



A Resolution Concerning Adoption of an Official Northeastern Pennsylvania Synod Land Acknowledgment Statement

WHEREAS in September 2021, the ELCA Church Council issued the Declaration of the ELCA to American Indian and Alaska Native People, a continuation of the 2016 ELCA statement which repudiated the Doctrine of Discovery; and

WHEREAS The Declaration confesses "...we have not listened to the stories of Indigenous people and have not taken the time to understand history. We have devalued Indigenous religions and lifeways and have not challenged the invisibility of Indigenous people in American society. We have treated American Indians and Alaska Natives as a "minority group" rather than as sovereign nations. We have not taken seriously the importance of land and how complicit we are in accepting the benefits of stolen land"; and

WHEREAS The Declaration also confesses "...we are complicit in the annihilation of Native peoples and [their] cultures, languages, and religions, and that we have refused to truly recognize the harm that we have caused our Native siblings. We confess that we must continue to learn more about our complicity and the roles our church played in dehumanizing Indigenous peoples, especially as it relates to the forced assimilation, abuse, and death in Indian boarding schools, adoption, and foster care; the ecological damages in Indian Country and beyond due to climate change; the breaking of sacred treaties meant to govern the relationships between Native sovereign nations and the U.S. federal government; and missing and murdered Indigenous women, girls, and relatives"; and

WHEREAS The Synod Racial Justice Team has consulted with local and national indigenous leaders on the subject of Land Acknowledgement; and

WHEREAS a Land Acknowledgement Statement is a meaningful and crucial first action toward raising awareness of truths that have been ignored by most for hundreds of years, truths which will work to bring healing reconciliation for both Indigenous and non-Indigenous people; therefore, be it

RESOLVED that the Northeastern Pennsylvania Synod of the ELCA formally adopt a Land Acknowledgement Statement as follows:

The Northeastern Pennsylvania Synod of the ELCA acknowledges and honors the Lenni-Lenape, Munsee-Lenape, and Susquehannock Peoples who were forcibly removed from this area, and upon whose ancestral homelands we gather. With gratitude to God, we honor the land itself, as well as all our Indigenous siblings who have and who continue to care for this land and call it their home.

and be it further

RESOLVED that this statement be placed on display in a prominent location at the Northeastern Pennsylvania Synod office, on the Synod website, and in appropriate Synod publications, as well as read at the beginning of Synod-wide gatherings; and be it further

RESOLVED that all congregations, camps, institutes of learning, and other partner organizations affiliated with the Northeastern Pennsylvania Synod be encouraged to likewise adopt and use this or a similar statement; and be it further

RESOLVED that this assembly commits itself and strongly advises all those within this church body to become aware of and involved with the ELCA Truth and Healing Movement, and to use these opportunities to learn the true history and ongoing realities of indigenous people.

Submitted by the NEPA Synod Racial Justice Team on May 11, 2023

Pastor Brian Beissel, St. Peter's, Pine Grove

Pastor D. Michael Bennethum (Retired), Friedens, Oley

Kaitlyn Olson Blend, Bear Creek Camp

Pastor Colleen Cox, Grace, Shillington

Pastor Samantha Drennan, Grace, Macungie

Deaconess Deborah Graf, Trinity, Reading

Pastor Jennifer Hall, St. John's, Nazareth

Pastor Brandon Heavner, Weisenberg, New Tripoli

Deacon Kathleen Tigerman, Director for Evangelical Mission, NEPA Synod

The Committee of Reference and Counsel recommends "A Resolution Concerning Adoption of an Official Northeastern Pennsylvania Synod Land Acknowledgment Statement" for adoption by this assembly.