

**Powerfully engaging assembly  
and a challenging commitment to solidarity and justice**

The January 14, 2017 Community Assembly  
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with photographs by Rita Quigley

Community Assemblies are wonderful opportunities for us all to gather as sisters, consociates, partners in mission, and people who share the passion for justice and spirituality of loving God and neighbor without distinction. This Community Assembly also gave us a unique opportunity to explore the needs of our times and to promote new ways of engaging with one another and those directly impacted by issues of injustice. Approximately 173 people (105 sisters, 38 consociates, 8 candidates, 11 partners in mission and 11 invited guests) truly embodied our CSJ vision for this special assembly.

Kandi Mossett, our keynote speaker, joined us via Skype from the Indigenous Environmental Network (IEN). Kandi is a member of the Hidatsa tribe and IEN's Lead Organizer on the Extreme Energy and Just Transition Campaign. Her opening words, "Hello, Relatives!" invited us into relationship. She engaged us in a very personal way by telling stories and showing pictures related to the historic gathering of tribes, allies, and people from all walks of life at the Oceti Sakowin Camp of Standing Rock. There, over the past several months, thousands of people from all over the world have stood in solidarity to halt the Dakota Access Pipeline.

We were deeply moved by Kandi's personal connections to the struggle and the pictures she showed us -- images of the campsite, of water protectors standing in front of pipeline construction equipment, of militarized policemen using water cannons on Native people in freezing weather, and pictures of people who had sustained serious wounds from the bites of police dogs or the rubber bullets shot by police. The "blood memory" of this Dakota land and the witness of many people putting their lives at risk to protect the water from contamination, are a testimony to the unique ways individuals and groups are deeply living the mission in real struggles for justice today.

We paused in our community conversations to listen to the insights of special invited guests. These included Estella LaPointe, Dakota tribal member and Community Programs Manager at Dream of Wild Health (DWH) together with four youth leaders of the DWH's "Garden Warriors." They helped to give voice to the next generation's view about what is happening at Standing Rock and ways we can be supportive. This assembly challenged us all to engage in significant dialogue around the Acts of Chapter and the recent *CSJ Carondelet Statement of*

*Solidarity with Native Peoples of Standing Rock Sioux Tribe.* The assembly was a very engaging and powerful experience. In the words of one participant,

*I came wondering why we were spending an entire morning on Standing Rock. This was really great and has opened my eyes. I see we really could have spent much more time looking at this issue.*

Another participant shared during the large group sharing,

*I am from North Dakota. I came here with a whole list of complaints against the protesters. After your presentation, I thought my legs were knocked out from under me. Now I'm grateful for what you are doing. You said the men from the man camps have raped the women at Fort Berthold. The energy industry has raped the people, the land and the culture of North Dakota, and no one has been able to stop them. You are doing something to stop them, and I am grateful for what you are doing for me, for the people of North Dakota, the land, the water, the world. (Lilly Long, CSJ)*

We are grateful to the Community Assembly planning committee for their collaboration with the Native American Awareness and Earth Partners Working Groups of the Justice Commission. Participants engaged directly with persons impacted by major issues of injustice, were educated about emerging needs, and challenged to take further action. All were deeply moved by the singing of Sara Thomsen's new song, *Water is Life – Mni Wiconi*, the song she wrote after visiting Standing Rock. Her songs knit together the entire gathering and inspired us to take courageous action for justice.

This assembly is an illustration of the importance of being in touch with the needs of our times and collaborating with the Commissions and other groups sharing our mission. The collection taken for the Indigenous Environmental Network and for their support at Standing Rock amounted to just over \$2000. For more information about the legal timeline which was presented at the Community Assembly about Standing Rock can be found at <http://earthjustice.org/features/faq-standing-rock-litigation>