



American Indian and Alaska Native Ministry

Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

God's work. Our hands.

Osiyo tsunalii (Hello friends),

On Indigenous Peoples' Day this year, the ELCA published "A Declaration of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America to American Indian and Alaska Native People," in which the church confesses its sins toward Indigenous peoples and lists the commitments it will begin working toward as it responds to its original "Repudiation of the Doctrine of Discovery" from 2016.

One commitment found in each document is to formally acknowledge the original inhabitants of North America. The declaration states, "We commit to begin the practice of land acknowledgments at all expressions of the church."

This is arguably one of the easier commitments, though it should never be thought of as simple or meaningless. Land acknowledgements are indeed meaningful and play a crucial part in combating the erasure of Indigenous peoples.

Other countries have been practicing land acknowledgements for some time; only recently have schools, organizations and government agencies in the United States begun to understand the importance of such acknowledgements.

Our church (congregations, synods, the churchwide organization, universities, seminaries, and all our ministries and partners) could and should become the leader in practicing this ritual of respect and gratitude for the land and our Indigenous neighbors.

Below you will find a link to land acknowledgement statements that you might read aloud at the beginning of every worship service, print at the top of worship bulletins, use to create outdoor signage and a plaque for your narthex, and use as an effective start to a Zoom meeting.

If you choose to develop your own acknowledgement, we encourage you to read the resources, created by Native and non-Native organizations, that follow at the bottom of this document.

Please remember that a land acknowledgement is a ritual intended solely to show gratitude to the land and acknowledge the original and Indigenous peoples from whom the land was stolen. Mentioning settler history in a land acknowledgement is not appropriate.

For help determining whose land you presently occupy, visit www.native-land.ca. After searching by city and state, or by zip code, select labels on the bottom-right corner to make the map more legible.

What a witness to the world our church will be as we begin this journey toward truth and healing, beginning with land acknowledgements.

Wado (Thank you),

Vance Blackfox (Cherokee)

Desk Director for American Indian Alaska Native Tribal Nations

ELCA

Land Acknowledgement Resources for Congregations

Land Acknowledgement for Beginning of Worship

Good morning! [*Name of congregation*] wishes to acknowledge and honor the [*names of tribal nations*] people[s] upon whose ancestral homelands we gather for worship this morning, as well as all our Indigenous siblings who have and continue to care for this place – this land – and call it their home.

Land Acknowledgement to Be Read by the Congregation

We, the congregation of [*name of congregation*], acknowledge and honor the [*names of tribal nations*] people[s], upon whose ancestral homelands we gather for worship this morning, as well as all our Indigenous siblings who have and continue to care for this place – this land – and call it their home.

Land Acknowledgement for Worship Bulletin

[*Name of congregation*] is located on the original and ancestral homelands of the [*names of tribal nations*] people[s], and we give thanks for their presence here since time immemorial. We also wish to recognize and honor all our Indigenous siblings who have and continue to call this land their home.

Land Acknowledgement for Narthex and Outdoor Signage

[*Name of congregation*] is located on the ancestral homelands of the [*names of tribal nations*] people[s].

Land Acknowledgment for Zoom Meetings and Events

We are gathered together in this virtual place from all parts of Turtle Island, connected by technology; faith; a common sense of purpose; the breath given us by the breath-maker, who has named and called us here; and the very piece of Mother Earth – the land – that each of us inhabits today.

We understand the importance and necessity of our acknowledging the land and the original, Indigenous peoples whose creation stories are rooted in these places and who have lived on these lands throughout Turtle Island since time immemorial.

We also understand that all land is Indigenous land, and I invite each of you to name in the chat feature the Indigenous peoples or tribal nations who were the first to love, pray, grow, celebrate, cry, drum and sing upon the lands and places where you are located now.

[*Give attendees a moment to name tribes in the chat feature.*]

We know that Indigenous peoples are not historical subjects but part of our communities, churches, schools and leadership, and that they offer invaluable

wisdom for how we exist, today and into the future, in relationship with Mother Earth and our human and nonhuman neighbors.

If you are Indigenous, we invite you to name your people or tribal nation in the chat feature now, so that we may see you more fully in this virtual place.

[Give Indigenous attendees a moment to list their own tribes in the chat feature.]

Thank you. We understand the importance and necessity of acknowledging the land and its original, Indigenous peoples, and doing so consistently, whenever and wherever we might gather, virtually or in person. Also, we understand that this protocol is only a first step and that, as we venture into the world, we must learn more, do more and realize healing and justice for the Indigenous peoples whose lands we now occupy.

Let us begin this work for healing and justice by entering into a place of peace and prayer together. Let us pray ...

Land Acknowledgement Resources From Native and Non-Native Organizations

- California Indian Culture and Sovereignty Center, “Land Acknowledgement: You’re on California Indian Land, Now What? – Acknowledging Relations to Space & Place” tool kit, www.csusm.edu/cicsc/land.pdf
- Native Governance Center, “Indigenous Land Acknowledgement,” nativegov.org/a-guide-to-indigenous-land-acknowledgment/
- National Museum of the American Indian, “Honoring Original Indigenous Inhabitants: Land Acknowledgement,” americanindian.si.edu/nk360/informational/land-acknowledgement
- Duwamish Tribe, “How to Make a Land Acknowledgement,” www.duwamishtribe.org/land-acknowledgement
- Delilah Friedler, “Indigenous Land Acknowledgement Explained,” *Teen Vogue*, Feb. 8, 2018, www.teenvogue.com/story/indigenous-land-acknowledgement-explained
- Philbrook, “(Living) Land Acknowledgement,” philbrook.org/visit/community/land-acknowledgement/
- Kiran Herbert, “Land Acknowledgements 101,” *Outside Business Journal*, Sept. 8, 2020, www.outsidebusinessjournal.com/issues/education/land-acknowledgments-101/