

St. John's Norwood Episcopal Church
September 2024
LAND ACKNOWLEDGMENT STATEMENTS

By adopting a Land Acknowledgment Statement our parish joins a national movement that began in the 1970s, and our parish aligns itself with initiatives of the Episcopal Church at national and local levels.

WHAT IS A LAND ACKNOWLEDGMENT STATEMENT?

It is a **public declaration**, to be included in publications and posted on websites, that the land on which a community lives and works, or in which it invests, was occupied by the indigenous peoples of North America prior to the arrival of European explorers and settlers.

It is a **public declaration that the land in question was unceded**, the original inhabitants having been displaced and dispersed by internecine wars, conflicts with European settlers, epidemics, and climate change.

The specific wording of the statements already in place reflects a vast range of demographic, geographical and political conditions that existed on the North American continent between ca. 1500 and 1900 A.D.

The specific wording also reflects whether or not descendants of the original inhabitants still live on the land in question.

ONE STATEMENT, TWO CORE VALUES

Regardless of demographics, geography and history, all Land Acknowledgment Statements affirm core values shared by the indigenous peoples of North America and their descendants:

- Human beings and the land that sustains them are ONE; on this earth, there is no separation between spiritual and material needs, actions and practices.
- Human beings access the resources of the land to survive and prosper; they do so collectively, through extended families, clans, tribes; they do not **own** the land;

ONE STATEMENT, TWO APPLICATIONS IN THE UNITED STATES

Over centuries, indigenous leaders have done their best to explain and protect these core values in complex and sophisticated diplomatic, commercial and political exchanges with Europeans throughout the North American Continent.

Today, Land Acknowledgement Statements like the one we are reading at St. Johns serve two purposes:

- **A spiritual purpose:** to reaffirm and honor the ancient bond between land and people, whether or not the descendants of the original inhabitants still live on the land;
- **A material, practical purpose:** to allow today's indigenous peoples, wherever they live, to benefit from the implementation of civil rights laws from which they were excluded in the 1960s and 1970s. Such laws originally were intended to dismantle Jim Crow statutes and other forms of discrimination against the descendants of African slaves.

Land Acknowledgment Statements provided a framework from which Indigenous leaders demanded recognition of their rights under the XIV Amendment of the U.S .Constitution.

The extension of civil rights laws has helped indigenous people - whether they live on reservation lands or not, and whether or not they are registered members of federally recognized tribes - to access education, healthcare and jobs. In some instances, the new laws have also allowed tribal governments to reopen land claims that had been previously denied by the Bureau of Indian Affairs (an entity within the Department of the Interior) or had simply been shelved.

And finally, an unintended consequence of improved access to education, from which all of us benefit directly. Since the 1980s, two generations of scholars from several indigenous tribes and reservation communities have blessed us with research-based books that affirm and honor the past of those tribes and communities. These books document the importance of Indigenous leaders as actors in the shaping of the American Continent rather than as inferior people destined to be ruled by European imperial powers. The same books also document the impact of Christian missionaries ignorant and contemptuous of indigenous cultures and beliefs.