



Land Acknowledgment Project

March 19, 2021

Elected Leaders of Ad Board,

Thank you for unanimously affirming my proposal to research and craft a land acknowledgment for the life of your church during your November 24, 2020 meeting. May we boldly enact this powerful confession and critical step into the realm of racial reconciliation.

In Christ,
Rev. Nate Melcher

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Land Acknowledgments and Missional Alignment:

A land acknowledgment is a form of confession and one step of many in repentance by those who benefit from harm and trauma caused to Indigenous Peoples.

The General Rules of The United Methodist Church compel us to first, do no harm. Then, do good. And stay in love with God (sometimes articulated as attend upon the ordinances of God). In this confession, we acknowledge harm done and call for an end to harm, do good by stepping into repentance, and stay in love with God by trusting God to guide this church forward.

The vision of the Minnesota Annual Conference are based on three critical Gospel imperatives: to grow in love of God and neighbor (the Great Commandment, Matthew 22:37-40), reach new people (the Great Commission, Matthew 28:19-20), and heal a broken world (the Great Proclamation, Luke 4:16-21). The accompanying “About” documentation with this land acknowledgment gives basis for how this vision becomes reality.

The mission of Richfield United Methodist Church is to create a world in which all may live in faith, justice, and joy. By our faith in the living Jesus, we take action in restorative justice that takes joy in caring for God’s great creation and affirming the diversity of God’s design of humankind.

Guests and partners of the church who are of Indigenous heritage should not be asked to recite this confession on behalf of the church. A land acknowledgment is not a “last step,” but a “first step” on the path of racial reconciliation and repentance. Like any organization, this church will need to review its land acknowledgment and documentation regularly to ensure its language and missional impact remain relevant in the life of the church.

This land acknowledgment, a confession and call for repentance, is in alignment with our missional values and must be owned by the church.



Crafting a Land Acknowledgment:

The [Native Governance Center](#) has extensive wisdom on crafting land acknowledgments:

- Start with self-reflection.
- Do your homework.
- Use appropriate language, including past, present, and future tenses.
- Land acknowledgements shouldn't be "grim."
- Take action, for a land acknowledgment alone is not enough.
- **Starting somewhere is better than not trying at all.**

Local Native theologian Rev. Jim Bear Jacobs, Racial Justice Director of the Minnesota Council of Churches, offers his wisdom as well. From the [MCC](#):

A land acknowledgment is a statement that recognizes that any institution in the United States is located on indigenous land. MCC's Racial Justice Director has consulted on multiple organizations' land acknowledgment statements and advised that good acknowledgment is:

- **Specific:** Name and research the tribe which last possessed the land you're on, and the treaties that dispossessed them of the land.
- **Contemporary:** Indigenous people are not relegated to history, but are still present with us today. Use present tense language. Where are the dispossessed people now?
- **Committed:** Not just a recognition of past atrocities, an institution should recognize and name their complicity in this history and demonstrate a commitment to righting historical wrongs.

Tribal Sovereignty:

Affirming tribal sovereignty aligns with US government policy. 574 independent Native nations operate in the US, managing their own affairs independent of state and federal governing structure. There are modern-era laws and rulings and several legal historic precedents for tribal sovereignty, yet sovereignty is not something to be granted but recognized. It is the natural right of a people to govern themselves. (Video: [NativeGov.org](#), Article: [MN Department of Health](#))

Indigenous Peoples of This Land:

According to [DigitalTreaties.org](#), the present-day tribes are the Sisseton-Waypeton Oyate of the Lake Traverse Reservation, SD.

That is congruent with the historical tribes named in the Cession 289 Treaty of 1851 that cover this territory, the "Sioux" Wahpeton and Sisseton Bands (see [details](#); see [treaty](#)).

According to Native-Land.ca, the Indigenous People of this land are the [Wahpekute](#) and [Očhéthi Šakówin](#), also related to the Wahpeton and Sisseton.

According to [Lakota Mall](#), the bands are of the Dakota.

The Mdewkanton tribe was likely on or near the land now known as 58th Street and Lyndale Avenue S., according to the [Richfield Historical Society](#), but dating could not be confirmed as solidly as the 1851 treaty naming the Wahpeton and Sisseton.



Sources: (All online sources accessed Spring Quarter, 2021)

Doty, Marjorie Bridge. *We Have This Covenant: The History of Richfield United Methodist Church*. 1979. 4-8.

Indigenous Digital Archive, The. [“IDA Treaties Explorer: Cession 289.”](#)

Johnson, Frederick L. *Richfield: Minnesota’s Oldest Suburb*. [Richfield Historical Society](#). 2008. 1-15.

Kappler, Charles J., ed. *Indian Affairs: Laws & Treaties*. Government Printing Office. Washington DC. 1904. [588-593](#).

Native Governance Center. [“A Guide to Indigenous Land Acknowledgment.”](#)

Native Governance Center. “What is Tribal Sovereignty?” [Video](#).

[Native-Land.ca](#).

State of Minnesota Department of Health. [“American Indian Tribal Governments.”](#)

US Department of Arts and Culture. [“Honor Native Land: A Guide and Call to Acknowledgment.”](#)

TreatiesMatter.org. [“Relations: Dakota & Ojibwe Treaties - 1851 Dakota Land Cession Treaties.”](#)

Consultations:

The following people were personally consulted on this project. Several were also invited to read the proposed land acknowledgment draft and “About” document for feedback.

Rev. Jim Bear Jacobs wrote the Minnesota Council of Churches land acknowledgment. He thinks the presented ideas of appearing regularly in the bulletin, website, and in worship are good. We would be the first church he knows of that “does this weekly” in worship. It is better to have a representative of an organization read their own statement and not have a guest Indigenous person read “our confession.” If people of the church feel discomfort when it is read in the presence of Indigenous people, that can be a healthy effect of moving forward in reconciliation. His comments on the draft and document are it “looks very good” and “is well-written and researched.”

Rev. Dawn Houser of Aitkin UMC wrote and delivered an LA at the 2020 Annual Conference session of the Minnesota Annual Conference of The United Methodist Church. She affirmed the websites that showed history of the land and advised ensuring elected church leadership would stand by the statement to give it impact. She sent the MAC land acknowledgment she wrote with permission to use any or all of it for RUMC. Her comments on the draft and document are it is “thoughtful” and “excellent,” that perhaps “it should/could be used as a model for other congregations.”

Rev. Kelly Sherman-Conroy of Nativity Lutheran Church leads an interfaith chaplaincy network. She affirmed the research resources and approach being taken. Her comments on the draft and document are it is “very good” and “addressed things well in making sure not to make it sound like Indigenous communities are in the past and not the present.”

Pat Eder is secretary of the Richfield Historical Society and a Richfield UMC member. He affirmed the information in the book *Richfield: Minnesota’s Oldest Suburb* is the best resources RHS has on the subject of the land before the arrival of white settlers.

Dixie Thompson is the Director of the Akta Lakota Museum in Chamberlain, SD. She directed us to the [Native Governance Center](#) for resources and best practices.



Examples of Land Acknowledgments from Other Entities and Organizations (alphabetical):

[Guthrie Theater](#)

The Guthrie would like to acknowledge that we gather on the traditional land of the Dakota People and honor with gratitude the land itself and the people who have stewarded it throughout the generations, including the Ojibwe and other Indigenous nations.

This statement is called a land acknowledgment – a practice that many organizations have adopted to recognize and thank the Indigenous inhabitants of the land on which they live and work. It was thoughtfully crafted by Guthrie staff with guidance from Dakota and Ojibwe consultants as well as non-Natives who have incorporated land acknowledgments into their organizations.

Over the past several years, the Guthrie has been working with Indigenous Direction, a consulting group co-founded by Larissa FastHorse (Sicangu Lakota) and Ty Defoe (Haudenosaunee, Six Nations/Anishinaabe Nation) that works with theatrical companies and artists who want to create accurate work about, for and with Indigenous peoples.

This partnership led to *Water Is Sacred*, a performance that blended ceremony, music, text, dance and discussion to acknowledge how water has been threatened on Indigenous lands, and *Stories From the Drum*, a project that was born from the hearts and minds of the Native community and culminated in three public performances on the McGuire Proscenium Stage.

As we continue to deepen relationships with the Indigenous communities who hold ties to the Mississippi River and the sacred land on which the Guthrie sits, we recognize this is only the beginning of our journey.

[Minnesota Annual Conference](#) (from Rev. Dawn Houser, consultant)

Collectively, we acknowledge that the churches and Annual Conference Office of the Minnesota Annual Conference of the United Methodist Church are located on the traditional, ancestral, and contemporary lands of Indigenous people. These congregations gather in church buildings that reside on lands that were cared for and called home by the Arapaho, Cheyenne, Anishinaabe, Dakota, Nakota, Lakota, Fox, Sauk, Iowa, Omaha, Otoe, Ottawa, Ponca, Winnebago, Wyandot, and other Native people from time immemorial. This land was taken from the many tribal nations in numerous treaty negotiations from 1805 to 1858, as tribal leaders did not know or understand the English language. Land values were listed at below their actual value and promised money was withheld from tribal nations. These lands hold great historical, spiritual, and personal significance for its original stewards, the Native nations, and peoples of this region. We recognize and continually support and advocate for the sovereignty of Native nations in this territory and beyond. By offering this land acknowledgment, we affirm tribal sovereignty and will work to hold the Minnesota Annual Conference and its congregations accountable to American Indian peoples and nations.



[Minnesota Council of Churches](#) (from Rev. Jim Bear Jacobs, consultant)

The MCC acknowledges that we are located on the ancestral homeland of the Dakota People. We are in close proximity to the territories of the Anishinabe and Ho-Chunk peoples. This land has been stewarded as a living relative by the Dakota for generations. The United States government effectively stole this land from the Dakota people through a series of unjust treaties and broken promises, followed by targeted efforts of genocide, ethnic cleansing, and forced removal.

The Minnesota Council of Churches, born out of White Protestantism, recognizes our complicity in these matters. The United States government often carried out this injustice in cooperation with institutionalized white churches. The trauma of forced assimilation and the boarding school system is a stain that cannot be washed away. But we can repent of that past and turn towards a more just future.

We look now to the Dakota people and indeed all Native American communities located in the State of Minnesota as examples of resilience, resistance, and strength. We stand resolute in our commitment to oppose any threat to Indigenous culture or tribal sovereignty, be it political, industrial, or religious. We were wrong, we can do better, we will do better.

[Native Governance Center](#)

Native Governance Center is an organization led by and for Native people. Our organizational roots are in St. Paul near Wakpá Thánka (the Mississippi river), not far from Bdoté, the place where the Mississippi and Minnesota Rivers meet. Bdoté, along with Bde Wakan (present-day Lake Mille Lacs), are central to Dakota creation stories. There are many other sacred Dakota sites near St. Paul, including Taku Wakan Tipi (Carver's Cave) and Eháŋna Wičháhapi (Indian Mounds Park burial mounds). We need to protect and honor the history and people of these places. Mni Sota Makoce (Minnesota) is the homeland of the Dakota people. The Dakota have lived here for many thousands of years. Anishinaabe people reside here, too, and reached their current homelands after following the megis shell to the food that grows on water (manoomin, or wild rice). Indigenous people from other Native nations also reside in Minnesota and have made innumerable contributions to our region.

[On Being](#)

The On Being Project is located on Dakota land. About 12 miles away from The On Being Project's central office, the Minnesota River joins the Mississippi River at a place called Bdote. In Dakota, one translation of "bdote" is "where two waters come together," and the bdote where the Mississippi and Minnesota Rivers concur is an especially sacred site – the center of the world to the Dakota.

[Pearl Jam](#)

We are honored to live and gather on the ancestral homelands of the Coast Salish peoples, in what is called Seattle, WA. We take this opportunity to express our gratitude and to thank the original and current stewards of this land.

Pearl Jam is committed to addressing issues of homelessness, systemic racism, historic inaccuracies and the other issues impacting the health and well-being of all first inhabitants. Acknowledging whose land we sit on is a step in honoring the original occupants of this place and also reminds us of their experiences and our responsibility to take meaningful action.



[University of Minnesota - Duluth](#) (also available in [Video Format](#))

We collectively acknowledge that the University of Minnesota Duluth is located on the traditional, ancestral, and contemporary lands of Indigenous people. The University resides on land that was cared for and called home by the Ojibwe people, before them the Dakota and Northern Cheyenne people, and other Native peoples from time immemorial. Ceded by the Ojibwe in an 1854 treaty, this land holds great historical, spiritual, and personal significance for its original stewards, the Native nations and peoples of this region. We recognize and continually support and advocate for the sovereignty of the Native nations in this territory and beyond. By offering this land acknowledgment, we affirm tribal sovereignty and will work to hold the University of Minnesota Duluth accountable to American Indian peoples and nations.

[University of Minnesota - Twin Cities Institute for Advanced Study](#)

The University of Minnesota Twin Cities is located on traditional, ancestral, and contemporary lands of Indigenous people. The University resides on Dakota land ceded in the Treaties of 1837 and 1851. The IAS acknowledges this place has a complex and layered history. This land acknowledgement is one of the ways in which we work to educate the campus and community about this land and our relationships with it and each other. The IAS is committed to ongoing efforts to recognize, support, and advocate for American Indian Nations and peoples.



April 18, 2021

Richfield United Methodist Church in Minneapolis, Minnesota acknowledges that we gather on the traditional, ancestral, and contemporary lands of the Dakota People.

These lands hold historical, spiritual, and personal significance to the Dakota People. We are grateful for Indigenous Nations and their continued stewardship of these lands and we appreciate their perseverance and strength. The Dakota People were harmed by the United States government through broken promises and unjust treaties, including the Cession 289 Treaty of 1851 which names the Wahpeton and Sisseton Bands. These atrocities effectively stole this geographical area and further harm and trauma have come through displacement, ethnic cleansing, and genocide. This church formed in 1854 as one of the first institutions established by white settlers in this geographical area and benefited directly from this harm inflicted upon the Dakota People.

In repentance, this church seeks active partnership with Native American communities and organizations in the State of Minnesota and beyond. We affirm tribal sovereignty. We reject attitudes of invisibility and erasure of Indigenous Peoples. We oppose policies and actions that threaten or demean Indigenous culture and tribal sovereignty by any means. We call upon our fellow houses of worship in the interfaith community to acknowledge the realities of the lands on which they gather and take educational and restorative justice action. With God's help, we commit to doing better.

This land acknowledgment was unanimously affirmed by the Richfield UMC Ad Board on March 23, 2021. It was first presented as part of worship on April 18, 2021, which was Native American Ministries Sunday, one of the Special Sundays of The United Methodist Church.

In Christ,

Rev. Nate Melcher, Pastor
Nick Dewey, Ad Board Chair

Sources: (All online sources accessed Spring Quarter, 2021)

Doty, Marjorie Bridge. *We Have This Covenant: The History of Richfield United Methodist Church*. 1979. 1-8.

Indigenous Digital Archive, The. ["IDA Treaties Explorer: Cession 289."](#)

Johnson, Frederick L. *Richfield: Minnesota's Oldest Suburb*. [Richfield Historical Society](#). 2008. 1-15.

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State of Minnesota Department of Health. ["American Indian Tribal Governments."](#)

US Department of Arts and Culture. ["Honor Native Land: A Guide and Call to Acknowledgment."](#)

TreatiesMatter.org. ["Relations: Dakota & Ojibwe Treaties - 1851 Dakota Land Cession Treaties."](#)

Special Thanks:

Pat Eder, [Richfield Historical Society](#)

Rev. Jim Bear Jacobs, [Minnesota Council of Churches](#)

Rev. Dawn Houser, [CONAM](#) Chair

Rev. Kelly Sherman-Conroy, [Native theologian and storyteller](#)

Dixie Thompson, [Akta Lakota Museum](#), Chamberlain, SD



About Usage, Process, and Ongoing Next Steps

About Usage:

A land acknowledgment is a form of confession and one step of many in repentance by those who benefit from harm and trauma caused to Indigenous Peoples. This confession and need for repentance is in alignment with our missional values and must be owned by the church. Guests and partners of the church who are of Indigenous heritage should not be asked to recite this confession on behalf of the church. This land acknowledgment is intended for use in the following ways:

1. **Worship and Events** The statement should appear in brief frequently and in full occasionally.
 - a. This brief statement should be used in worship and events as frequently as possible such as part of the Welcome, Benediction, or another appropriate place: “Richfield United Methodist Church (or ‘Your church’) acknowledges that we gather on the traditional, ancestral, and contemporary lands of the Dakota People (or ‘Indigenous Peoples’).”
 - b. The full land acknowledgment should be used in worship on fifth Sundays, the Sunday closest to Indigenous Peoples’ Day (second Monday in October), and on or around [Native American Ministries Sunday](#) (third Sunday of Easter as a Special Sunday of The United Methodist Church).
 - c. On April 18, 2021, the full land acknowledgment shall debut in worship accompanied by an appropriate liturgy and special offering for Native American Ministries Sunday.
2. **Publication** The following will appear in worship bulletins, newsletter, electronic newsletter, event programs, website, and other appropriate publications whenever possible: “Richfield UMC gathers on Dakota land. More at richfieldumc.org/land.”
3. RichfieldUMC.org/land This website will feature the full land acknowledgment, sources and special thanks, this document, and resources for other houses of worship to do similar work.
4. **Other Media** An effort will be made to bring periodic attention to the land acknowledgment and the importance of land acknowledgment in appropriate platforms (i.e. online social media).
5. **Archives** History of the land and the Indigenous Peoples who are its historical stewards must be included in future “history of” heritage and archive documentation and publications.

About the Process:

On November 24, 2020, Rev. Nate Melcher proposed to the Ad Board the church take action to research and craft a land acknowledgment honoring Indigenous Peoples as a critical first action step. Nick Dewey, Chair, moved to empower Rev. Melcher to research and craft language and usage and present it to Ad Board; Jerry Schilling, Trustees Chair, seconded; the motion was approved unanimously. On March 23, 2021, the Ad Board reviewed and discussed the presented research, land acknowledgment, and “About” document. Nick Dewey moved to approve the land acknowledgment as written; Wayne Johnson, Lay Leader, seconded; the motion was approved unanimously. It first presented as part of worship on April 18, 2021 during Native American Ministries Sunday.

About Ongoing Next Steps:

This land acknowledgment and documentation will be reviewed regularly by Ad Board and/or designated team to ensure its language and impact remain relevant in the life of the church.

Richfield UMC must continue forward on a path of racial reconciliation and repentance. This includes both works of compassion and justice born of a faith in the loving God of all people. Moving forward begins with acknowledging harm caused, continues through openness to learning and taking meaningful action, and a commitment to do better. With God’s help and working together, we will.