

Recognition, Repentance, Relationship, Reconciliation: Land Acknowledgement as an Act of Repentance for Two People

Reader 1 **Glenna**: We're beginning to hear and read more about Land Acknowledgement, especially at United Women in Faith events. What is this exactly?

Reader 2 **Daryl**: In an attempt in the 1900's to mend relationships with First Americans, some Canadian groups took up a tradition of hospitality that has been a part of North American Indigenous people's practices for centuries. At powwows and other celebrations, they either welcome their guests or thank the hosts by acknowledging those who were there before the First Nations people.

Reader 1: Does this fit with our PURPOSE? This Land Acknowledgement thing?

Reader 2: Yes, we acknowledge that we are on land inhabited for hundreds of years by Indigenous People, my people. We want to know God and to experience freedom as whole persons while getting to know others as whole persons through Jesus Christ, including Native Americans who lived on the land we are on. We want to develop a creative, supportive fellowship with Native Americans in our local communities and develop authentic relationships, relationships that will lead to healing of hearts, minds, souls, and the land.

R1: Hmmm. So this could lead to full reconciliation with our Native American neighbors? Many of our indigenous sisters and brothers are hurting from the trauma of broken treaties and massacres and relocation marches. The taking of children to remote places they'd never heard of and buried without ceremony, to be unearthed today when golf courses and swimming pools are constructed on top of their graves. We can help with the healing through Acts of Repentance. This is tremendous!

R2: Yes! Since United Women in Faith began an Acts of Repentance project in 2012, we have learned many things that touch our hearts, minds, and spirits. We understand now that *Acts* is plural. It's not a "one and done." At the beginning of this project, we as Native American women were asked to welcome non-Natives to our land.

R1: That must have been awkward!

R2: Not at first. We were excited to be seen! United Women in Faith has moved from asking a local Native American to *welcome* us to the land taken from her ancestors - to a more appropriate *land acknowledgment*. Recognition, repentance, and reconciliation through relationships can begin with Land Acknowledgement. Remember that Indian Land was not surrendered voluntarily; it was taken. Non-Natives are not guests, which implies an invitation.

R1: Is that the goal? Relationships with our people?

R2: Yes, if those relationships are positive and healing – of the people *and* of the *land*. Not all Native Americans believe the land has been hurt by the blood of our massacred ancestors, but it makes sense if you think about it. [pause]

Land Acknowledgement is a powerful way of showing respect and honoring Indigenous People. It's a solemn act that can be a beginning, a door to relationships, an entry point to other Acts of Repentance. It can be presented verbally or visually. Say, in a statement, a short dramatic presentation, or graphic art.

R1: Eva Johnson, a Klamath/Modoc member of Great Spirit United Methodist Church in Portland, Oregon, envisions plaques in the narthex of churches with a brief land acknowledgement of those who lived on that land before the settlers came.

R1 continues: So it sounds like a Land Acknowledgement is an act of reconciliation that can be done immediately? But Patty Krawek says in her book *Becoming Kin* that lots of Indigenous People don't like Land Acknowledgements.

R2 nods: Yep. It can be like hearing a white person say "I stole your TV and I'm keeping it." But it also shows that work is being done while inviting the truth, and it becomes more meaningful when coupled with authentic efforts to develop relationships.

[R1 nods] So what does a good Land Acknowledgment sound like?

R2: There are many types of land acknowledgment. Museums, some churches, and a few commercial companies have Land Acknowledgements on their websites.

R1: This *sounds* like an Act of Repentance. But how can people repent of something they had no part in? When Mother told me about my Irish great grandpa marrying my Choctaw great-grandma, I saw a beautiful romance. After reading *Becoming Kin*, I'm realizing the Irish Adair men probably married all those Choctaw and Cherokee women to get their land. And I feel bad.

R2: There was a lot of that going on. It wasn't your fault, but you can help now. Do you know about historical, or intergenerational, trauma? It's a scientific and medical fact. And we know "sins of the fathers" to be fact. What was done to our people in the last 600 years can't be undone, but the pain is still there. Part of our purpose as members of United Women in Faith is to inspire others to take action – in this case between Native and non-Native communities and individuals.

R1: Many Indigenous People are very forgiving people! Many embrace Christianity and the teachings of Jesus!

R2: That's true. But there are thousands of us who still hurt because of the genome of historical trauma. This is recognizing what must be addressed through repentance and reconciliation that leads to healing and relationships.

R1: I remember reading in school that our people were not considered to be human beings. After a while it made me embarrassed to say I was Indian. That's what we called ourselves back then. It took a long time for me to believe that was not from God!

R2: Me too. It was **not** God's plan! Neither was the Doctrine of Discovery, even though Christian nations created it and enforced it. It is still law in some countries, including the United States.

R1: Would these acts include boarding schools? And forced removals called the Trails of Tears?

R2: Yes, and the banning of potlatches and Giveaways. And the **Indian Relocation Act of 1956** that removed some of us from tribal lands to big cities. And then left us there – usually without the promised support we needed to survive. Many of us became “urban Indians” who lost contact with our traditional families and culture. And language!

R1: I've heard that when a group loses its language, it soon loses its culture. Sad.

R2: If Land Acknowledgement is used to reconcile individuals and groups, I want to be a part of that relationship-building! So – I acknowledge that I live today on land originally inhabited by my people, the Dine', the Navajo, who hunted and farmed and raised sheep in this beautiful land I call home. I invite each of you with us today to learn who lived in your area hundreds of years ago.

R1: And then reach out to at least one Indigenous person with the goal of an authentic relationship that could lead to friendship and healing.

[And they hug]