

A Brief History of the Episcopal Diocese of North Dakota

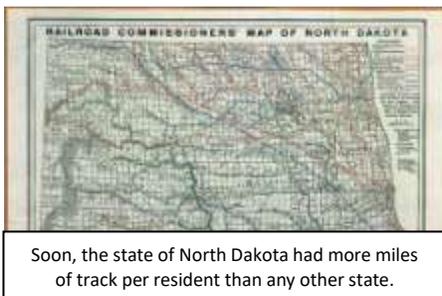
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As we remember who we are and where we have come from, there are good memories and some not as good. Each of us remembers and can help fill out our history. This is an overview and background of the Episcopal Diocese of North Dakota. Remembering our rich history involves many more stories and hopefully leads us to share what we know. Only by understanding each other and our stories do we grow and become closer as part of the body of Christ. We may need to think of our past but let us more so look towards the future. God has always been with us and is working in each of us even now.

The story of the Episcopal Church in North Dakota is reflected in the history of the state, the confluence of our cultures, including Native American, European, and Sudanese from East Africa. The history of North Dakota is influenced by its geography, location, and climate, which includes remoteness, dependence, economic disadvantage, oil boom and bust, and agrarianism. But it is God who has brought us all together. So we ask: **What is God doing in North Dakota?**

Native Americans have a long history of living in this place. There has been much historical trauma resulting from the clash with non-native culture. This includes remembered battles, being confined to ever smaller “reserved areas,” loss of land through the Dawes Act of 1887, and building of reservoirs under the Pick-Sloan Plan in the late 1940s. The cultural understanding of family, tribe, land, water, and treaties have caused much conflict. Most recently protests over the Dakota Access Pipeline brought deep seated feelings to the surface.

Sudanese refugees arrived here from a war-torn land and refugee camps feeling unsafe for their personal welfare. They grew up in an Anglican tradition and understanding of their faith. Once a part of the majority population living in a different climate and place, suddenly they adapt to a totally new environment. Families are disrupted and new relationships develop. They combat their own cultural differences as they become part of our communities and church.



Scots and English came to the area drawn by agriculture and ranching. Growth of the state to a population over 6 Million was anticipated. Railroad lines were laid out and small towns founded with many Episcopal churches ready to accept members. The immigrants who arrived here were largely German and Scandinavian with Lutheran and Roman Catholic roots. The land, climate, and farming methods did not support the expected growth.

Good roads and Interstate highways encouraged personal cars and trucking. The population of North Dakota reached 650,000 around 1920 and did not increase from that level until around 2010 when the oil boom increased population to 750,000. Railroad lines, towns, and Episcopal churches closed over the years. In 1915 there were over 124 Episcopal churches, mission, and preaching stations. The number decreased to 26 in 1989 and 20 congregations in 2020, several on the edge of closing.

The tradition of the Episcopal Church comes from the early church, the Church of England and the democracy following the American Revolution. The structure of the lay-dominated churches included a diocese, headed by a bishop, with conventions annually. A national General Convention meets every three years and is composed of two legislative houses, modeled after the United States Congress. All bishops are members of the House of Bishops and the House of Deputies is made up of equal number of clergy and laity. The Executive Council, headed by the Presiding Bishop, administers the church between General Conventions.

Here in North Dakota the Tribes experienced the Episcopal Church much earlier than statehood. In 1862 at the end of the Minnesota Uprising, the Santee people broke free from the Minnesota Valley reservation. At the time there were Christians among the Santee. They saved lives of missionaries and settlers. All of the surviving Santee were imprisoned and sent to Dakota Territory. Samuel Hinman, an Episcopal Deacon served the Santee and went with them. He also translated the Prayer Book into the Dakota language.



In 1871 the Missionary Diocese of Niobrara was created with William Hobart Hare consecrated as the first Bishop two years later. In 1874 Bishop Hare designed the Niobrara Cross (shown to the left) which was given to each new Indian Christian. This cross has become a prominent symbol among the Lakota. On the cross there are four tips that represent the four gospels. The engraving (in Latin) translates to "That They May Have Life." In 1975, at the South Dakota Diocesan Convention, a resolution was passed to share the cross with all churches in the diocese not just the native congregations. This cross is still given today to people at the time of their confirmation.

During the time of Bishop Hare, he established All Saints School, Sioux Falls; St. Mary's School for Episcopal Indian Girls, (1873) Springfield; Bishop Hare Home for Boys, Mission; and St. Elizabeth's Mission, Wakpala, on the South Dakota side of Standing Rock Reservation. Many students at these schools came from within North and South Dakota. Many were related to one another as well as being from the same reservations.



Bishop William Hobart Hare and travelling equipment

In 1883 Dakota Territory was divided into North and South. Bishop William Walker was appointed the first missionary bishop for North Dakota. Official statehood for North Dakota occurred in 1889. Following 1896, several missionary bishops were appointed. Several national acts impacted members of the Tribes including the Indian Citizenship Act 1924. Vine Deloria, Jr., a Standing Rock Sioux, was the first Native American Missioner and served four years in that position. The American Religious Freedom Act in 1978 legalized traditional spirituality and ceremonies.

In 1970 General Convention designated all Missionary Districts become Dioceses. The first North Dakota Diocesan Convention was presided over by Bishop Masuda. A group of newly designated dioceses, which also included the Area Mission of Navajoland met annually in Tempe, Arizona as Coalition 14 (C-14). They shared ideas, proposed standards, scrutinized each other's budgets, and divided approximately \$1.5 Million between each other. The native churches in North Dakota seceded from the Niobrara Deanery into the North Dakota Episcopal Diocese. In 1971 Innocent Goodhouse and Captain Laverne LaPointe (Church Army), were ordained to the priesthood under the Dakota Leadership Program.



Periods of diocesan life have been viewed in terms of who is the bishop. In 1951 Richard Emery (pictured here) was appointed missionary bishop of North Dakota. Bishop George Masuda was appointed in 1965, after Bishop Emery was killed in a train accident. Subsequently bishops were elected, which included Harold Hopkins (1980-1988), Andrew Fairfield (1989-2003), and Michael Smith (2003-019).

Various national committees such as the National Committee on Indian Work, Episcopal Council on Indian Ministries and the Executive Council's Committee on Indigenous Ministries have been appointed by the Presiding Bishop and Executive Council. To address local ministry, in North Dakota the diocese developed the North Dakota Council on Indian Work which is now known as North Dakota Committee on Indian Ministries. Eventually C-14 dioceses became self-supporting and the coalition dissolved with national funding going directly to the four who receive block grants, North Dakota, South Dakota, Alaska, and Navajoland. The General Convention grant comes to the diocese for Native American work.

Ministry among the youth has been important to the diocese, including statewide youth gatherings in the 1960s and 70s, national events, and annual summer camps. Holiday House was the diocesan owned camp on Lake Pelican in Minnesota. It was eventually sold and is part of our investments. Summer camps were held at Lake Metigoshe and now the diocese owns Camp Gabriel on Standing Rock (pictured here).



Several *mission strategy* efforts have been done as well as Partners in Ministry Capital Campaign. Total Ministry was embraced, including changes in the Canons, forming regions in an effort to bring ministry closer to the congregations, designating all parishes and missions as congregations so as not to designate a difference. Canon 9 was supported and locally ordained priests and ministry teams were formed. This theological and mission-based concept was well articulated by Bishop Wesley Frensdorff. Other C-14 members such as Nevada, Northern Michigan, Eastern Oregon, and Alaska also developed Total Ministry as their approach.

See also the Episcopal Church's **Archival Holdings Relating to Native Americans – An Historical Overview** found at <https://www.episcopalarchives.org/holdings/native-american-episcopal-experience>