**The Romero Institute: Standing With the Lakota**

The [Romero Institute](http://www.romeroinstitute.net) is a non-profit 501(c)(3) organization founded in California in 1980. The Institute’s missions is to stand with the poor and the oppressed and advocate for their rights through education, grass roots organizing, leadership development, research, investigation, litigation, and public policy development.1

**Archbishop Oscar Romero: “If I should die, I will rise in the spirit of my people.”**

We take our name from Oscar Arnulfo Romero, a Catholic Archbishop in El Salvador. Initially a conservative supporter of the status quo, he came to realize that government-sponsored death squads in his country were killing and disappearing those who stood up for their rights. Archbishop Romero began to give spiritual encouragement to his people. He also warned the Salvadoran government that they must not sacrifice children of God for economic and political gain. As his voice grew stronger, El Salvador’s poor gathered strength and courage.

On March 24, 1980, while delivering the Eucharist in a small hospital chapel, Romero was shot and killed. The day before his assassination he had delivered a sermon imploring El Salvador’s soldiers to hear God’s higher justice and disobey any order to violate human rights. In the weeks leading up to his death, as the threats against him were increasing, he responded to concerns for his safety by saying that “If I should die, I will rise in the spirit of my people.” Today, Oscar Romero is a beacon of justice and hope throughout the Americas to all who hunger for justice and dignity for the oppressed.

**Our Priority: Resolving Severe Systemic Injustice**

The Romero Institute receives many appeals for help. In determining which projects are most appropriate for us to support we particularly look for cases where injustice is severe and systemic; where the people have no financial resources to hire others to help them; where the problems will seemingly not be addressed by anyone else; and where the desired change will have a positive impact for large numbers of people on a local, state, and national or global level.

**The Lakota: Fighting for Their Children and Their Future**

In 2004 we were asked by several Lakota people to investigate the high levels of youth suicide in Lakota country, the disappearing of massive numbers of Lakota children by the South Dakota State Department of Social Services, the over-drugging of children in foster care, and the continued taking of Lakota lands, which together amount to a slow genocide of the Lakota people and their culture. We were astounded by what we found: six of the 11 poorest counties in the entire United States are on Indian reservations in South Dakota; unemployment is over 85%; families are torn apart; cancer and diabetes are pandemic; drinking water is contaminated with uranium from government-licensed mines; education is poor; despair and hopelessness abound.

Just as surprising, the caring spirit of the Lakota people is still intact. The fact that they have survived the devastating Federal and State policies of the past 150 years is a testament to their phenomenal strength. For hundreds of years the Lakota lived in a spiritually-based culture and society, in harmony with nature and all living things, and with a sustainable economy that left no footprint on Mother Earth. Their horsemanship, based on total brotherhood with the horses, was unsurpassed and breathtaking. Their ability to hunt the Buffalo embodied the utmost skill and courage. They treated their children as “sacred,” raising and educating them in a cohesive and stable kinship society. They were among the greatest healers and herbalists on the planet. And their complex system of government was spiritually based and just.

One hundred fifty years ago our obsession with material possessions and development cost us our humanity with the Native people. Now it is endangering the survival of the planet and the human species. As we stand on the brink of global destruction, caused by the dominant culture’s obsession with pillaging the Earth for her resources, we know the profound value of the indigenous worldview that is in harmony with Mother Nature and all living things.

**Join Us in Standing With the Lakota**

The [Romero Institute](http://www.romeroinstitute.net) has chosen to stand with the Lakota and together we are committed to a renewal of their people and culture. Much progress has been made with the help of visionary and compassionate supporters who, in the spirit of White Buffalo Calf Woman, have made this work possible. Together we are addressing the systemic injustices that must be transformed in order for the Lakota people to survive and flourish. Together we will encourage the dominant culture to let go of its selfish and unkind policies and to receive the gifts that come from embracing all people as children of God, endowed by their creator with inalienable rights and with gifts that contribute to the rich tapestry of life on this planet.

Remember, even the horrific structure of South Africa’s apartheid fell and was transformed into a democracy. If we join our minds, our hearts, and our resources together, the darkest human failure can be redeemed by the will of the people. We hope that you will join us in this endeavor. For more information, contact us at:

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As the Lakota say, we thank you with a warm heart and a firm handshake.

1. All public policy advocacy is conducted within the limits provided by Section 501(c)(3) of the United States Internal Revenue Service Code.