

The Reverend Jonathan M. Barton – General Minister

Virginia Council of Churches

House Committee on Natural Resources

“Thomasina E. Jordan Indian Tribes of Virginia Federal Recognition Act of 2006”

April 18, 2007

Chairman Rahall, members of the House Committee on Natural Resources, Congressman Moran, Congressman Wolf, tribal leaders from the Virginia Tribes, thank you for the opportunity to speak here today. My name is Jonathan Barton and I serve as the General Minister for the Virginia Council of Churches. I ask your permission to include my previous testimony and to revise and extend my comments. I would like to express my deep appreciation to the members of Virginia’s six tribes present here today for inviting the Council to stand with them in their request for Federal Acknowledgment. We stand with the Virginia tribes today in solid support of H.R. 1294, the “Thomasina E. Jordan Indian Tribes of Virginia Federal Recognition Act of 2007,”

The Virginia Council of Churches, established in 1944, is the combined witness of 37 governing bodies of 18 different Catholic, Orthodox, and Protestant denominations located within the Commonwealth of Virginia. A list of our member denominations is appended to my written comments. During our 63-year history, we have an established record for fairness, justice, and the dignity of all peoples. We stand here today in grounded faith, in our history and values. Faith means living not by our feelings but by our commitments. The assurance of things hoped for is often less about when a hoped-for dream becomes a reality than why that dream must become reality. The conviction of things not seen isn’t always about when or even how it will come to pass but rather why it deserves our energies in the first place. We hold fast to our faith that our Virginia Tribes will be recognized by Congress because we have assurance in the rightness of it and have the conviction necessary to see it through.

Four hundred years ago this month when Captain Christopher Newport sailed into the Chesapeake Bay, a relationship between the church and Virginia’s Indigenous People

began. There is little doubt in the historical record that one of the purposes of Jamestown was to establish the church in Virginia, this relationship continues today.

In 1999 both chambers of the Virginia General Assembly agreed to House Joint Resolution 754 urging Congress to grant Federal Recognition to the Virginia Tribes. Our legislature asked the state's delegation in Congress "to take all necessary steps forthwith to advance it." Five years ago when I testified before this Committee and the Senate Committee on Indian Affairs, Senator Ben "Nighthorse" Campbell made the comment: "You know Rev. Barton, the Indians and the church have not always gotten along very well." The church has much to repent in our early missionary efforts. My presence here today represents a desire to repent for past sins. The Rev. Robert Hunt and others of the early 1600s failed to find the Image of God in the native people they encountered. They believed that in order to be a Christian, they needed to look, live, and speak with an English accent. Even though the missionaries were excessively zealous, the scriptures they brought with them eventually provided the strength for these tribes to endure four centuries of oppression and discrimination. We have come a long way together since those early days. During that same hearing Senator Allen asked me about concerns the Council may have regarding gaming. At that time I stated the Council's opposition to all forms of gaming and our conviction that if gaming comes to Virginia it will not be the Virginia Tribes who are the ones to introduce it. This is still our strong conviction today.

The cultural landscape is similar with each of the Virginia tribes. As you enter their land, you find the church, the school and the Tribal Circle. As you approach the Circle you can hear the sounds of the Tribal Drum, you can feel the heartbeat of life move through your body, declaring you are on sacred ground. It is here where the tribal community is grounded. You must listen to the sound of the drum of the past, so that you can sing in the present and dance into the future. Here is where the faith and traditions of the Elders are passed to new generations.

It has been a blessing for me to know and work with each of the chiefs of our Virginia tribes. I know them to be persons of great integrity and moral courage. Each brings

strong leadership to their tribes. Each brings unique and special gifts, and they all share a common respect for their past and vision for the future.

America's 400th Anniversary Commemorations are now center stage with special events drawing international guests and visitors every week. It is vital that we show the world that Virginia's Indigenous People, who have lived on this land for a thousand generations, and who greeted the English as they landed in 1607, still exist today. We need to recognize them, as we approach these public observances marking the 400th Commemoration of the first permanent English Settlement at Jamestown. We are called to review our complete history, reflect upon it, and act as a people of faith mindful of the significance of 1607. The people in our churches and communities now look at the significance of these events differently. What represented newness of hope and opportunity for some was the occasion for oppression, degradation, and genocide for others. For the church this is not just a time for celebration but a time for a committed plan of action insuring that this "kairos" moment in history not continue to cosmetically coat the painful aspects of the American history of racism. These six Virginia Tribes; the Chickahominy, the Chickahominy – Eastern Division, the Upper Mattaponi, the Rappahannock, the Monacan, and the Nansemond, stand before you today after a four hundred year journey asking only that you honor their being, honor their contributions to our shared history, and honor their ancestors by acknowledging they exist. This simple request is vital to the healing of the broken circle, broken four centuries ago when cultures collided and forever changed the history of the world. It is about the present and the recognition that despite the journey these tribes have survived and are still here. It is about taking their proper place among the other 563 tribes recognized by the United States. It is about the future that future generations may experience the fullness of life intended by their forbearers and their Creator. Let us mend the Circle so that we may move forward into the future. Let me close with the words from one of the songs created and recorded for this special Jamestown observance by "Anniversary Voices"

Remember the Many

We are all part of the sacred earth, every deer, every stream, every tree

We have learned to respect all living things, and to live in harmony.

*We are riders on the sands, the sands of time,
the Creator's in the wave in the shore.
We have been here for more than ten thousand years.
We will be here for ten thousand more!
Stand where I'm standing; take a look at my view
How should I feel? I was here before you.
The time has arrived recognition is due.
Remember the many who've become the few!*

The member Communion of the Virginia Council of Churches, strongly encourage you to remember the few, recognize our tribes pass the Thomasia E. Jordan Indian Tribes of Virginia Federal Recognition Act of 2006.