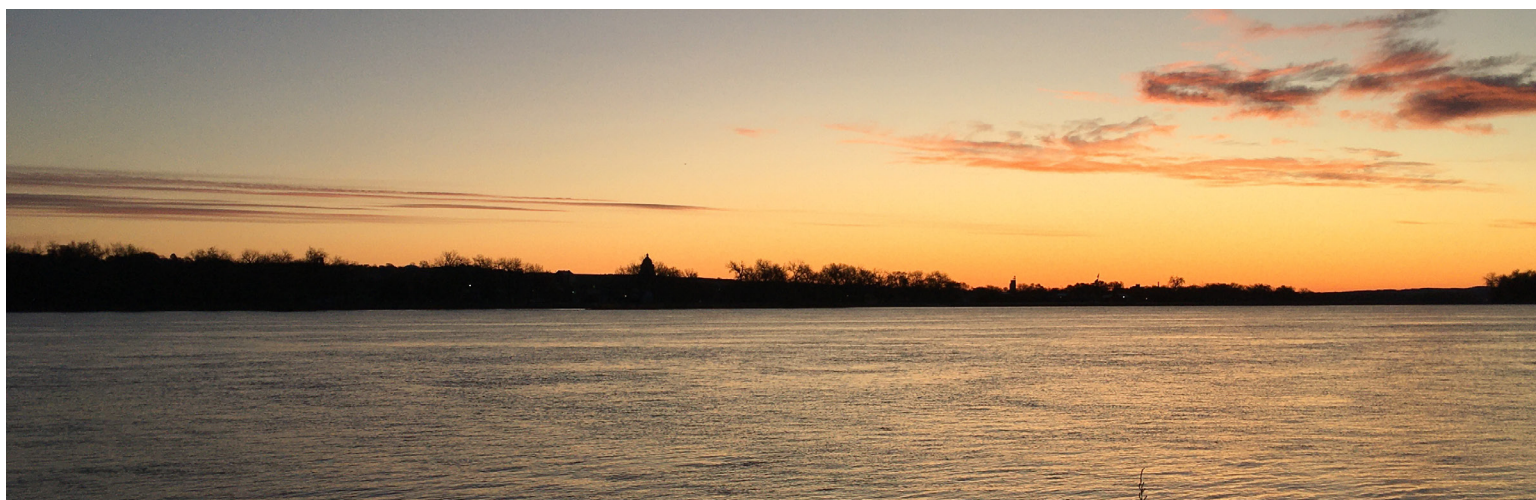




INDIGENOUS
MINISTRIES

The Episcopal Church and Indigenous Land Acknowledgements



THE
Episcopal
CHURCH



The Episcopal Church and Indigenous Land Acknowledgements

Learn more about Indigenous Ministries in The Episcopal Church at <https://www.episcopalchurch.org/ministries/indigenous-ministries/>. If you have questions, please contact the Rev. Bradley Hauff, missionary, The Episcopal Church Office of Indigenous Ministries, at bhauff@episcopalchurch.org.

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The Episcopal Church and Indigenous Land Acknowledgements

At the 80th General Convention (2022), two resolutions were passed regarding the inclusion of Indigenous land acknowledgements in our corporate life and worship. Resolution C072 reads as follows:

Resolved, that The Episcopal Church commits to ensuring that all public gatherings and worship of The Episcopal Church, its boards, commissions, committees of the same, will, before the 81st General Convention, implement land acknowledgement liturgies and prayers to begin any public meetings or worship held in North America ...

Resolution D019 reads as follows:

Resolved, that the 80th General Convention shall promote the acknowledgement of Indigenous Lands at all gatherings within the Domestic and Foreign Missionary Society (TEC) and its affiliate organizations ...

In response to these resolutions, many congregations, dioceses, and other church groups and organizations have begun the practice of making land acknowledgements regarding the Indigenous tribal people who used to live on the land they currently occupy, and in some cases still do.

When implementing a land acknowledgement, it is important to be aware of their purpose.

A land acknowledgement is:

- Truth-telling about what happened in our homeland years ago and how it affects the way we live today.
- A recognition of the Indigenous tribal people whose home was the land we now occupy. By doing so we remember them and begin to ask questions about what happened to them and why.
- A confession of how our church contributed to, or was complicit in, the process of colonization of the Indigenous peoples of the Western Hemisphere. An admission that while we are not responsible for what our ancestors did in the past, we are responsible for what we do today, knowing that the colonization process is still in place, and the effects of it are still felt by Indigenous people.
- An invitation to right relationship with Indigenous tribal people, particularly if the people still reside in the region. A recognition that Indigenous people currently live in all areas of this country, even if we do not see them. They are still here.
- A call to stand with Indigenous people in their myriad struggles to recover from the effects of genocide and enforced assimilation into the dominant society.

- An honoring of Indigenous people for their resilience, faithfulness, wisdom, and respect for the Earth and all of creation. A call to us to learn from their example.

A land acknowledgement is NOT:

- A statement intended to make everyone feel guilty and ashamed.
- A one-and-done task that gets everyone “off the hook.”
- A solution, in and of itself, to the injustices of our world.
- An attempt to rationalize, justify, or dismiss what happened in the past.
- A call to vacate our homes and return overseas to the land of our ancestors.

In short, a land acknowledgement is the start of a process that is intended to lead to something more. This could result in any number of possibilities, with the overall objectives being a deepening of the awareness of Indigenous peoples and living in right relationship with humanity and all of creation.

How to Design a Land Acknowledgement

There is no one, definitive way to write or design a land acknowledgement. They can be statements that are said at the beginning of meetings or worship services. They can be in the form of a prayer or a more elaborate liturgy. They can be said or prayed solely by a leader or in unison with others. They can be simple or very extensive. It all depends on the context in which they occur and the intentions of the community as they consider the history and current situation of the tribal people in their region. For many this pertains to tribes that were either annihilated or driven out many years ago. For some it pertains to tribes that still have a presence. In some regions only one tribe can be identified; in others, multiple tribes. The context and history are complex in some instances. Here are some basic questions and suggestions:

Who does a land acknowledgement?

Land acknowledgements can be done by anyone. They are typically done within settings that are non-Indigenous, by non-Indigenous people. During virtual gatherings, participants may briefly acknowledge the tribal people of the areas where they live, wherever that may be. Both Indigenous and non-Indigenous people may do this. Where there is an in-person gathering of Indigenous and non-Indigenous people, it is preferred for the local Indigenous people to welcome the non-Indigenous people to the land, the building, the context of the gathering. The non-Indigenous people may respond to the welcome with an acknowledgement.

How do I know the name(s) of the tribe(s)?

If you are uncertain as to the name of the tribe in your region, the website nativeand.ca is recommended. All you have to do is identify your location, and it will find the name(s).

What are the key elements to a land acknowledgement?

While there is no official template, here is an example:

We remember and honor the Indigenous people of the world, especially the _____, whose land that we now occupy in this region was once their home, and it was taken from them. (If they have a continued presence in the region, acknowledge this as well.) We give thanks for them and express our gratitude for their witness on how to live a life that is honorable and humble. May we always remember that the Earth does not belong to us; that we belong to the Earth, and that we are all relatives in life. Help us to learn from our past mistakes and be instruments of justice and peace for all people in today's world, particularly the original Indigenous inhabitants.

When composing an acknowledgement, it is important to include:

- A general acknowledgement of the Indigenous peoples of the world who were victims of genocide and colonization.
- A specific acknowledgement of the local tribe(s) – say the names.

- An acknowledgement that the land we now occupy was once their home and it was taken away from them.
- An expression of remorse and a confession of our historic, collective responsibility for what happened to them, and our current responsibilities to systems of injustice and oppression.
- A statement of thanksgiving for the wisdom of Indigenous people and the good example they have given to all of us.
- An acknowledgement that we are all related.
- A pledge to live differently, in right relationship with all people and all of creation, asking for God's help in the process.

These are the basic, essential elements. As previously stated, the acknowledgement can be more extensive and elaborate if desired and depending on the occasion.

Is Indigenous input necessary?

If it is at all possible, please give an Indigenous person or group the opportunity for input, taking any suggestions seriously. Use this as an opportunity for the start of a relationship with local Indigenous people that, hopefully, will lead to greater association and involvement with one another.

In accordance with the 80th General Convention, let us prayerfully proceed with this important ministry. If you have questions, please contact the Rev. Bradley Hauff, missionary, The Episcopal Church Office of Indigenous Ministries, at bhauff@episcopalchurch.org.