



PECHANGA INDIAN RESERVATION
Temecula Band of Luiseño Mission Indians

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September 22, 2015

His Holiness, Pope Francis
Apostolic Palace
00120 Vatican City, Italy

Apostolic Nunciature of the Holy See
3339 Massachusetts Ave. NW
Washington, DC 20008

Dear Pope Francis,

The Pechanga Band of Luiseño Indians of the Pechanga Indian Reservation near Temecula, California, a tribal nation recognized by the federal government of the United States, is opposed to the canonization and glorification of Father Junipero Serra for the genocide, inhumane treatment and various crimes that Fr. Serra and his Spanish mission system committed against the ancestors of the Pechanga people.

The Pechanga people, known by our aboriginal name Pecháangayam Payómkawichum, are the descendants of the thousands of Native Americans that were enslaved and imprisoned by the mission personnel at Mission San Luis Rey. In just one generation, the total population of all Payómkawichum (Luiseño) villages suffered a greater than 90% population loss through disease and abuse brought by Fr. Serra's missionization. Fr. Serra's mission system killed between 9,000 and 13,500 of our ancestors. This rapid population loss in such a compressed time frame triggered a collapse of our indigenous societal structure and way of life and set into motion the atrocities and hardships that our people endured for nearly two centuries.

Our review and knowledge of this history concludes: had Fr. Serra not been present in California, the genocide of our ancestors and collapse of our society would not have occurred. While death through disease undermined the integrity of our society through rapid population loss, those that survived had to endure additional violations of human rights. Serra's missions, by design, condoned and encouraged the genocide of our ancestors through enslavement, the forced removal of people from their village homelands to become the missions' slave labor workforce, the suppression of indigenous religions, whippings and beatings of those caught practicing native ceremonies, and the rape and sexual assault of Indian women by mission soldiers.

Your decision to confer sainthood on Fr. Serra is an affront to the Pechanga people and to all Payómkawichum. Our ancestors' voices were quickly silenced during the mission period and have remained so for nearly 200 years. Today, we speak for them: this is our legacy. In so doing, it is our responsibility to advise you that your canonization decision is plain wrong. It is wrong even when measured against the Catholic Church's own standard of requiring two miracles. And although your decision is *fait accompli*, our decision to inform you of our opposition to Serra's sainthood is also based on the question: what do we say to our grandchildren when they ask, why didn't you say something?

The Pechanga people have determined that remaining silent on Serra's canonization would be misinterpreted as being ambivalent toward Fr. Serra's history and impending sainthood. Quite the contrary, Pechanga Payómkawichum are troubled by this with some being deeply conflicted as Indians and as practicing Catholics. This is the standing testament to the intergenerational trauma still present among the descendants of the survivors of Fr. Serra's missions. It is thus that we urge you to acknowledge the deep wounds suffered by our ancestors for the sake of dignity.

Beginning with Fr. Serra's mission system, many since have tried dispensing with us; pushing us into the margins of our own ancestral homelands and society to make us invisible. Our ancestors are no longer silent because they speak through us. Today, we refuse to be silent and invisible. The only benefit of Serra's sainthood will be the platform it creates for us to tell the real, whole and true story of Fr. Serra and to do so in our voice. Lóoviqap nuǵúun.

On behalf of the Pechanga Band of Indians,



Mark Macarro
Tribal Chairman