

Land Acknowledgement Statement of Minnehaha United Methodist Church

Presented to the congregation on September 17, 2023

Minnehaha United Methodist Church acknowledges that we gather on the traditional, ancestral, and contemporary land of Dakota People.

We recognize that the land upon which Minnehaha United Methodist Church is built - as well as the surrounding land - holds spiritual, historical, and personal significance to Dakota People, the first peoples of this land. For generations, this land has been stewarded as a living relative by the Dakota. Minnesota comes from the Dakota name for the area, Mni Sota Makoce, which means the land where the waters reflect the skies. We worship within a few miles of Bdote, the confluence of the Minnesota and Mississippi Rivers, one of the sites that marks the Dakota's origin story. Dakota people live among us and the land connects us to Dakota heritage that is all around us. Even our name Minnehaha is an adaptation of Dakota words.

Dakota People were taken advantage of and harmed by the United States government through broken and unfair treaties, including Pike's Treaty of 1805, the White Pine Treaty of 1837 and the Treaties of Mendota and Traverse des Sioux of 1851, in which the land in southern and western Minnesota was unfairly ceded to the United States government. The United Methodist Church, the state of Minnesota, and the United States government are all complicit in the genocide and deceit that has enabled white dominant culture to own and control this land.

Following the U.S.-Dakota War of 1862, Dakota people were forced to leave their homes and were marched to a concentration camp outside Fort Snelling. Those who survived a harsh winter in the concentration camp were shipped to what is now Crow Creek Reservation in South Dakota. Dakota people were exiled from Minnesota, and Minnesota offered a bounty for scalps of Dakota men and male children.¹ The blood of generations of Dakota People cries out from the land.

Dakota people suffered more than just the loss of their homelands, including cultural genocide and forced assimilation.² Native spiritual practices were criminalized by the Religious Crimes Code of 1883. This law drove Dakota religious ceremonies underground.³ Forced removal of Dakota children to boarding schools was designed to strip future generations of their culture and language. Dakota children are still targeted for assimilation. In 1978, Congress passed the Indian Child Welfare Act⁴ after finding an alarmingly high percentage of Indian families had been broken up by the unwarranted removal of their children who were placed in non-Indian foster and adoptive homes and institutions.⁵

Minnesota is still and will always be Indigenous land. We affirm tribal sovereignty and oppose policies and actions that harm or ignore Indigenous Peoples and their cultures. We encourage individuals and other houses of worship to learn and acknowledge the truth of how they have come to control the land they now live and gather upon. With this acknowledgement, we commit continued education, programming, acts of justice and service to our church congregation and the community beyond.

¹ Minnesota Governors Alexander Ramsey and Henry Swift, directed Minnesota Adjutant General to issue a series of orders offering rewards for the killing of Dakota men including male children found within the State. The first order authorized the creation of a corps of volunteers to search for Dakota men. They were to be paid \$25 for each scalp. Subsequent orders permitted individual citizens who were not part of the volunteer corps to claim \$75 for proof of having killed a Dakota male including male children. This amount was later raised to \$200. These bounty orders remained in effect until at least 1868, when their constitutionality was finally questioned by the Minnesota Supreme Court in *State v. Gut. Routel, Colette*, [Minnesota Bounties On Dakota Men During The U.S.-Dakota War](#).

² U.S Supreme Court Associate Justice Gorsuch recounts this history in his concurring opinion upholding the Indian Child Welfare Act in *Haaland v. Brackeen*, 599 U. S. ____ (2023); Copy of the decision at : https://www.google.com/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=web&cd=&ved=2ahUKEwj4l9PY8KOBAX8GTQIHW7WB84QFnoECBEQAQ&url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.supremecourt.gov%2Fopinions%2F22pdf%2F21-376_7148.pdf&usg=AOvVaw1wQRnYWLvCGQZNr24uLjyS&opi=89978449 .

³ The Religious Crimes Code of 1883 banned all Native dancing and ceremonies, including the Sun Dance, Ghost Dance, potlatches, and the practices of medicine persons. The Code gave Indian agents authority to use force, imprisonment, and the withholding of rations to stop any cultural practices they deem immoral or subversive to federal government-mandated assimilation policies. In 1978, Congress passed and President Jimmy Carter signed the American Indian Religious Freedom Act (AIRFA). It recognized that government policy had inhibited the practice of Native American religions, including access to sacred sites and use of sacred objects and materials. <https://nativephilanthropy.candid.org/events/religious-crimes-code-of-1883-bans-native-dances-ceremonies/>

⁴ [United States Code Title 25 – Indian Chapter 21 – Indian Child Welfare](#)

⁵ Forced Assimilation of Native American Children: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UGqWRyBCHhw>. In Minnesota, American Indian children were 16 times more likely to be in out-of-home placement than white children. [Minnesota Department of Human Services Legislative Report Minnesota's Out-of-home Care and Permanency Report](#), 2021. This report is online at: <https://edocs.dhs.state.mn.us/lfserver/Public/DHS-5408NA-ENG>.