**Proposal for Reparations to the Pawnee Nation**

Summary: The history of Baltimore Yearly meeting (BYM) is linked to that of the Pawnee Nation. Friends from BYM established a school for Pawnee children. One purpose of the school was assimilating Pawnee children into the dominant white, Eurocentric culture of the U.S. Part of the educational process was teaching them English, resulting in the near extinction of their Native language. We have the opportunity to provide a measure of restorative justice by providing funds to the Pawnee Nation’s language program. We are following a spiritual leading in submitting this request. We deeply believe it is the right thing to do.

BYM has issued a statement of apology for its complicity in a broad scope of harms to Native people, including the Pawnee Nation. No amount of monetary reparations can ever erase the effect of these far-reaching injustices. Regardless of our forebears’ intent, they were complicit in contributing to systemic injustice. As Friends today, we continue to be complicit in perpetuating those injustices, as we have inherited the resulting benefits of inequality.

There is a specific harm that we believe cries out for a more focused, constructive, and positive response to our historical wrongs against the Pawnee.

**Proposal:** BYM will commit $10,000 each year for 2024 and 2025 to the Pawnee Nation’s language restoration program as direct reparations to a group harmed by ancestral members of BYM. These reparations would be limited to two years, with no further donations planned. After that, we will proceed as way opens.

**Background:** The Pawnee people originally lived in the central plains of North America, living a subsistence lifestyle sustained by buffalo and growing the “three sisters,” corn, beans, and squash. As settlers from the East moved westward, seeking lands for farms and ranches, the Pawnee were pushed into smaller areas and their sources of food were greatly diminished. Buffalo were, at times, massively slaughtered by the U.S. Army to intentionally reduce food available to Native people and to drive them to dependence on the government.

Quakers sought to facilitate peace between whites and Indians, though they also shared many of the prejudices of white people of their times. They were patronizing towards Native people, believing that assimilation was inevitable, and that adoption of white Eurocentric culture would “improve” Native people. They rationalized that assimilation would eventually result in equal status that would justify the loss of Native cultures. When the Pawnee were forced to abandon the small area that remained of their ancestral lands in Nebraska, Quakers accompanied them to Oklahoma, “Indian Territory,” to settle on reservation lands set aside by the government for dislocated tribes. The Pawnee hoped to have the freedom and space there to live according to their traditions; instead they experienced malnutrition and disease, diminishing their numbers by one-third in the first four years.

**The Critical Importance of Language:** As one form of compensation for the lands the Pawnee were forced to cede to the U.S. Government, the Pawnee were entitled by treaty to education for their youth. However, because they were not allowed to receive this benefit on their own terms, they resisted. Nonetheless, over time, their children became absorbed into the culturally foreign world of white Christianity. Loss of their Native language estranged children from their parents and grandparents, compromising their survival and their identity as a people.

Baltimore Yearly Meeting Friends contributed to harming the Pawnee when they participated in practices of cultural assimilation in a school they established at the Pawnee agency in Nebraska. The school was a day-school and parental permission was required to attend. The school promoted English and suppressed the Native Pawnee language, contributing to ongoing intergenerational cultural destruction. It was not the Genoa Indian Industrial School, a larger boarding school not affiliated with Quakers.

Language and culture are inextricably interwoven. Native people existed and cultures flourished for millennia using oral, not written, practices. By providing the education the government had promised, Friends chose to impose their own language. Friends joined our Eurocentric peers in believing that European language, in this case English, was the only acceptable means of communication. Deeming the English language to be superior to that of the Pawnee, the Friends’ actions interrupted the vital flow between generations of Pawnee. The tradition of transmitting cultural traditions, sacred practices, and their vast knowledge of astronomy and the natural sciences to younger generations was irreparably broken.

Present day Friends in many places are finding ways to provide some sense of healing with the Indigenous peoples we have harmed. A list of some of these actions is attached to this document.

**What can and should BYM do? What actions shall we take?**

The BYM Indigenous Affairs Committee asks our Quaker community to act in a specific way to help restore a culture that we helped damage. We ask BYM to provide $10,000 in 2024 and an additional $10,000 in 2025 to the Pawnee Nation. It is appropriate that BYM ask or suggest that the funds be used for Pawnee Nation’s language program, though it is not appropriate to impose stipulations on the use of those funds.

The Pawnee Nation’s language program teaches K-12 and college students. It is in its second year as a full-time program. Although it was started in conjunction with Indiana University, it is now completely taught and managed by the Pawnee Nation. It is currently funded by grants, which conclude at the end of calendar year 2024. This is an existing program, so there are no startup costs. We hope these modest contributions, along with an apology, will begin to rebuild relations between the Pawnee Nation and BYM.

When Friend Martha Catlin wrote the early history of the Indigenous Affairs Committee, she communicated with the Pawnee Nation’s Tribal Historic Preservation Officer. Later, she sent him a copy of the published book, *As They Were Led - Quakerly Steps and Missteps Toward Native Justice: 1795-1940*. Friend Susan Marcus contacted the Cultural Resources Director and the Tribal Historic Preservation Officer of the Pawnee Nation to speak in general about reparations and about the language program. They were wonderfully welcoming and were pleased that we had reached out to them.

Other yearly meetings and individual Friends have donated lands or money. Some meetings’ contributions have been far more than what we propose. BYM is an old yearly meeting, though not one that is well-endowed. We believe that our proposal is workable and practical.