

# A Guide to Territorial Acknowledgements

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The use of a territorial acknowledgement has become a common practice in Canada. A territorial acknowledgment is a statement at the beginning of a gathering or event to name the Indigenous territory that the gathering is taking place upon. A territorial acknowledgment is a statement of respect. It recognizes that the land was not empty when Europeans first arrived on Turtle Island, that particular peoples inhabited these lands as custodians for many generations prior to colonization, and that in many instances those peoples continue to be present.

A territorial acknowledgement usually involves naming the First Peoples of the area and may also involve acknowledgement of treaties that covered that area, or an acknowledgment of the fact that no such treaties exist in the area. It may also involve giving thanks for the land and acknowledging the ongoing oppression and struggles for justice that are facing Indigenous Peoples and communities.

Doing a land acknowledgment at the beginning of a gathering does not mean we are done! The work that non-Indigenous organizations and individuals need to do towards reconciliation with Indigenous Peoples is a long-term journey, and land acknowledgments keep this work in our consciousness.

In a church setting, a territorial acknowledgment can be a meaningful and important practice and can be communicated in a variety of ways:

- a spoken statement at the beginning of the worship service or other gathering
- printed weekly in the church bulletin
- on the church's website and e-newsletter
- a piece of visual art somewhere in or on the church building
- included in the story of your church's history
- it could be something spoken by one person, or a responsive reading
- part of the call to worship
- accompanied by a visual image
- accompanied by a video

## How do you make them meaningful?

Knowing how to deliver a meaningful land acknowledgement takes some thought and practice. Here are a few tips intended to help you create a meaningful statement:

- Reflect on what your goal is (e.g. to inspire others to take action in supporting Indigenous communities). Developing a land acknowledgment simply because “everyone else is doing it,” is a sign that perhaps further self-reflection is in order.
- Ensure that you are well informed by researching the following:
  - The Indigenous people to whom the land is home for.
  - The pre- and post-settlement history of the land as well as related treaties.
  - Indigenous words and phraseologies including correct pronunciation for the names of nations, communities, places, and individuals.
  - Historical relationships between your church/denomination and the local Indigenous peoples
  - Existing relationships between you/your church and local Indigenous people, groups, or organizations.
- Contemplate the language you use:
  - Use appropriate identifying terms such as First Nations, Métis, and Inuit, rather than antiquated designations (e.g. Indian, Aboriginal, Native, etc.)
  - Use terms like colonization, settler and assimilation highlight actions taken in the past that have disrupted Indigenous wellbeing.
  - Use past, present, and future tenses thoughtfully. Remember, Indigenous people are still here - they are not a remnant of the past.
  - Make every effort to ensure you are correctly pronouncing a nation’s name. There are a number of ways to learn, including:
    - Respectfully ask someone from that nation or from a local organization such as a Friendship Center or Indigenous Student Center
    - Check the nation’s website for a phonetic pronunciation. There may be an audio-recording on their ‘about’ page
    - Look for a video that includes people saying the nation’s name
    - Call the nation after hours and listen to their answering machine recording
- Consider how often and what types of gatherings it is appropriate to include:
  - If you include an acknowledgement frequently, make sure that it remains fresh. This can include a consistent statement that is supplemented each time with small items of historical/geographic/cultural detail
  - Consider including regularly but not necessarily at every service or gathering
  - Include especially at services or gatherings where people from your community might attend
  - Include at gatherings on or near the National Day for Truth and Reconciliation (September 30) and during Indigenous History Month (June).

- Personalize it:
  - Speaking from the heart about colonialism and your personal path toward reconciliation is challenging. A first step is to speak to what you know: your background, your relationship (or lack thereof) with Indigenous people, and sharing the new things you learn.

“As a visitor on this land, coming from [describe your background i.e. Europe], I am striving to deepen my own understanding of the local Indigenous communities....”

“I come with respect for this land that I am on today, and for the people who have and do reside here.”

## Examples of a Territorial Acknowledgment:

### Example 1:

As we begin, I want to acknowledge the traditional territory upon which we gather this morning/afternoon/evening. 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.

### Example 2:

I am not Indigenous, rather I am of settler-colonial ancestry. Although my heritage extends to \_\_\_ (England, France, Ireland, etc.) \_\_\_. Like many other settler people, I have benefited greatly from living on Turtle Island.

As a visitor on this land, I have an important responsibility to acknowledge the grounds on which we are privileged to gather to \_\_\_ (worship, celebrate) \_\_\_.

We are gathered today in the traditional and treaty territory of the \_\_\_ (Mississauga Anishinaabeg) \_\_\_. I believe that it is not only important to recognize the \_\_\_ (Mississauga)\_\_\_ for their care for, and teachings about the earth and our relations, but to honor those teachings through our interactions today and everyday hereafter.

Nearly 100 years ago, Canada and \_\_\_ (seven Mississauga and Chippewa First Nations signed agreements that became known as the Williams Treaties) \_\_\_. These agreements were intended to be the foundation upon which sovereign peoples would build a common relationship, but lead to long-standing disputes.

In light of this history and understanding our role as Treaty People, may we dedicate ourselves to moving forward in the spirit of partnership, collaboration, and reconciliation, as we learn together and contemplate the possibilities that lay ahead.

**Sources:**

- <https://native-land.ca>
- <https://www.kairoscanada.org/territorial-acknowledgment>