

Territorial Acknowledgement Resource

Anglican Diocese of Niagara

Acknowledging the territory where we gather and the people who have traditionally called it 'home' for thousands of years is one way in which churches can more fully live into our work of truth, healing and reconciliation.

At its most basic level, an acknowledgement is a sign of respect towards Indigenous peoples. Acknowledgements can also be understood to be:

- tangible repudiations of the Doctrine of Discovery which held that Turtle Island – or North America - was 'empty' until 'discovered' or claimed by European settlers;
- a way of living into the apology our Primate made on behalf of the Anglican Church of Canada for our part in the residential schools system; and
- an opportunity to acknowledge the spirituality of Indigenous peoples that was not respected by churches and was used to justify colonialism, including the residential schools.

There is no one way to acknowledge traditional territory but any effort must be undergirded by respect and with the hope that it will help foster right-relations with the Indigenous peoples in your community. With this in mind it's a good practice to engage Indigenous elders in your community as you seek to acknowledge their traditional territory.

Local Treaty History

In order to undertake an acknowledgement with integrity, it's important to have a basic understanding of colonial history, especially when it comes to treaty-making. In the area now within the ecclesiastical boundaries of the Anglican Diocese of Niagara, several treaties were negotiated under the protocol of the Royal Proclamation of 1763 which stipulated that the new Indian Department would be the primary point of contact between Indigenous peoples.

The first land cession under these protocols happened in 1764 when the Seneca negotiated a treaty that granted the British unimpeded access to two miles on either side of the Niagara River for the purposes of communication and travel between Lake Erie and Lake Ontario. By the time Confederation of the new Dominion of Canada was established in 1867, nearly the entire land mass of the Province of Ontario at the time was ceded by a treaty. These are now collectively referred to as the Upper Canada Treaties. For more information about them, [visit Indigenous and Northern Affairs Canada](#).

Forms of Acknowledgment

We encourage the acknowledgement of the traditional territory of Indigenous people at services, events and meetings, in all spaces and place we gather. An acknowledgement may be printed, spoken, projected or posted. It may refer generally to Indigenous peoples, or specifically to a Treaty or group. You might also include the recognition on your outside sign, on a unique plaque outside, on your website, at the entrance to your building, or in your Sunday bulletin.

A spoken territorial acknowledgment in worship might be a statement that is used consistently, or it might be something that changes depending on the context or liturgical season. It can be something that is responsive or proclaimed by a whole community or something stated by one person.

You might also consider how and where your church history is presented and how to integrate a territorial acknowledgment into that story, as well as any work throughout your church's history towards reconciliation and right relations.

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Sample Acknowledgements

Creativity is encouraged as you develop or employ an acknowledgement for our particular context. What follows are several examples that have been drawn or adapted from a number of sources.

- 1) For thousands of years, indigenous peoples have walked on this land; their relationship with the land is at the centre of their lives and spirituality. We are gathered on the traditional territory of several Indigenous peoples, including the Neutrals, the Mississauga, the Anishnaabe and the Haudenosaunee. We acknowledge their continuing stewardship of this land.
- 2) We acknowledge with respect the history, spirituality, and culture of the Indigenous peoples with whom the Upper Canada Treaties were signed and the territory wherein our church resides, and our responsibility as Treaty members. We also honour the heritage and gifts of Métis people. May our actions be guided by our commitment to reconciliation.
- 3) Welcome to this service of worship. We begin by acknowledging the traditional territory upon which we gather this morning. For many thousands of years, the (name the nation or nations) have sought to walk gently on this land. They offered assistance to the first European travellers to this territory and shared their knowledge for survival in what was at times a harsh climate. We seek a new relationship with the Original Peoples of this land, one based in honour and deep respect.

4) Area Specific:

Hamilton: We would like to begin this service/event/meeting by acknowledging that the land on which we gather is the traditional territory of the Haudenosaunee and Anishinaabe. This territory is covered by the Upper Canada Treaties and directly adjacent to Haldimand Treaty territory.

Guelph: We wish to acknowledge that we are on land that, at the time of contact, was held by the Attawandaron as an area of trade and ceremony by the 2 rivers. At various times the land was occupied by both Haudenosaunee from the south and Anishinaabe from the north. In more recent times the Huron Treaty gave rights to the Mississaugas of New Credit. May we who dwell on, or visit this land also be good stewards and honour those who came before us.

St. Catharines: We would like to begin this service/event/meeting by acknowledging that the land on which we gather is the traditional territory of Anishinaabe and Haudenosaunee peoples.

Acknowledging territory is a beginning and not an ending in terms of our work towards truth and reconciliation. We hope that such acknowledgements will be a spring board towards deeper and sustained relationships Indigenous people and we encourage you to reach out to local Indigenous communities to create the space for this important work to begin.

In creating this resource, we wish to acknowledge the excellent work of KAIROS, the United Church of Canada, the Canadian Association of University Teachers and Indigenous and Northern Affairs Canada.