.

Protocols are standards or norms of action or behavior. These protocols express “the usual and accepted way of proceeding” in the Church of Los Angeles and in its various faith communities. They also fully recognize that civil and secular obligations, laws and regulations address certain of the matters outlined therein. Accordingly, secular requirements may determine how certain protocols must be addressed or implemented by all. However, in themselves, these protocols are not intended to be legally binding or to

modify those civil laws or regulations to which all are subject. As such, these protocols are not subject to legal action, litigation or suit.

The leadership of the Archdiocese, in approving the promulgation of these protocols, and the participating representatives of the Native American communities, in receiving them, share a mutual commitment to dialogue and consultation in order to assure their appropriate implementation. They likewise share a mutual commitment to inform and educate their constituents with regard to the values and procedures reflected in the protocols. Should differences develop concerning the content or implementation of the protocols, the Archdiocese will convene a mediation with representatives of the Native American people and any other parties impacted by the matter, in order to reach a just and balanced resolution of the precipitating issue and to engage in dialogue to mitigate future differences or disputes.

## PROTOCOLS

1. Indigenous, ethnic Native American people, and especially those whose traditional lands coincide wholly or in part with the designated boundaries of the Archdiocese of Los Angeles, are, with regard to their persons, traditions, history, tribal protocols, and cultural expressions, to be accorded the respect due to them as the “first people” of the land.
2. Native Americans leaders or representatives from local tribes or bands are to be included in all undertakings in the Archdiocese of Los Angeles that directly involve the Native American community. Moreover, Native Americans are to be included along with representatives of other ethnic groups in all events and undertakings that involve a cross section of ethnic representation.
3. For all liturgies and other Church ceremonies and events that directly involve the assistance of local Native American tribes or bands, or which publicly acknowledge their attendance or honor their presence, conscious consideration is to be given to the traditions and cultural protocols of the specific Native American tribe or band on whose traditional lands the liturgy, ceremony or event is taking place; the coordinator of the Archdiocesan Office of Native American Concerns Ministry and, as needed, a representative of the specific local Native American tribe or band involved are to be consulted regarding these traditions and cultural protocols.
4. When the Archdiocese or any of its parishes, schools, organizations or other official entities plan to conduct a liturgy or event involving the publicly acknowledged presence of Native American tribes or bands or their representatives, a formal letter

of request is to be addressed in advance to the tribal leadership of the local Native American tribe or band on whose traditional lands the liturgy or event is intended to take place.

5. Native American Catholics who are directly descended from the Native American tribes or bands and, especially, from the tribal members who built the original California missions, including La Placita in Los Angeles, and on whose traditional lands these missions were built (e.g., Tongva of San Gabriel Mission and Nuestra Señora de los Angeles, Tataviam of San Fernando Mission, and Chumash of several distinct bands associated with San Buenaventura, Santa Barbara, and Santa Ines Missions) may request the celebration of Catholic sacraments and services, notably baptism, confirmation, marriage and Christian burial, in the mission churches with which they are historically associated without having current membership in the local mission parish and, all canonical requirements being met, shall be accommodated in their request.
6. Native Americans whose family records, wholly or in part, are contained in the books of any mission, parish, church or archives associated with the Archdiocese of Los Angeles are to be accorded access to those records, either directly or by transcript, for the purpose of tracking and maintaining their family and tribal histories.
7. When Native Americans are invited to participate in liturgies, ceremonies, or events associated with the Archdiocese of Los Angeles, its parishes, or any of its recognized entities, they are to be invited not merely for purposes of demonstration or cultural expression but for appropriate, full and active participation in the planning and implementation of the liturgy or event.
8. It is proper that liturgies, celebrations, ceremonies or events that involve the formal public participation of Native Americans, begin with recognition of the tribe or band on whose traditional territory the event is taking place, a greeting by a representative of the tribe or band associated with this particular indigenous traditional tribal land, a recognition of the Native American Elders and dignitaries who are present, and a traditional blessing with sacred herb (sage, tobacco) by a member or members of the Native American tribe or band. It is fitting that these protocols take place between the entrance procession and the formal commencement of the Liturgy, which begins with the "Sign of the Cross."
9. In conformity with other special liturgical blessings in the Roman Missal, a Native American purification blessing at the beginning of Mass may precede the "Sign of the Cross" intoned by the celebrant

and may take place before or following the entrance procession of the Liturgy. Following the entrance procession is preferred so that the entire assembly may be present for the blessing.

10. In planning and conducting funeral rites for Native American Catholics, including the vigil and the graveside service, consideration is to be given to including those Native American burial customs that are not incompatible with Catholic belief, especially during the graveside burial rites.
11. At liturgies celebrated with Native American communities or involving the inclusion of Native American traditions, it is permitted to use as chalices and ciboria non-porous ceramic vessels specifically and solely reserved for liturgical use.
12. For churches and other facilities of the Archdiocese that are located on traditional Native American ceremonial sites, in particular the missions associated with the Archdiocese, it is the preferred protocol that reasonable accommodation be made for the Native American communities associated with these particular sites of the Archdiocese to use these sites for tribal ceremonies and celebrations; and to welcome their participation in the Archdiocese of Los Angeles, whenever appropriate, in the general celebrations and events of the entire Catholic community. Additionally, Native Americans are to be allowed free access to Native American burial sites located on properties now owned by the Catholic Church, for the purpose of praying for and honoring their ancestors.
13. Whenever ground is broken for a new construction site by the Archdiocese or by one of its parishes, schools or other entities, it is the preferred protocol, although not required, that the ground breaking ceremony include a traditional blessing of the site by a member of the local Native American tribe or band within whose traditional lands the new site is located.
14. Historically identified and authenticated Native American Indian burial sites are to be respected and are not to be utilized as construction sites by the Archdiocese, its parishes, and all other Catholic communities, organizations, and entities associated with the Archdiocese. If an alternative arrangement warranting an exception is reached with the local Native American Indian band, for example the relocation of remains, the exception is first to be reviewed and approved by the leadership of the Archdiocese. The guidelines and directives of the Native American Heritage Commission are to be followed and respected.

15. In all arrangements in any way associated with the Archdiocese, if relocation of Native American remains is agreed upon by the local Native American tribe or band and by the site developer, the relocation of remains is to take place in a respectful manner involving prayers and reburial rites appropriate to the Catholic faith and to the traditions of the local Native American community. The Archdiocese accords this respect to the burial sites of all Native American tribes and bands and does not limit this respect solely to those tribes that are recognized and protected by the federal laws of the United States.
16. At the missions, parishes and schools within the Archdiocese of Los Angeles, whenever cultural and historical displays are made and presentations related to Native Americans are conducted, these are to be conscientiously associated with the specific local Native American tribes or bands, and consultation is to take place with local tribal or band leaders in order to assure accuracy in the presentation.
17. The missions located within the Archdiocese of Los Angeles are to include comprehensive and accurate displays on Native American cultures, life, and history, including the historical interaction between the native people and the Catholic Church. Displays should be appropriate and respectful and should focus primarily on the local tribe or band of Native Americans associated with the construction of the mission. Members of the local Native American tribe or band are to be consulted in the selection and arrangement of such displays in order to assure accuracy, integrity of presentation and respect.

# **Notations for Implementation**

## **Native American Protocols, Archdiocese of Los Angeles**

**PROTOCOL 4:** The Office of Native American Concerns of the Archdiocese of Los Angeles provides information regarding the boundaries of the traditional lands of the four Native American Nations and local tribes that correspond to the boundaries of the Archdiocese of Los Angeles and local parishes, schools, and ecclesial institutions, as well as names and contact information for current tribal leadership.

**PROTOCOL 7:** Native Americans are respectful of the traditions and liturgical practices of the Catholic Church and wish similar respect for their traditions and ceremonial practices. They would not want to interject into the Catholic liturgy any practice that would not be acceptable to or compatible with Catholic liturgical norms. When they are invited to participate demonstratively in Catholic liturgy, a Catholic member of their tribe who is familiar with Catholic forms of worship should be included as a member of the planning committee or group to assure the integrity of both the Catholic liturgy and local Native American customs and protocols. Both the Office of Native American Concerns of the Archdiocese of Los Angeles and the Office of Liturgy and Worship of the Archdiocese are available to assist and advise as needed.

**PROTOCOL 10:** Native American burial customs that are compatible with Catholic liturgical norms include “sageing” the burial site (blessing the site in the four directions – north, south, east, west – with the smoke of burning sage), the offering of a prayer by a tribal leader or elder to the Great Spirit (the divine spirit, the Holy Spirit, the messenger of the Creator), the singing of a “sending song” to the “Grandfather-Creator” (God the Father), placing in the grave items sacred to the tribe and/or the person, sprinkling tobacco on the coffin when it is lowered into the grave (tobacco being a sign of life and the gifts sent from God), and the singing of other traditional songs of sending, blessing, and gratitude after the grave is filled in. All these traditions are acceptable and compatible practices since Catholic Native Americans relate each of them to the persons of the Trinity – the Creator-Grandfather, the Savior-Brother, and the Messenger-Spirit. The Office of Native

American Concerns of the Archdiocese of Los Angeles can offer specific explanations and advice upon request.

**PROTOCOL 13:** A traditional Native American site blessing in a simple form adaptable to and compatible with Catholic norms may include “sageing” the site (as explained above), offering a prayer invoking the blessing of the Creator-Grandfather (a blessing prayer), and sprinkling tobacco on the site at the spot where the blessing prayer is offered. Since traditions may vary from tribe to tribe, the Office of Native American Concerns of the Archdiocese of Los Angeles can offer specific explanations and advice upon request.