

Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ,

I have been reading with interest the *La Crosse Tribune* articles about the 25-foot high statue representing a Native American that has just been removed from Riverside Park in La Crosse. The statue was created by a La Crosse area art teacher, Anthony Zimmerhagl, and erected in 1961, as a tourist attraction. It was given the name, "Hiawatha," because many people are familiar with that name.

The statue has been the source of controversy, at times more so than others, throughout its almost 60 years of existence. It has been described as a "caricature-like image of Native Americans, and... its wardrobe doesn't accurately represent any one specific tribe, but rather a 'mish-mash of many different tribes'" (Olivia Herken, "The history behind the Hiawatha statue: What's behind the name, intent and controversy?," *La Crosse Tribune*, August 10, 2020).

Ms. Tracy Littlejohn, a member of the Ho-Chunk Nation (formerly known as the Winnebago Nation) spoke out about how she and others in the Ho-Chunk Nation view the statue. She stated, "No longer is it OK for a society to tell me how I feel. No longer is it OK to tell my children how they're supposed to feel. It is not an honor to us. It does not teach anything. People don't learn about the Ho-Chunk people because they see a statue. It was a tourist attraction not meant to teach anything." (Olivia Herken, "The history behind the Hiawatha statue: What's behind the name, intent and controversy?," *La Crosse Tribune*, August 10, 2020.)

In Ms. Littlejohn's statement, we hear the voice of one woman standing up for her herself, her children, and her culture. Her voice is the voice of one Ho-Chunk woman, but it may speak for many others in the Ho-Chunk Nation. Her voice, like the voices of many women in the past, may have previously been silenced, disrespected, or otherwise devalued. But on this day, she stood up and spoke out to help others understand her feelings, and most likely the feelings of others in her culture.

Although some persons do not understand why the statue needs to be removed, when we hear the voice(s) of those the statue is meant to represent, we pause. What would God want to be displayed? A stereotypical, caricature-like, generalize image of a Native American, or a more accurate representation that demonstrates respect for the Ho-Chunk people and their culture? When we hear of injustices such as this, how do we respond? Do we speak up in solidarity with those whose voices have long been devalued or silenced?

The statue of the Native American has been removed from Riverside Park. The lesson learned from its removal communicates a stronger, more compelling message about seeking justice and peace: Let us live peacefully and respectfully one with another. This is what God calls us to do for the sake of God's world.

Peace,

Pastor Cathy