

MUUC Anti-Racism Team Land Acknowledgement Proposal for Publication

Background and FAQ's Supporting this Acknowledgement

Why publish a land acknowledgement on the MUUC website and include an acknowledgement at each service?

MUUC believes that acknowledging native ancestral lands is a simple and powerful way to show respect to the original inhabitants of the land where we currently stand, present, and engage in church activities.

For many years now, Native American peoples have asked institutions across the US to begin to address our shared history of colonialism by acknowledging that native ancestral lands were taken. In their words . . .

Land Acknowledgements are a simple, powerful way to show respect to the original inhabitants of the land where you are currently standing, presenting, or about to engage in an activity. The Massachusetts Center for Native American Awareness (MCNAA) believes that this is a meaningful step toward honoring the truth, making the invisible visible, and correcting the American stories that erase indigenous peoples' tribal history and culture. Land Acknowledgements demonstrate a commitment to counter the Doctrine of Discovery and to undo the ongoing legacy of settler colonialism. (Massachusetts Center for Native American Awareness <https://www.mcnaa.org/land-acknowledgement>)

The practice of Land Acknowledgments has also been endorsed by the U.S. Department of Arts and Culture since 2017:

<https://centerracialjustice.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/Honor-Native-Land-Guide.pdf> and

encouraged by the UUA since 2016:

<https://www.uua.org/justice/blog/beyond-land-acknowledgment>

What is the Land Acknowledgement History at MUUC?

At MUUC in November 2020, guest preacher Kia Bordner (a member of the Tigua and Yaqui Native peoples) challenged us to include a Land Acknowledgement in each worship. That request was endorsed by the MUUC Worship Committee. The MUUC Anti-Racism Team agreed, and both groups worked with Rev. Susanne to create an appropriate ritual recognition.

Since Spring 2021, words similar to these below have been spoken or included in the Announcements video at the beginning of each service:

Our church sits on land belonging to the native Massachusetts people. We support Native rights through the Massachusetts Indigenous Legislative Agenda, maindigenousagenda.org, which lobbies for native justice at the state level.

We are now adding a permanent, published statement to the MUUC website.

Is Land Acknowledgement a widespread practice?

Yes. In response to a growing awareness, institutions around the US are including land acknowledgements. Here are some local examples:

1. Boston City Council
<https://www.boston.gov/news/city-council-offers-land-acknowledgement>
2. Harvard University <https://hunap.harvard.edu/land-acknowledgement>
3. Town of Salem
<https://www.salem.org/about-salem/native-history-and-indigenous-acknowledgement/>
4. Tufts University <https://sites.tufts.edu/decolonizeir/land-acknowledgment/>
5. Framingham State University
<https://www.framingham.edu/the-fsu-difference/inclusive-excellence/land-acknowledgement/>
6. MIT <https://iceo.mit.edu/land-acknowledgement/>
7. Emerson College
<https://www.emerson.edu/departments/intercultural-student-affairs/about-us/honoring-native-land-massachusetts-indigenous>

Does this acknowledgment put us at risk of litigation? Does it mean someone could try to take this land?

No. Using the [Doctrine of Discovery](#), colonists have been taking (and keeping) Native lands since 1494. The Supreme Court has reaffirmed the Doctrine and rejected Native claims ever since — and as recently as 2005. Land acknowledgments are moral statements and are in no way legally binding. No local land acknowledgements have led to lawsuits thus far. Moreover, indigenous activists, even those who are demanding the return of lands, *are not asking* for individual plots belonging to churches. Most recently the NDN collective, a US national coalition of indigenous activists, created the LandBack Campaign, which calls for the US to grant back public lands — such as National Parks — to Native Peoples. Learn more here: <https://ndncollective.org/ndn-collective-landback-campaign-launching-on-indigenous-peoples-day-2020/>

Summary: Our MUUC Land Acknowledgement is a moral statement, not a legal statement.

It seeks to recognize and begin to address the historical injustice of settler colonialism. By saying out loud each week that we acknowledge our land was taken unfairly and under duress, we take a step toward educating ourselves and our visitors. This statement aligns with our UUA first principle.