

# Mennonite Weekly Review

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Last Updated July 9, 2007

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## Church supports U.S. apology to Native Americans

By Robert Rhodes  
Mennonite Weekly Review



**Steve Cheramie Risingsun, left, prays with Jim Schrag during a delegate session on July 3. — Photo by Paul Schrag/MWR**

SAN JOSE, Calif. — Mennonite Church USA delegates on July 3 approved support for congressional bills that would apologize to Native Americans for injustices suffered at the hands of the U.S. government and other groups, including some churches.

MC USA pastor Steve Cheramie Risingsun, a Chitimacha Indian who leads Native congregations in Louisiana and Alabama, appealed for support for the joint House and Senate bills, which include no financial restitution for tribes but acknowledge past wrongs committed by the government.

“I am here to speak for those who were forced against their desire into church-run boarding schools” and subjected to other efforts to destroy Native American culture, Risingsun said during an adult worship service July 3.

Young Natives forced to cut their hair, locked in closets and beaten for speaking their own tribal languages, Risingsun said, “didn’t know who to pray to, because the people who were doing this to them were God’s representatives. . . .

“I speak on behalf of all who have been wounded.”

Risingsun said Christian Native Americans especially need to hear an apology from the U.S. government because it would mirror Christian teachings on repentance and reconciliation.

“There is something dynamically powerful in saying, ‘I’m sorry,’ ” Risingsun told delegates.

MC USA executive director Jim Schrag spoke in support of the initiative, noting that the misappropriation of Native lands and natural resources by the government continues.

“We ask that we would understand the responsibilities we still carry to this very day,” Schrag said.

In addition to expressing support for legislation that would issue an official government apology to Native Americans, the MC USA statement advocated congregations researching the history of Native Americans who once lived in their area and supporting programs such as Return to the Earth.

This initiative, led by Oklahoma Mennonite pastor and Southern Cheyenne peace chief Lawrence Hart, advocates for the return and burial of Native American remains and other artifacts long held by museums and other institutions.

“This apology might offer a path to mutual healing,” the church statement said. “We are also doing the work of God’s people — truth telling. We acknowledge that apology is only a very small beginning to reconciliation among Native peoples, descendants of European settlers and the United States government.”

The delegate assembly approved the statement by a unanimous show of hands.