

APACHE STRONGHOLD

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Christian Prayer Rising at Oak Flat on November 4 Attracts Faith Leaders, Religious People from Across the Country to Pray and Stand in Unity with the Apache Stronghold for the Protection of Sacred Site, Oak Flat.

For Immediate Release: October 27, 2023

Christian & Indigenous Prayer Rising
November 4, 2023 from 8am – 4pm
Oak Flat Campground, N Magma Shaft 9 Rd, Miami, AZ 85539

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San Carlos, AZ - On November 4, Christian faith leaders and religious people from across the country will make a pilgrimage to the Apache sacred site, Oak Flat. The Prayer Rising will bring together the prayers of Apache leaders, Christians, members of other Indigenous tribes, and people of various faiths and spiritualities to protect the air, water, land, and spirit of this sacred place from destruction through the proposed Resolution Copper Mine.

Rev. Dr. John Mendez, civil rights leader, retired pastor of Emmanuel Baptist Church (Winston-Salem, North Carolina), and clergy activist with the Poor People's Campaign, will travel from North Carolina to join other people of faith in prayer. He shared, "I've been involved for over 30 years with this struggle, and what affects one directly, affects all of us indirectly. So, it's not just the Apache struggle, it's all of our struggle: for clean water, for respect for all religions, and the continuous liberation and freedom of all Native people."

The U.S. government's plan to turn over Oak Flat to Resolution Copper threatens Apache and all Indigenous religion, historical sites, identity, and the earth itself. The company has already drained millions of gallons of water from Oak Flat's underground aquifers, and plans to drain billions more in a state under decades-long drought conditions. Resolution Copper's foreign parent companies – Rio Tinto and BHP – have left a long legacy of human rights abuses and environmental devastation in their wake.

Allowing Resolution Copper to turn Oak Flat into a two-mile wide sinkhole is akin to destroying Mt. Sinai, the Church of the Holy Sepulcher, the Grand Mosque of Mecca, or the Bodh Gaya, the site where the Buddha achieved enlightenment.

“The threat to religious freedom at Oak Flat is a threat to religious freedom everywhere,” said Luke Goodrich, vice president and senior counsel at [Becket](#), which represents the Apache Stronghold. “That’s why people of all faiths are uniting to protect Oak Flat.” Mr. Goodrich will also be present at the Prayer Rising, to advise religious leaders and all in attendance on how they can join and help the legal fight to protect Oak Flat.

Dr. Wendsler Nosie Sr., founder of the [Apache Stronghold](#), shared:

This upcoming court decision will set a precedent that will impact all Indigenous holy sites in America. It could allow environmental damages, and it will define freedoms for all religions. In this court case, the US government has questioned one’s spiritual connection to God. Not only has the United States Government exempted environmental laws for Resolution Copper (Rio Tinto and BHP), Resolution Copper has been allowed to intervene in our religious freedom case. All people of faith must unite together to protect God’s greatest gift to us all, our Mother Earth, from our own US government and two foreign mining giants.

The Apache Stronghold welcomes the Prayer Rising and all who plan to attend, as it embodies and emphasizes the message we’ve shared for years: that the effort to protect Oak Flat is a fight in defense of religious freedom, including the right of all people to experience and defend their personal spiritual connection with Mother Earth, as well as to protect the land and water for future generations.

Rev. Carol Rose, Pastor at Shalom Mennonite Fellowship in Tucson, AZ, Chair of the Oak Flat Committee of the [Coalition to Dismantle the Doctrine of Discovery](#), and lead organizer of the Prayer Rising, said:

This sacred place is a place of prayer for many, many peoples. I am one of those who experience the Spirit of God in this place.

I am a Christian clergyperson. I follow Jesus whose sermons first found the hearts of people on a wide open plain, and on the slope of a mountainside. Jesus was immersed in baptismal waters not in a building, but in a wilderness river. Jesus went into the hills to pray, and had such a relationship with the local lake that he walked back through her turbulent waters.

I believe that imprisonment of our faith within buildings was a part of what set Christianity up to become a tool of the colonial and capitalist projects. We were fooled by greed and lies to come to think of land as resource rather than the living breathing presence of our Mother the Creator God. Through the Doctrine of Discovery, and all of its many subsequent legal and economic structures, Christianity justified enslavement and dispossession. Christianity continues to be complicit in the legacy and ongoing oppressions and theft. We have strayed very far from following the indigenous Palestinian Jew who told us to consider the birds of the air. My faith needs saving.

Fortunately, nothing can erase connection with the Spirit of God. Fortunately, even Christians can reconnect with the Spirit of God in and through sacred land. Come on Nov 4 to reconnect, to find the Spirit moving in the ancient oaks, blowing over the grace of rock, singing and dancing and speaking through the many and varied people who know Oak Flat to be sacred.

Yes, Oak Flat must be saved from destruction. And, our lives, even my Christian faith, might just be saved through Oak Flat.

Dr. Nosie added:

Mother Earth is filled with spaces that God has chosen that are places of deep healing, connection, and communion with all who have come before and for all who will come after. Oak Flat is one of these places. When we come to these sacred places, we are reminded that we are all connected. For far too long, so many have existed disconnected from Mother Earth, from the spirituality that comes with connection to the land.

We have been fighting this fight for a long time, not unlike other Native peoples around the world, against the evils of greed – colonization, capitalism, destruction. We fight for the land because we know that we are all dependent on Mother Earth. We fight for our sacred connection to Oak Flat because we know that the loss of this land means continued loss of our spirituality for both us and our future generations.



Rev. Dr. John Mendez & Dr. Wendsler Nosie Sr. at Oak Flat