

Indian bishop believes Wisconsin very racist

By Mary Beth Murphy

Religion editor

One of the state's Episcopal bishops said Wisconsin's attitudes toward Indians make it "the most racist place I've ever lived, and the people are totally ignorant of their racism."

"But it is there," said Bishop William C. Wantland, leader of the East Claire Diocese since 1980 and a citizen of the Seminole nation of Oklahoma.

"Wantland said his personal experiences made him more aware of problems facing Indians and 'perhaps more sensitive to how it affects our people.'"

Motivated by his religious convictions and pride in his Indian heritage, Wantland is committed to working on Indian rights.

"Who you are affects how you address issues," he said in an interview this week in Pewaukee, where he was staying while attending graduation ceremonies at Nashotah House, an Episcopal seminary.

Wantland also is president of the Wisconsin Conference of Churches, which has sponsored forums on Indian treaty rights throughout the state.

Although he didn't encounter prejudice while growing up in a predominantly white Indian community in eastern Oklahoma, he was later subjected to racism's animosity and bitterness when he practiced law in the western part of the state before he entered the ministry.

He described his initial reaction as one of "almost sadness at the ignorance of the people who would judge a person solely on race. And I would have to say there was a certain amount of anger, also."

Wantland said he realized that the best way to deal with that anger was to address the problem's cause in-

stead of lashing out at the individuals involved.

The problem, he said, was ignorance.

"One of the things that motivated me to be so much involved in Indian rights was the whole question: How do we educate non-Indians as to the unique, legal situation of Indian people and their unique problems?"

Wisconsinites need to be educated, or re-educated, on a massive scale, he said.

This is particularly true, he said, in light of anger directed at Chippewa Indians for exercising fishing, hunting and trapping rights on public land in northern Wisconsin under 19th century treaties.

Until a few years ago, he said the average Wisconsin high school textbook described Indians in the nation's early history as blood-thirsty savages and referred to them in contemporary times as being drunken and non-productive members of society.

"It shouldn't surprise us that you're going to have the Equal Rights for Everybody and the PARR (Protect Americans Rights and Resources) organizations when these people have been brought up on racial stereotypes from the time they were old enough to go to school."

A non-Indian's education begins with the realization that "the Indian peoples are by definition of the US government dependent sovereign nations.... Indian people in Wisconsin are citizens of their states.... The fact that the United States has surrounded them and annexed them doesn't destroy their sovereignty or their rights as people," Wantland said.

He added that this was hard for Wisconsin citizens to understand.

Under the US Constitution, Indian treaties are the supreme law of the

land and every state is obligated to accept them.

County and state governments have to deal with Indians on a government-to-government basis, he said. If a conservative Republican such as Ronald Reagan can recognize that, "it would seem the so-called progressives of Wisconsin could grasp that concept," the bishop said.

To those who would argue that 100-year-old treaties were too ancient to be upheld, Wantland noted that the Constitution is about 200 years old, so "we should do away with the freedom of speech, I suppose?"

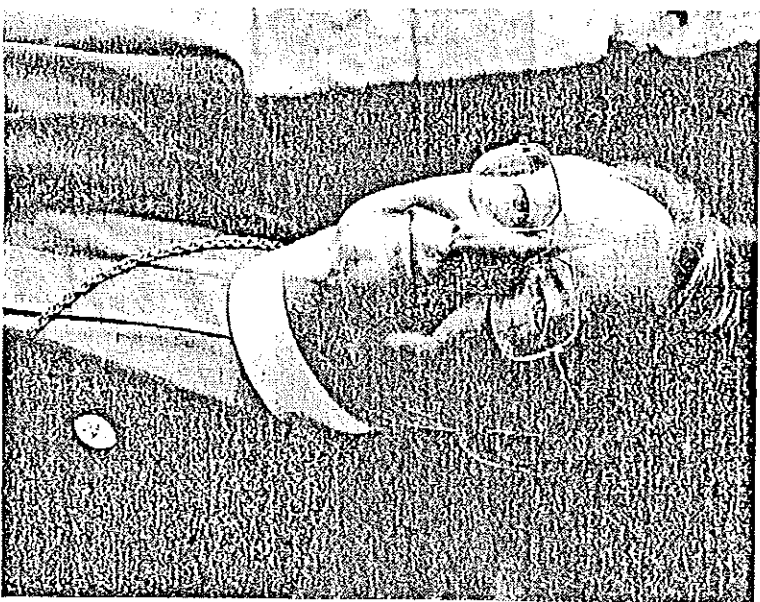
Wantland said he felt that after four or five years of Indian hunting and fishing seasons, people would realize resources hadn't been depleted.

"When that fact finally sinks in, that's not going to be the point of anger and confusion. It is now," he said.

As for the recent incident of the Lac du Flambeau Indians spearfishing excessively on two lakes, Wantland acknowledged it was unfortunate and would have a negative impact on how other Indian people were perceived.

However, he stressed that despite all provocations, there was only one such incident, proving the Indians "to be generally passive and law-abiding, rather than aggressive and law-breaking."

"The average citizen of this country, faced with all the provocations that went on would have probably done a lot of property damage and damage to individuals," he said, referring to the Hornell meat strike in Minnesota as an example of "how the white American reacts."



Episcopal Bishop William C. Wantland, a citizen of the Seminole nation of Oklahoma, said Wisconsin residents need to be educated on a massive scale about Indian rights.

—Sentinel photo by George R. Cassidy

be accomplished through forums, he noted.

Pastors also have an obligation to educate their own members to the truth "so that they not be part of the problem." That means exposure to other cultures and other ways of life.

Churches, he said, have to support Indian treaty rights. To interfere with the rights of Indians to hunt and fish in northern Wisconsin is a criminal act, he said.

"If the church says it's wrong to try and break the law, that's not taking sides; that's pointing out an injustice," he said.

Bishop names Thurston for foundation job

Father Anthony C. Thurston resigned as rector of St. Paul's Episcopal Church, 914 E. Kanapp St., to become executive director of the DeKoven Foundation for Church Work in Racine and canon for development of the Milwaukee Episcopal Diocese.

His appointment to be effective July 1, was announced this week by Bishop Roger J. White, the diocese's head.

The diocese will take over the ownership of DeKoven July 15 from the Western Province of the Community of St. Mary, which has been operating the foundation for the past 50 years.

Thurston, rector of St. Paul's since 1981, will be chief operating officer of the foundation and its retreat and conference center, whose programs will be expanded.

He also will supervise the development of a cooperative senior citizen housing project to be built on part of the foundation's 32-acre property. Thurston led a task force that has been working on the project for the past several months.

He also will be responsible for development and implementation of a national campaign to renovate and refurbish the historic St. John's Chapel and the shrine of Father James DeKoven, an educator who died in 1879 and is a saint of the church.

Veterans give award to rabbi

Rabbi Francis Barry Silberg recently received the Scholar of the Year Award from the Jewish War Veterans of the USA — Morris R. Guttman Auxiliary No. 487 of Milwaukee. Silberg, spiritual leader of Congregation Emanu-El B'nai Jeshurun, 2419 E. Kanwood Blvd., was the first recipient of the auxiliary's award.