

## **The Acknowledgement of Traditional Territory:**

*a dialogue for sharing in UCC communities of faith*

*Note: Underlining indicates sections that can be contextualized by the community of faith.*

V1: When we began the event/worship today, we heard that we are gathered on the Traditional Territory of the Atikameksheng Anishinabek, land that is part of the Robinson-Huron Treaty of 1850.

V2: In 2009, Manitou Conference sent a proposal to the General Council of the United Church, asking that all formal gatherings of our Church begin with a recognition of the Traditional Territory on which worship or a meeting is being held. That proposal was approved.

V1: Recognition of Traditional Territory means we are acknowledging the Indigenous peoples who first lived on this land, and their descendants, who we, as "settler people," have come to live beside.

V2: Maybe we should clarify... who are the Indigenous Peoples, and who are settler peoples?

V1: Indigenous Peoples are the original inhabitants of this land--those who were here when the European explorers arrived. The settlers are those people who came to this land as immigrants, settling upon the land that was occupied by the First Peoples. Settlers are

also those who are the multi-generational descendants of those immigrants.

V2: Recognizing Traditional Territory not only acknowledges the history of this land and the Indigenous Peoples who were here but it is the beginning of a journey into the past as it now impacts the present. By exploring the past, we can make good choices about how we want to live as faithful people in the future.

V1: It is important that as Christians, we know about "The Doctrine of Discovery." In the 15<sup>th</sup> century, when European nations were extending their reach in the world, a law was made by Pope Nicholas V. This law gave explorers the justification to claim lands they "discovered," for their Christian Monarchs. It was deemed that any land that was not inhabited by Christians was available to be "discovered," claimed, and exploited.

V2: In fact, the "Law of Nations" asserted that Christian nations had a divine right, based on the Bible, to claim absolute title to, and ultimate authority over, any newly "discovered" non-Christian inhabitants and their lands. Over the next several centuries, "The Doctrine of Discovery" was used by Spain, Portugal, England, France, and Holland, to justify their colonial authority.

V1: The French and English also developed the idea of *terra nullius*, which means "no man's land" and therefore, open to claim. The presence of Indigenous Peoples did not void a claim of *terra nullius*, since it was stated that the

Indigenous People simply occupied, rather than owned, the land. The colonial powers justified that true ownership could only come with European-style agriculture.

V2: Yet, as early as 1615, it is estimated that, in what is now known as Ontario, there were 90 - 110,000 Indigenous Peoples living on the land. Clearly they were sustaining themselves and caring for the land, as a result of the relationship they had with it.

V1: "The Doctrine of Discovery" has had a wide and long-lasting impact. It is still alive within international and Canadian law. The sovereignty of the Crown remains paramount today.

V2: In 2012, after recognizing the significant connection between Christianity and "The Doctrine of Discovery," the World Council of Churches repudiated this Doctrine, as did The United Church of Canada.

V1: But first, let's hear how "The Doctrine of Discovery" made its way into the Royal Proclamation of 1763.

V2: Britain and France fought against each other in the Seven Years War. The British won the battle on the Plains of Abraham in 1759, taking control of Canada and the Thirteen Colonies along the eastern seaboard of North America.

V1: The British assumed that because they had defeated the French, that the Indigenous Peoples, who were

living on that land, were a conquered people and now under their rule. New policies imposed by the victors made the Indigenous peoples unhappy. They had been allies of the French and enjoyed a prosperous fur-trading relationship with them. As a result, the Indigenous Peoples rose up in opposition. With the leadership of Obwandiyag (Pontiac), they captured 9 of the 12 British forts on their western frontier in what is now southwestern Ontario.

V2: Britain realized very quickly that they needed the support of the Indigenous Peoples if they were to maintain control of the continent. The British wanted a peaceful environment in order to promote settlement across the land.

V1: So in 1763, King George III issued the Royal Proclamation. The British retained monopoly over all Indigenous lands, as would be their right given "The Doctrine of Discovery," since the French not only surrendered their colonies but also their "discovery rights."

V2: However, the Proclamation recognized Indigenous Peoples as Nations, and upheld their right to inhabit and to use their traditional lands. It recognized that Aboriginal title to the land existed and continues to exist, and that all land is considered Aboriginal land until ceded by treaty.

V1: A treaty was the accepted European way to make legal contracts and agreements between Nations of people.

The Royal Proclamation enabled the development of the treaties that exist today.

V2: Treaty-making began in the early 18<sup>th</sup> century. Especially significant was the Treaty of Niagara. In July 1764, Sir William Johnson, representing the British Crown and somewhere between 2,500 and 3,500 Chiefs, representing 24 Indigenous Nations of the Great Lakes, met at Fort Niagara to confirm the terms of the Royal Proclamation.

V1: Can you imagine hundreds of Chiefs representing 24 Indigenous Nations gathering to make this treaty?

V2: Yes, there was a lot of support for it! But what was also noteworthy is that the Treaty of Niagara was not just made in writing as we might expect today. To guarantee the successful approval of the Royal Proclamation, Johnson relied on the longstanding Indigenous practice of wampum diplomacy. First Peoples had exchanged wampum belts between their Nations for centuries when establishing agreements.

V1: The original wampum belts were beaded sashes made from shells found in the Atlantic Ocean. They were considered sacred and exchanged in special ceremonies. Agreements between peoples were woven into the belts as a symbolic and tangible way of recognizing an understanding between them.

V2: At Niagara, on behalf of the British Crown, Johnson presented the Indigenous Chiefs with 'the Great

Covenant Chain' and 'the Twenty-four Nations' wampum belts.\* They are purple and white in colour. White representing peace and friendship. Purple representing government matters such as agreements or treaties.

V1: Johnson's actions indicated that the British Crown understood the Indigenous principles of sustainability and stewardship. Their way of life and relationship to the land would not be interfered with, and they were given annual gifts of money or goods as payment for being loyal allies.

V2: In response, the Chiefs offered the British 'the Two Row' Wampum Belt.\* On it, the white background symbolizes peace, friendship and mutual respect. The two rows of purple beads represent the Indigenous Peoples travelling in their canoe, and the Europeans travelling in a parallel path in their boat. Neither was to try to steer the other's vessel or interfere with their journey.

V1: To the First Peoples, the Treaty of Niagara was about peace, friendship and respect. They considered treaties to be sacred covenants, where "the spirit and intent" of the agreement was as, or more important as "the written terms."

V2: In the Church, we know about covenants. A treaty is a covenant. Indigenous Peoples understand their primary covenant relationship to be with the Creator and all of Creation. Out of respect for the life they have been given, Indigenous Peoples acknowledge "all my

relations," as an expression of their commitment to the covenant relationship they have, in the sacred trust of all life.

- V1: As Christians, we look to the Bible where a covenant is a partnership of mutual respect and accountability. It is in the Book of Exodus, where we find the first covenant when God's people and God, make promises to one another. It is at Sinai, that a community is formed, for which love of God was intimately bound with love of neighbour. To be in a covenant relationship with God means acting justly towards all our neighbours.
- V2: Covenants are agreements that Indigenous people and Christian people take seriously. They are promises meant to be kept. A covenant means that God, or the Creator, is always part of the agreement. For Indigenous Peoples, the Creator is part of a treaty especially because the treaties involve the sharing of land—a part of the Creation.
- V1: To Indigenous peoples, land ultimately belongs to the Creator. While Europeans considered the treaties as transfers of title or ownership to the land, the First Peoples perceived them as agreements to share the land. They already shared the land with other Indigenous peoples and animals. The concept of legal title to land was foreign to their cultures.
- V2: Clearly though, First Peoples had a strong concept of territory—occupation of specific parcels of land was an acknowledged part of almost all their societies.

However, land was not something that an individual could divide, transfer, surrender, destroy or own to the exclusion of others. The land was to be shared, as it was the source of all life. It was a gift of the Creator.

- V1: It is now recognized that Indigenous Peoples were the original inhabitants of this land. Treaties are nation-to-nation agreements between the Crown, now represented by our federal and provincial Governments, and Indigenous Peoples. The treaties set out responsibilities, agreements, and benefits for all. There are 70 recognized treaties in Canada and 46 of those are in Ontario.
- V2: As settler people, we are also Treaty People. We have benefitted and continue to benefit immensely by these Treaties, and as with any covenant agreement, we have obligations to honour and update the treaties.

*This is the space to include specific information on the particular land that your community of faith meets on, for example, whose Traditional Territory it is, the Treaty that was made with respect to that land (or whether it is unceded land) and any other history you can include that would bring even greater relevance to the listeners.*

- V1: Acknowledging Traditional Territory affirms our respect and appreciation for the original inhabitants of this land. We acknowledge that there were real people leading real lives on this land, long before settler peoples arrived on Turtle Island.

V2: By acknowledging Traditional Territory, we are saying that we are Treaty People too. By virtue of the treaties, settler peoples are in a covenant relationship with Indigenous peoples. Government people acted on our behalf in creating these covenants. We want to honour and update these partnership agreements, grow in our understanding of our shared history and model this for others in the settler community, who we hope will also grow in understanding.

V1: Recognizing Traditional Territory is another step on the journey toward reconciliation. Acknowledging the territory where we gather and the people who have traditionally called it 'home' for thousands of years, is a way for United Church people to live out our Apologies for the misdeeds of the past.

V2: As the practice of recognizing Traditional Territory spreads, hopefully, it will promote mutual respect, peace and friendship between all, as the first treaties were intended to do. It will encourage restitution for Treaty rights that have not been kept.

V1: The land is central to all this. In recognizing Traditional Territory, we honour the Creator. We did not create the land but are privileged to live upon it and be sustained by it. Our on-going relationship with the land will determine life for future generations on this planet.

V2: Our United Church crest, now includes the four colours of the medicine wheel, a symbol of peaceful interaction

among all living beings and the earth. This revision was to honour the presence of Indigenous congregations at the time of Church Union.

V1: The words "all my relations," written in the Mohawk language are also on the crest. <sup>i</sup> Recognizing Traditional Territory opens us to the wisdom of Indigenous Peoples who understand that all of Creation is one—"all my relations."

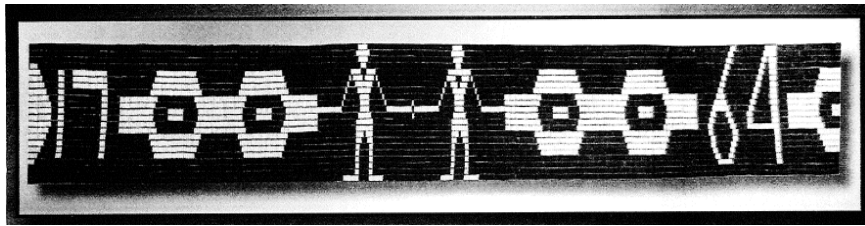
V2: In 1995, our Church revised our United Church Creed with the encouragement of the Right Rev Stan McKay, our first Indigenous Moderator. As a way of incorporating the wisdom of "all my relations" into our call to be the Church, we now say, we are called "to live with respect in Creation" as we confess our faith.

V1: May we pray for the humility that is needed as we live into an ever-deepening respect for the Creator, the land, our treaty partners and all living beings.

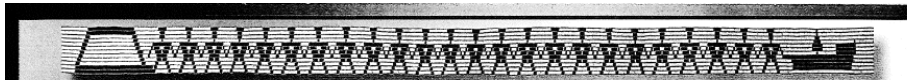
V1/2: May it be so!

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*\*Great Covenant Chain, 24 Nations & Two Row Wampum Belts:*



*To serve as a tangible illustration, you may wish to obtain a WE ARE ALL TREATY PEOPLE kit that includes a copy of the Great Covenant Chain belt that can be put together with LEGO. Copies of the other belts below are also in the kit in the form of bookmarks. TREATY PEOPLE kits are available from the Canadian Shield Regional Office and the Manitou Intentional Learning Community based in Sudbury.*

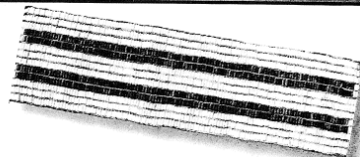


*The 24 Nations or 'Presents' Belt*

*Given in July, 1764 by Sir William Johnson to Indian leaders at the Treaty of Niagara Congress. Accompanied by thousands of dollars in gifts of guns, blankets, and cash, the presentation of the Belt came with the promise: "Your people will never want for the necessities of life so long as the world exists." The Wampum depicts 24 Indian nations linked by a rope, one end of which is tied to a great rock representing Canada, and the other to a British ship. The Treaty of Niagara promised that the Indians had only to tug on the rope and the ship would bring all their material needs.*

*Guswhenta (Two Row Wampum)*

*Introduced 400 years ago by the Haudenosaunee (Iroquois) to the first newcomers in what is now the United States, the Two Row embodies principles of peace, friendship and mutual respect. The white background beads symbolize peace, friendship, and the river of life. Two rows of purple beads represent the Haudenosaunee journey – with their customs and laws in their canoe – and the Europeans travelling in a parallel path in their boat. Neither was to try to steer the other's vessel, or interfere with their journey.*



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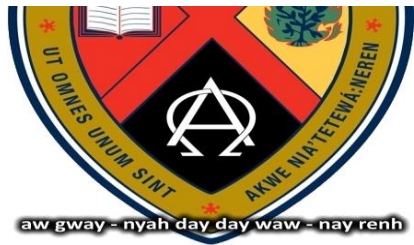
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<sup>i</sup> "All my relations" phonetic pronunciation in Mohawk



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For use by UCC communities of faith*

*(Opposite) A free-standing copy of the crest can be obtained from the Canadian Shield Regional Office for display.*