

We Stand For Her

Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women



Stand with us

May 5 is a day of remembering missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls. It is also the beginning of Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women Awareness Month. This resource is a gift that will support our efforts in educating ourselves and standing for her and bringing justice to Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women everywhere. This gift is written by the director of the documentary *We Ride for Her*. Prairie Rose Seminole will stand with us and guide us through her documentary, so that we will learn to stand for her—missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls. We stand for her because, we are sisters and as a community of women, it is what we are called to do.

Herstory

My relatives in faith: as you begin to read, I ask that you hold your heart. Some of what you will witness within these words may be challenging to your lived experience. I ask that you push forward and be a witness. I ask that you move grief into action and stand with us in our lived experiences.

Too many Indigenous families know this pain.

My aunt was killed on a gravel road in McLean County, North Dakota. There was no investigation. My uncles were murdered around the same time before I was born. One was left in a field to freeze to death. The other was murdered on an Air Force base; his death ruled a suicide, despite circumstances that made that impossible. My niece was beaten so badly that she died on the steps of her sister's home. My nephew's death was misclassified as a suicide until our family and community fought for the truth. And most recently, I lost my brother while he was in the custody of law enforcement. I could go on...

These are not isolated tragedies. This is the lived reality of Indigenous families across the U.S. and Canada. The crisis of Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Relatives (MMIWR) is not a historical footnote, it is ongoing, systemic, and deeply personal.

Grief can be isolating, but in the right community, it becomes a force that moves us toward healing, toward justice, toward action.

I'm Prairie Rose Seminole, the co-director and co-producer of *We Ride For Her*, a short documentary about four Native women motorcyclists who unite to confront the crisis of MMIWR. I am an enrolled citizen of the Three Affiliated Tribes, descendant of the Arikara, Northern Cheyenne, and Dakota nations. My mother is white, of German-Russian heritage. I have been an ELCA Lutheran my entire life, and my faith is not separate from my work but the foundation of it.

For me, storytelling is faith in action. In the ELCA, we believe in accompaniment, the practice of walking alongside people in their joys and their struggles. This is the heart of the MMIW movement: bearing witness, standing in solidarity and refusing to turn away from the violence and injustice that have stolen so many lives.

Through *We Ride For Her*, we are bearing witness. We are amplifying voices too often silenced. We are calling for justice, for accountability, for change. This film is not just a story, it is a movement. And I hope it moves you to act.

Director's Statement – Prairie Rose Seminole

Introduction to the Film

We Ride For Her is a powerful short documentary that follows an Indigenous women's motorcycle group as they ride to end the crisis of Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Relatives (MMIWR). The film also intimately follows a community member searching for her missing sister while trying to heal her shattered family.

Directed by Prairie Rose Seminole and Katrina Lillian Sorrentino, this documentary sheds light on the United States' history of genocide and systemic oppression of Indigenous people and the continued dark reality of violence against and consistent devaluing of Indigenous women. Indigenous women and girls in the United States are more likely to experience violence than non-Indigenous women and girls. Eighty-three percent of American Indian Alaska Natives experience violence in their lifetime while 80 percent of sexual violence is perpetrated by non-Indigenous people. The vast majority of women and children who have endured sexual violence never see their abusers brought to justice.

The reality of missing and murdered Indigenous women, girls, and relatives (MMIW/G/R) is a horrific one with its origins its origins in the violence brought upon Indigenous communities by

colonizers. A history of violence and devaluation of Native bodies, combined with a justice system that was never established to protect Indigenous people, created the epidemic we see today. There are over 5,500 missing or murdered Indigenous women and girls. And that number is conservative. Most cases are closed prematurely by law enforcement; this results in Native families putting little faith and trust in a justice system that has failed them. That is why the women in our film take matters into their own hands to see what impact they can have.

The annual Medicine Wheel Ride is a two-week pilgrimage that culminates at the iconic Sturgis motorcycle rally in South Dakota, where women are trafficked or murdered every year. This documentary, at its heart, is a story about love, sisterhood and accountability, showing Indigenous women leading grassroots efforts to ensure the missing are never forgotten. Through motorcyclists - modern-day warriors symbolizing freedom and advocacy - we show the intersection of personal and collective responsibility. The mutual aid of the Medicine Wheel Ride is needed now more than ever. The potential loss of federal support during this administration poses severe consequences. Indigenous women, girls, and Two-Spirit individuals already face disproportionately high rates of violence. Without these crucial resources, the vulnerability of Indigenous women, girls and Two-Spirit individuals will only increase.

Families of MMIW/R often endure the anguish of unresolved cases due to systemic inequities and jurisdictional challenges. Federal offices have come to play a vital role in bridging these gaps, facilitating cooperation between Tribal, state and federal entities. If these programs are eliminated or underfunded, the current backlog of unsolved cases will grow, leaving families without justice and further eroding trust in government systems. As the Medicine Wheel Ride travels through various Indigenous communities, their primary goal is to bring together vital resources and support, while also addressing the systemic issues underlying this crisis. This film holds immense significance, as it not only amplifies voices as advocates but also creates a space of hope and healing for the affected families. We believe that through sharing these stories and fostering a sense of community, we can bring about meaningful change, inspire action and work toward a future where the lives of Indigenous women are protected, valued and celebrated. You are a part of this community. Our story becomes a part of yours, as a witness, an ally, a part of a movement larger than us.

We will not find comfort in a justice system that is tied to stolen land, broken treaties, forced removal of Indigenous peoples and countless government policies centered around assimilation and cultural genocide. These systems need to change and to do that, we must educate the

dominant culture around us that we matter. Through this film, we do not seek to exploit the violence and trauma in our communities but rather seek to raise consciousness and demand action for Indigenous women, girls and two-spirit relatives who have been taken, tortured, raped, trafficked, assaulted and murdered.

This film provides a platform for Indigenous voices to be heard and for our stories to be shared with a wider audience, to raise awareness, empathy and understanding. I hope our film provides evidence to support policy changes and reform that address the root causes of the crisis and the barriers that we face to seek justice. Our film is a witness of this moment, serving as a historical record of MMIW and preserving the stories and experiences of those affected for future generations to learn from and build upon.

Begin

You can view the film *We Ride For Her* on the WaterBear network by signing up for a free profile at waterbear.com.

As we reflect on *We Ride For Her*, we must ask ourselves: How do we bear witness to this crisis? How do we engage in meaningful relationship-building with those impacted? And how do we take action to create systemic change?

Reflection and Discussion Questions

1. How does the film *We Ride For Her* challenge common narratives about Indigenous women and the MMIWR crisis?
2. What does this film teach us about the impact of historical and intergenerational trauma?
3. How do we balance the urgency of raising awareness with the need to center Indigenous-led solutions?
4. What role does faith and community play in addressing violence and injustice?
5. How can we support Indigenous-led movements for justice and healing?
6. What emotions did the film bring up for you? How can those emotions be channeled into action?

In the ELCA, we are called to live out our faith in relationship—with God, with one another and with creation. To be in relationship is to be accountable. It is to see, to hear and to act when

injustice is present. The crisis of Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Relatives (MMIWR) is not just an Indigenous issue, it is a human issue, a faith issue and a moral crisis that calls all of us into deeper discipleship and action.

For non-Native women, being an ally in this work means acknowledging the ways that colonialism, racism and gendered violence continue to shape our world today. It means recognizing that the systems meant to protect women often fail Indigenous women and that silence and inaction allow this violence to continue. It means seeing the disparities in whose stories are heard, whose cases are solved and who is given the dignity of justice.

The continued violence against Indigenous women and relatives is an attack on the sacredness of life itself. It tears apart families, fractures communities and erases futures. When justice is denied, when perpetrators are not held accountable and when our missing relatives remain unfound, it sends a message that Indigenous lives are expendable. This violence is not a historical artifact; it is woven into the very fabric of the legal and social systems that surround us. If we do not challenge these systems, we allow them to persist.

Questions to Ask Ourselves and Those Around Us

- Who benefits from the systems in place, and who is left vulnerable?
- How does silence—our own and that of our institutions—perpetuate this crisis?
- What does justice look like when the systems in place were never built for us?
- How can we leverage our own privilege, resources and platforms to center Indigenous voices and experiences?
- Where is God calling us to act and how do we live out our faith in this work?

What You Can Do

1. **Listen and Learn** – Commit to ongoing education about the MMIW crisis. Listen to Indigenous women, families and advocates who have been leading this work.
2. **Speak Out** – Challenge narratives that erase or dismiss Indigenous women’s experiences. Share their stories in your communities, congregations, and workplaces.
3. **Advocate for Policy Change** – Support legislation that protects Indigenous women and holds law enforcement accountable for solving cases. Encourage churches and faith communities to advocate for justice at local, state and federal levels.

4. **Support Indigenous-Led Efforts** – Donate to and uplift Indigenous organizations working on MMIW issues. Follow and support grassroots movements that are leading this work.
5. **Show Up** – Attend vigils, awareness events and community gatherings. Be a visible and vocal supporter of Indigenous justice.
6. **Live in Right Relationship** – Being in relationship means taking responsibility. It means acting when injustice is present, even when it is uncomfortable. It means disrupting systems of harm and building communities of care.

Organizational Climate and Balancing Power

Working to eliminate the conditions that uphold abuse and violence is central to advocacy. However, this work often takes place within hierarchical structures where power imbalances exist. Advocacy organizations must navigate the tension between collaboration, shared power and formal leadership responsibilities.

The alarming rates of violence against Native women reflect broader patterns of domestic violence, sexual assault, stalking and human trafficking. These realities stem from more than five centuries of colonization, whose impacts continue to reverberate through Tribal communities today.

In response, grassroots movements have lifted May 5th as the National Day of Awareness for Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Relatives. The date honors the memory of Hanna Harris (Northern Cheyenne), who was murdered in 2013. Native families, advocates and Tribal Nations have continued to demand justice, organizing community searches, justice marches and press conferences to hold governments accountable. Nearly half of all Indigenous women have experienced domestic violence, emphasizing the need for sustained support and services for survivors.

Actions and Support for the Work

Here are some ways to support the National Day of Awareness for MMIW—

- **Wear red on May 5th** and post a photo on social media using the hashtags #NationalDayofAwareness, #MMIW, or #MMIWG.
- **Attend an event, prayer circle or vigil** in your community if one is taking place.
- **Share a list of missing Indigenous women from your community** to bring awareness to their cases.

- **Attend or contribute to a memorial** for those who have been lost.
- **Register for webinars and educational events** to deepen your understanding of the MMIWR crisis.
- **Use your voice** to raise awareness and engage others in meaningful conversations about MMIWR.
- **Advocate for policy change** that addresses the root causes of violence against Indigenous women and relatives.
- **Donate to Indigenous-led organizations** that provide support services and advocacy for MMIWR families. (Like the Medicine Wheel Ride www.medicinewheelride.org)

This crisis will only improve as awareness spreads, communities come together, and action is taken. Let us stand in solidarity, bear witness and commit to justice for missing and murdered Indigenous women and relatives.

Stay engaged. Added resources on how to combat this epidemic and support the work for justice and healing are being developed.

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A Call to Women of the ELCA and the Church

A Prayer for Justice and Healing



Creator, Loving God,

We come before You with heavy hearts, grieving the lives stolen, the families broken, and the justice denied.

We lift up the names of our missing and murdered Indigenous women, girls, and relatives, those known and unknown, those who have been found and those still lost. We refuse to forget them.

We pray for the families who carry the weight of loss, for the mothers, sisters, aunts, and grandmothers who continue the search, who refuse to let their loved ones be erased. Give them strength in their sorrow, courage in their fight, and comfort in their pain.

We pray for the communities who rise up against this injustice, who demand change, who speak the truth in the face of silence. Bless their voices, magnify their witness, and move hearts to action.

We ask You to open the eyes of those who benefit from systems of power and privilege that allow this violence to continue. Stir in them a holy discomfort. Call us into accountability, into allyship, into the hard and necessary work of justice.

Forgive us, O God, for the times we have been silent when we should have spoken, for the times we have turned away when we should have leaned in. Move us to be in right relationship with one another. Let our faith be a faith that acts, that heals, that refuses to ignore the suffering of our relatives.

Walk with us, Creator. Guide us in this work.

Make us instruments of Your justice.

Make us vessels of Your love.

In Your holy and powerful name, we pray.

Amen.