

## Working Partners

Months passed and in 2023, I received word from the BVM Congregation inviting the tribe to apply for a gift. At this news, Sharon and the tribe were elated and began the application process.

Also in 2023, I met Mike Harley, a member of the Social Justice Committee at Lumen Christi Catholic Church in St. Paul, Minn. Together with the Tribal Council, Mike and I spent months introducing the Lumen Christi Social Justice Committee and others to Sharon and members of the tribe.

By way of these partnerships, the tribe, church, and others raised enough money to meet a crucial need for a new tribal office. The fundraising not only provided them with an office but with funds for three years of operation.

In September 2023, Sharon and the Tribal Council thanked Mike and me for our partnership with them by honoring us at their 26th Annual Traditional Wacipi.

A few weeks before the Wacipi, the BVM Congregation notified Sharon that a gift was awarded to the tribe. Sharon and tribal members were astounded that their voice was heard by the BVMs in this generous manner.

The gift was like an eagle blessing them at such a pivotal time. At the Wacipi, the tribe honored the Sisters of Charity of the Blessed Virgin Mary, Lumen Christi Catholic Church, Mike, and me during one of their traditional dances.

The tribe's ever-expanding web of partnerships was reaching out in new directions. In the BVM award letter to Sharon, LaDonna Manternach, BVM President said: "We are grateful for the opportunity to walk together in preserving, protecting, and promoting the Dakota culture for future generations."

LaDonna's words joined with Sharon's desire for these interconnections. Sharon shares in her autobiography, *Stolen Culture, Traditions, and Heritage*, "You now hold the planted seed of the Mendota Dakota history, my history, and the hope for the future. It is my hope those seeds grow, take root, and make change." ■

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**About the author:** Patricia (Herbert Mary) Thalhuber, BVM lives in Inver Grove Heights, Minn. Restorative justice, an alternative way of being present to those incarcerated, and her journey with Indigenous Peoples throughout the United States continue to enhance her commitment to justice and equality.



BVM Pat Thalhuber joins in dancing around the Wacipi arena for an honoring dance. (Photo by: Jill Warren)

## Walking with the People of the Land

by Marilyn Wilson, BVM

Walking with the People of the Land (WPL) is a grass roots group of BVMs and associates who developed a connection with BVM directional statements (DS) 1 and 2 that were established during the 2021 Congregational Assembly.

**In accordance with DS1: Spirituality/Worldview**, the committee desires: To seek conversation with and listen deeply to people with divergent perspectives, cultures, and experiences.

**In accordance with DS2: Inequality**, the committee desires: To educate ourselves about systemic issues of injustice in all its forms, especially racism, and letting our study change us and move us to action.

WPL supported the gift request of the Mendota Mdewakanton Dakota Community and is in the process of researching which Indigenous People may have passed over BVM land and

note if recognition or ritual are needed to acknowledge and receive blessings. Education and building relationships are major functions of the committee.

The current WPL statement is: "We gather on sacred ground that over the years has been home to the loway, Winnebago, and Meskwaki peoples. We celebrate their reverence for this earth and commit ourselves to care for this beautiful land." ■



The drum groups sing while dancers are moved to respond, dancing around the Wacipi arena.

(Photo by: Jill Warren)

# Spirit Moves in Partnership: *Walking With the People of the Land*

by Patricia "Pat" Thalhuber, BVM

**Over 25 years ago, Sharon Lennartson, Good Thunder Woman (Wakiya Waste Win), the Tribal Chairwoman of the Mendota Mdewakanton Dakota Community, met with me at her tribal office located in the back room of the Mendota, Minn., post office.**

The Mendota Mdewakanton Dakota Community is a nonprofit dedicated to protecting their sacred land sites and bringing their culture back to its Minnesota birthplace.

Sitting together, Sharon shared with me her hopes for her people to regain a land base in order to build a community cultural center.

Tucked within her story was the painful reality of their struggle to gather documentation of family and cultural records in order to apply to the Bureau of Indian Affairs for Federal Recognition as a tribe. As she described the process to me, a window into their determination and commitment touched my heart.

Each year, my relationship with Sharon and the tribal community deepened. I became an Honorary Member of the tribe, attended their Annual Traditional Pow Wow (Wacipi), their sacred ceremonies and cultural gatherings. Our friendship evolved into a partnership focused on the path forward for the tribe.

At Wacipi in 2022, Sharon passionately shared with me again her vision to purchase land for the community cultural center. It was a powerful moment for us as we had a sense that a spiritual door was opening for her vision to become a reality.

Nodding in unison, we then understood all too well the tremendous challenges that would face the tribal community, not the least would be the need for them to initiate a broader partnership among the people of the Minnesota Twin Cities area and beyond.

Shortly afterwards, an opportunity to work in partnership with the BVM community became a reality when sisters and associates formed a committee titled, "Walking with the People of the Land." This committee nominated the tribe to be considered for a financial donation from the congregation.