

FAQs
About Honoring Lands & Peoples:
Land Acknowledgment & Humble Confession for Blackhawk Presbytery

What is a Land Acknowledgment?

“Land acknowledgements are a way that people insert an awareness of Indigenous presence and land rights in everyday life. This is often done at the beginning of ceremonies, lectures It can be an explicit yet limited way to recognize the history of colonialism and first nations as well as a need for change in settler-colonial societies.”¹

A Land Acknowledgment is more effective when it includes some or all of these:

- Why is this acknowledgment happening?
- How does this acknowledgment relate to the event or work you are doing?
- What is the history of this territory? What are the impacts of colonialism here?
- What is your relationship to this territory?
- How did you come to be here?
- What intentions do you have to address the structures of colonialism beyond this territory acknowledgement?
- How might this statement inspire transformative acts that contribute to undoing Indigenous erasure?
- How might this statement focus on the positivity of who Indigenous people are today and inspire others to take action to support Indigenous communities?

What is the purpose of a Land Acknowledgement?

- Re-educate about the history of the land and people as well as the impact of colonialism
- Narrate the history of the land, as a guide for what is needed in the future
- Begin to repair Indigenous erasure by naming whose traditional land it was and where those people still are today, as well as how their resilience shapes who they are today
- Be honest about what policies dispossessed the Indigenous people of their lands
- Initiate a process of commitment to telling the truth and acknowledging the harm so that transformative acts of conciliation may begin to take hold

Why is a Land Acknowledgement being offered to us as Christians, particularly in Blackhawk?

- We are called to love God with our whole beings and to love our neighbor as we love ourselves.
- In this context, we’re looking to acknowledge the existence of Indigenous bodies in geography and how they occupy land now and in history.
- As a Presbytery, we are responsible to steward land as a way to share the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

Why does this one for the Presbytery of Blackhawk include a confession?

- We are in the Christian lineage of those whose leadership produced the Doctrine of Discovery, and so we have confessing to do about the harm done to those whose lives have been forever changed by the acts of the Christian church.
- As part of the Reformed tradition, we embrace the power of humble confession and repentant turning around. Because God's grace does not use blame and shame, our repentance is not dependent upon individual culpability. Instead, as a community of Christians, we turn around to face the devastating repercussions of sin. We trust that Jesus meets us in this humble stance.
- Confession enables accountability for how we face the present situation and move toward conciliation in the future.

What a Land Acknowledgement is not intended to be:

- Not an end in itself, but instead is a means to participate in God's ongoing reformation of the church so that we can participate in manifesting God's realm here and now.
- Not centered mostly on people who identify as white Presbyterians, but instead centers the experiences of our Indigenous neighbors and the Earth.
- Not something to be performed by rote, but instead opens us to the lead of the Spirit.

How might you consider using this document or pieces of it in your community's life? A few ideas:

- Use it for education in its entirety with your Session, Deacons, and Committees
- Use the prayer of confession in worship
- Preach on it in part or entirety
- Rewrite the second paragraph for the specific land you are on; possibly add details about the livelihood of these specific Indigenous people, e.g., their gathering practices, precious artifacts, language, cultural practices, etc.
- Feel free to use it as you discern your congregation's participation in supporting Indigenous Revitalization and loving these people as your neighbor.

How you might go beyond Land Acknowledgment and Confession to Take Action

- Toward Right Relationship with Native Peoples <https://friendspeaceteams.org/trr/>
- Develop Upstander practices and mindset <https://upstanderproject.org/about/land-acknowledgement>
- Develop a practice of listening for God's presence in Nature and seeing yourself as part of Nature.

¹ Native Land Teacher Guide 2019, p. 6 <https://native-land.ca/resources/territory-acknowledgement/>

We gratefully acknowledge the Presbytery of the Redwoods for the origin of this document. It is used with their permission.