

Land and History Acknowledgement

Preface

Providing the land acknowledgement at the beginning of public meetings and events first started in Australia in the 1970s to give honor to the Aboriginal peoples and as a way to increase the rights of these Indigenous peoples. It traveled to Canada, where people wanted to raise awareness of the horror of Boarding Schools and the children who were separated from families, language, culture and religion. In the United States, we Presbyterians have been giving a Land Acknowledgement for some time now, to give honor to the peoples who lived on this land before us.

As 2021–2024 Presbyterian Women, Inc. Vice Moderator and Chair of the Justice & Peace Committee, I began to think about the Land Acknowledgement not only to remember and honor Indigenous peoples but also a way to remember our history—a history fraught with white supremacy, racism and violence. It seems that so many of us are looking for ways to forget our past and move beyond the sorrow we caused in the name of Manifest Destiny, but until we confront and embrace our history, we cannot possibly move forward in love!

This Land Acknowledgement is evolving. It recognizes that the land we call the United States was stolen from its traditional Indigenous inhabitants and caretakers. The statement also confesses the injustices perpetrated against people living on this land, based on their race, ethnicity, gender or sexual identity, place of birth, or religion.

The Land Acknowledgement may be read aloud by one or more speakers. The text about a particular group or community should be read by someone not of that social identity. For example, if you are using this Land Acknowledgement as part of a meeting where only women are present, omit the part about gender inequality. If a white male is present, have him read that part. Likewise with other parts.

Visit presbyterianwomen.org/acknowledgement for a digital/downloadable version. Permission is granted for non-commercial usage. Please include credit to the authors when used.

The following land acknowledgment was written by Andy James (Atlanta, GA); Rev. Beth Richardson and Rev. Shanea Leonard and adapted by Kathleen Keefer; edits by Lucia Kremzar.

Please listen as we acknowledge the land we are meeting on and all of those who struggle in this country under the weight of oppression.

We acknowledge we are all currently meeting and living on land taken by force or by trickery by European invaders from across the sea. This land was loved, cared for and honored by countless generations of indigenous people. These people continue to be systematically abused by policies and practices that remove their histories, culture, language and rights from this place.

We pause to acknowledge the indigenous groups who originally inhabited this land: *(Insert the names of the tribes who live(d) on the land where you are gathered.)*

We acknowledge and honor the people from Africa who were enslaved, brought to this country against their will and, through their abuse and forced labor, built the wealth and very foundation of this country. These African siblings continue to be kept down and held back by laws, programs, policies and practices created and perpetuated by the white establishment.

We acknowledge and honor our siblings from Mexico, whose very country became a source of armed conflict and was subsumed by the United States government, while their president was held hostage and forced to sign away 55 percent of his country. Our country flourished while theirs lay in ruin. We continue to strive to keep our countries separated by barbed wire and armed guards.

We acknowledge and honor those people who came from East Asia to escape persecution and hardship, only to find harsh and even brutal treatment as they labored to build the railroads that joined the East and West of this land, thus increasing the wealth of the Europeans who arrived here without invitation. We remember the women who came from Asia with the promise of marriage to their kindred men, only to find themselves enslaved as servants to the rich white or in brothels as prostitutes.

We acknowledge and honor the Hawaiian people whose population was decimated by diseases carried by white missionaries, and whose land was stolen by white Europeans who desired to develop sugar plantations to meet the needs of the European wealthy. The indigenous Hawaiian people continue to be discriminated against and held back from achieving their full potential.

We acknowledge and honor the Indigenous people of Alaska. When Russian trappers hunted their own fur bearing mammals to near extinction, they sought other areas to hunt. They arrived in Alaska and began trapping for fur, the animals that were food for the Alaskan people. They developed colonies and trading posts until the Alaskan people rose up against them. Russia then sold the land that belonged to the Tlingits to the United States.

We acknowledge and honor the people of Puerto Rico, an island country invaded by Europeans who brought diseases and took gold found in abundance on the island. The Spanish government permitted the enslavement of the indigenous people to work in the sugar cane and ginger fields. A strong military outpost was created. The United States took the island from the Spanish by signing the Treaty of Paris that ended the Spanish-American War in 1898. We sometimes forget that our Borinquen (pronounce as bore-EEN-cane) siblings are fellow citizens.

In 1942, our siblings of Japanese descent were forced to evacuate to be resettled in internment camps. Unless they were able to dispose of or make arrangements for the care of their property within a few days, their homes, farms, businesses, and most of their private belongings were lost forever. The camps here slowly closed towards the end of the

war. In 1988, Congress apologized for this injustice and provided \$20,000 for each person incarcerated.

We acknowledge and honor our siblings in the Abrahamic faiths. Our Jewish siblings, who came to this country in 1654 fleeing persecution in other lands. They sought religious freedom and a better way of life. Through the centuries, the Jews fought for equal rights, the right to worship God in community and the right to work. Still today, 46 percent of Jewish Americans have experienced anti-Semitic behaviors; violence and hatred toward them continues.

We acknowledge and honor those who practice the Islamic faith. Muslims came to this land as early as 1528—perhaps even sooner. Some were enslaved, but others were able to live and move freely, even becoming adventurers. Thomas Jefferson, when writing the Virginia Statute for Religious Freedom, included Muslims, Jews and Pagans along with Christians as those deserving religious freedom. But still today, Muslims are discriminated against and face religious persecution in this “Land of Free.”

We acknowledge and honor the people of the LGBTQIA+ community who have been subject to legalized second-class citizenship because of their identity and whom they love. Queer people have experienced systemic harm of biased sanctions crafted and enforced under the guise of religion. These unjust laws have been explicitly responsible for bigoted policing, housing and workplace discrimination, immigration sanctions, overt and covert practices that have prevented and still prevent participation in many of the rights afforded to other citizens.

We acknowledge and honor women, who make up 51 percent of the population of the United States and are not yet treated as equal with their male counterparts. Women are still paid less than men for the same work, are often denied employment because of their sex/gender and are frequently victims of violence and rape. Women of color experience these gender-based injustices at an even higher rate than white women. In some states, women no longer have authority over their own bodies, adequate reproductive health care, or the ability to be safe in their own homes. Congress has continually failed to ratify the Equal Right Amendment, the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women or the Beijing Platform for Action.

We recognize the history of the United State includes complicity in the attempted genocide of a people, and of the sin of white supremacy, and the taking of unfair and unscrupulous advantage of people who are not white Europeans—all under the guise of Manifest Destiny.

This land on which we walk, pray, laugh and weep—this land is stained by the blood and sweat, moans and tears of our indigenous, African, Mexican, Asian, Alaskan, Hawaiian, and Puerto Rican and Japanese siblings; LGBTQIA+ siblings; and faithful people demeaned and harmed for not being Christians.

We who benefit from white patriarchal systems acknowledge our sin against our siblings, and we commit to the process of dismantling structural racism in all the spaces of our lives: our families; homes; communities; churches; government and country.

Let us pray: O God of all peoples and nations, open our eyes to the wonder and majesty of all humankind. Help us to confess the times and places where those who came before us—and we ourselves— have denied the fullness of humanity to those around us, demanding that they surrender to our desires. Guide and direct all the work we do as we lead your church, that your Spirit may lead us to new patterns that engage your world and your beloved children with the same honor and dignity that you have shown us in your Son Jesus Christ, who comes to make us and all things new. Amen.