

# Making time to be better neighbors

**BY THE REV. DR. KHARMA R. AMOS**  
*Spirit of Life*

This week in our congregation, we experienced something too rare these days — a unanimous vote on an issue of urgent importance to our neighbors. That issue is tribal sovereignty for the four Wabanaki tribes that remain in Maine, and the goal is to recognize and restore to Maine's tribes the same rights, powers and status of other federally recognized tribes. Since 1980, they have been excluded from more than 150 federal laws, missing opportunities that would provide economic equity, health care, housing, environmental protections and much more. Restoring tribal sovereignty would benefit not only Wabanaki people but all people of Maine.

For our congregation and for the larger Maine UU State Advocacy Network (MUUSAN) of which we are a part, this is about more than a single piece of legislation. This is about working to be in the right relationship with those most affected by current injustices and most knowledgeable about potential solutions. Specifically, our resolution joins over 80 other organizations in Maine in recognizing and deferring to the wisdom and experience of Maine's tribal leaders and striving to follow the course of action recommended by the Wabanaki Alliance.



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As Unitarian Universalists, we affirm and promote the democratic process in our congregations as well as our larger society. Many of us, for good historical reasons, are skeptical about anyone speaking on our behalf. Consequently, the process for our entire church to speak publicly with one voice on any given issue is messy, laborious and sometimes takes more time than it seems to merit. Despite the complications, complexities and inevitable irritations, there is something powerful about making the time — together as a community — to be better neighbors.

For us, this was a year of progressive steps including self-education, small group conversations, newsletters columns, a vote of our working for justice committee, discussions and outreach with the Wabanaki Alliance and other community partners, and (of course) having to back up and engage the most basic questions again and again so that as

many people as possible would be sufficiently informed. It was imperfect. If we had do-overs, we could find room for improvement. However, we can now officially say to our Wabanaki neighbors and the broader public, “We — as an entire faith community — are with you! We support and will advocate for tribal sovereignty ... and work with you to honor the land, the people and the future of our common home.”

This specific issue of tribal sovereignty is important; please reach out to the legislators who are even now preparing to vote. More broadly, the most crucial issues facing our world are incredibly complex, requiring innovative and collaborative solutions. At the same time, our capacity to have genuine dialogue with people across differences appears drastically diminished. Our progress is dependent upon this reality changing. We desperately need to be able to come together to discern wise solutions that promote the common good. Yes, this is messy and takes time (i.e. what will feel like too long). Feeling buoyed by our unanimous and celebratory vote, I am reminded that the investment of our time is worth it. Let's make the time, together, to be better neighbors.

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