

WFWP USA: Celebrating Life and Unity - Honor the Spirit of Thanksgiving

Linda Nishikawa and Katarina Connery
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On November 19, Sacred First Nations for Peace and the Women's Federation for World Peace USA (WFWP USA) co-hosted a heartfelt virtual gathering titled "Celebrating Life and Unity: Honoring the Spirit of Thanksgiving - Grateful to God, Open to One Another." The online event brought together Native and non-Native participants, 45 in total, for an evening of prayer, learning, honest reflection, and warm community connection.

Dr. Linda Nishikawa, Pueblo Hunka Lakota, President, Founder of Sacred First Nations for Peace, opened the program alongside WFWP USA President Dr. Katarina Connery, emphasizing the long-standing friendship and shared mission between the two organizations. Chief Nathan Strong Elk, Ute Mountain Ute, Southern Ute, Native American Church, began with a traditional prayer, welcoming the Creator and our ancestors to the circle. This grounding invocation set a reverent tone for the evening, reminding participants that Thanksgiving is more than a holiday - it is a sacred act of gratitude and unity that the Creator had envisioned at the time of the first Thanksgiving and every day.

Exploring Thanksgiving with Honesty and Hope

Recognizing the mixed and often painful history associated with Thanksgiving, particularly for Native American communities, the gathering approached the theme with sensitivity and truth. Dr. Katarina guided participants through a lively educational quiz about Indigenous history, especially the Wampanoag Nation, whose ancestors played a central role in the 1621 harvest gathering that later became known as the "first Thanksgiving."

Participants learned about the original purpose of the 1621 agreement between Massasoit and the Pilgrims - mutual protection and peace - and the agricultural. The Wampanoag Nation generously shared to help the settlers survive. The quiz highlighted important cultural values such as reciprocity, communal responsibility, and deep respect for the land, encouraging everyone to continue learning, researching, and expanding their understanding of Indigenous perspectives.

Following the quiz, the group watched a short video featuring the Wampanoag community speaking about Thanksgiving in their own words. Dr. Linda emphasized the importance of hearing directly from Indigenous voices: "These are the ancestors of this land," she shared. You can find additional videos on YouTube by entering: Wampanoag perspective on Thanksgiving.

Building Connection Through Sharing and Story

To deepen the spirit of gratitude, participants joined breakout rooms to share meaningful blessings from their past year - a reminder that Thanksgiving, at its core, is about recognizing the gifts of life, community, and the Creator's daily abundance. Later, Dr. Linda led a warm and engaging session on Native American foods and the deep cultural knowledge behind traditional recipes. From "Three Sisters" (corn, beans, and squash) to regionally specific preparations passed down through generations, she encouraged everyone to explore authentic Indigenous cuisines as a way of appreciating the living cultural heritage that continues today. There are over ten million indigenous people in the USA and Canada today.

A second breakout invited participants to share their favorite Thanksgiving dishes, adding lightness and joy to the gathering and highlighting the universal role of food in bringing people together.

Closing in Reverence and Gratitude

As the evening drew to a close, Chief Dr. Mary Murdock Myers, Tampangos Nation, offered words of love, unity, and encouragement. Her presence, steeped in Indigenous tradition, honors us with words of blessing and encouragement at our gatherings. Also, reminding us that silence is also our way of showing deep respect.

The final closing was led by Chief Nathan Strong Elk, who smoked the ceremonial peace pipe. Participants were invited to reflect quietly on all they had learned and received spiritually - what the Creator is trying to teach and learn from others at this meeting about history, about each other, and about the original spirit of Thanksgiving rooted in gratitude, unity, and mutual respect.

Dr. Linda and Dr. Katarina both offered a final message of love and blessing, thanking all who came. Sacred First Nations for Peace and Women Federation for World Peace will continue to collaborate in future endeavors. Let us all return to our Creator's (Gods) plan of unity so we can begin and continue healing together.