

## **The Rev. Paul Cuffee, 1757-1812**

*Observed March 4*



Paul Cuffee was a member of the Shinnecock tribe of Long Island and early in life was an indentured servant on a farm. At about age twenty he experienced a conversion to Christianity and was later ordained in what became the American Presbyterian Church.

When he was 42 years old, Paul was commissioned by the New York Missionary Society as the fourth preacher to minister under their auspices among the Shinnecock. This he did with great faithfulness for thirteen years, walking the length of the island to care for his flock. His enthusiastic preaching drew large crowds. One of his predecessors had been his own grandfather, the Rev. Peter John Cuffee, the first preacher to have notable success among the Shinnecock. In 1791 Paul founded Shinnecock Presbyterian Church in Southampton, which remains the oldest Native American Reformed church in continuous operation. He was notable not only for his success in ministering among his own people, but also for creating good relationships among the neighboring European settlers, enlisting their support in preserving the remaining Shinnecock lands and customs.

It is still possible to visit the grave of 'Priest Paul' standing alone surrounded by a white picket fence. The gravestone reads "Erected by the New York Missionary Society, in memory of the Rev. Paul Cuffee, an Indian of the Shinnecock tribe, who was employed by the Society for the last thirteen years of his life, on the eastern part of Long Island, where he labored with fidelity and success. Humble, pious and indefatigable in testifying the gospel of the grace of God, he finished his course with joy on the 7th day of March, 1812, aged 55 years and 3 days."

*Lessons* Isaiah 55:1-5; Psalm 100; Colossians 3:12-17; John 16:16-24

*Collect* Almighty God, you empowered Paul Cuffee to be a powerful evangelist and preacher and so to win many souls for Christ among the Native Americans of Long Island: Help us to proclaim your Word with power, in the Name of the same Jesus Christ; who with you and the Holy Spirit lives and reigns, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.