

2023 Vine Deloria Jr. Theological Symposium

Speakers:

David Wilson



Bishop David M. Wilson has served as episcopal leader of the Great Plains Conference of The United Methodist Church since Jan. 1. He was elected as a bishop Nov. 2, 2022, on a historic vote by the South-Central Jurisdiction's delegates, when he was one of three people elected on the first and only ballot needed to fill bishop vacancies.

A member of the Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma, Wilson holds the distinction of being the first Native American elected to serve as a bishop in the history of The United Methodist Church. He previously served as assistant to the bishop of the Oklahoma Indian Missionary Conference of The United Methodist Church, which is comprised of 81 Native American churches in Oklahoma, Kansas and Texas. He previously served as the conference superintendent for 18 years.

He has served on several general agencies in The United Methodist Church and is currently working with the denomination on a task force to research the denomination's role in Native American boarding schools. The board operated boarding schools in the past, along with the United Women in Faith national organization.

Wilson is a graduate of Oklahoma City University with a bachelor's degree in mass communications and his Master of Divinity from Phillips Theological Seminary. He received an honorary doctorate from historic Bacone College. He is a board member of the Oklahoma City Indian Clinic and was recently named to the board of Garrett-Evangelical Theological Seminary in Evanston, Ill.

Stacy Leeds



Stacy Leeds is the Willard H. Pedrick Dean and Regents Professor at the Sandra Day O'Connor College of Law, Arizona State University. She is a scholar of Indigenous law and policy and an experienced leader in law, higher education, economic development and conflict resolution. She holds law a Master of Laws degree from University of Wisconsin, a Juris Doctorate from University of Tulsa, an MBA from University of Tennessee and a B.A. in history from Washington University in St. Louis, Mo.

Leeds was the first Indigenous woman to serve as a law school dean. She was dean of University of Arkansas School of Law (2011-2018) and the inaugural vice chancellor for economic development at University of Arkansas (2017-2020). Leeds was an administrator and

professor at University of Kansas and University of North Dakota, and a William H. Hastie Fellow at University of Wisconsin. She is an elected member of the American Law Institute and a recipient of the American Bar Association's Spirit of Excellence Award.

Leeds prioritizes public service at the national and local levels. She is a former Cherokee Nation Supreme Court justice and former chair of the Cherokee Nation Gaming Commission. She is a founding board member and treasurer of the Foundation for America's Public Lands, a congressionally chartered nonprofit, and a corporate board member for Kituwah LLC (wholly owned by the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians). She also serves as board vice president of Native Forward Scholars Fund (formerly American Indian Graduate Center).

Leeds is passionate about food, agriculture and whole health. She is co-founder of the Indigenous Food and Agriculture Initiative, board president of Akiptan (a Native community development financial institution providing capital to farmers and ranchers) and vice chair of the board of trustees for the Native American Agriculture Fund (a private, charitable trust serving Native farmers and ranchers, created from the historic *Keepseagle v. Vilsack* settlement).

Aaron Payment



Dr. Aaron A. Payment currently serves as vice president of Tribal Relations and Learning for Kauffman and Associates Incorporated (KAI), a Native-woman-owned company serving tribal nations and contracts that support tribal nations. His KAI work portfolio includes the White House Council on Native American Affairs' National Plan on Native American Language Revitalization, the Bureau of Indian Affairs' Renewable Energy Acceleration Deployment Initiative, the American Indian College Fund Capacity Building Project, and several tribal and federal visioning and strategic planning initiatives.

A high school dropout who earned his GED at 16, Payment earned bachelor's and master's degrees in public administration with the intent to serve his people. He has over 33 years' experience working in American Indian student retention at the collegiate level and in elective tribal leadership roles. He served on Tribal Council for eight years, including as vice chair, before being elected as tribal chairperson. Payment was not reelected after his first term. Humbled by this, he pursued two additional master's degrees in education and a doctorate in educational leadership. He subsequently returned to office in 2012 after a four-year hiatus, getting elected as tribal chairperson for three more four-year terms. In 2021 he retired from tribal office and worked briefly for the National Indian Health Board as government relations director to secure advance appropriations for the Indian Health Service.

During his elective tribal leadership career, Payment served as chair of the Inter-Tribal Council of Michigan, president of the United Tribes of Michigan, vice president and president of the Midwest Alliance of Sovereign Tribes, and regional vice president, secretary and first vice president of the National Congress of American Indians. Payment has also served on the tribal advisories of the Health and Human Services Secretary, National Institutes of Health Tribal Health Research Office, Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, Health Resources and Services Administration, and Office of Minority Health Resource Tribal Advisories Center. He also served on the Tribal-Interior Budget Council, as an Obama appointee on the 2015 Every Student Succeeds Act Negotiated Rulemaking Committee, and currently serves in a presidential appointment on the National Advisory Council on Indian Education.

Payment knew Dr. Vine Deloria Jr. personally as Dr. Deloria served on his dissertation committee when Payment first pursued a doctorate in political science and public administration (though he did not

complete this degree when first elected to office in 1996). Payment credits Vine Deloria's mentoring, advice, and role modeling as his primary motivation for pursuing and eventually earning his doctorate degree.

Fawn Sharp



Fawn R. Sharp serves as the 23rd president of the National Congress of American Indians (NCAI), the oldest, largest and most representative American Indian and Alaska Native tribal government organization in the country. Sharp was elected Oct. 24, 2019, at NCAI's 76th Annual Convention & Marketplace. She is the third woman to hold the position of NCAI president.

Sharp is the current vice president of the Quinault Indian Nation in Taholah, Wash., after being a five-term past president. Her past positions include managing attorney and lead counsel; and staff attorney for the Quinault Indian Nation, administrative law judge for the Washington state Department of Revenue – Tax Appeals Division, associate judge for the Quinault Tribal Court and counsel for Phillips, Krause & Brown.

She has held numerous leadership positions, including an appointment by Gov. Gary Locke to serve as trustee for Grays Harbor College, governor of the Washington State Bar Association, trustee of the Washington State Bar Association's Indian Law Section, vice president and founding member of the National Intertribal Tax Alliance, and director/secretary of the Quinault Nation Enterprises board. She has conducted lectures and publications all over the United States.

Sharp graduated with a B.A. from Gonzaga University in Spokane, Wash., at the age of 19. She received her Juris Doctorate from the University of Washington in 1995 and has subsequently received certificates from the National Judicial College at the University of Nevada and the International Human Rights Law at Oxford University.