

Responding to Native American Land Loss

Religious and spiritual communities, and particularly the Christian churches, have a responsibility to respond to the horrendous history of Native American land loss. The vast majority of Minnesota's political leaders involved in land-taking policies at the time no doubt also were leaders in their religious communities. And few if any religious communities spoke out against the blatant land theft that took place.

So how do we respond today? First, we need to have a dialogue and education effort within our communities to talk about the truth of this history. Next, we can look at some concrete steps.

Returning Land: Here are two examples. The Episcopal Church in Minnesota [announced in 2015](#) that it would give unused church camp land near Cass Lake in northern Minnesota to the Leech Lake Band of Ojibwe. Bishop Brian Prior wrote: "... the Good News that Jesus calls all of us to, is that the property that [we were] privileged to enjoy for a good long season is once again in the loving hands of those who first enjoyed this amazing piece of God's creation." In 2017, the [Jesuits announced that they would return 525 acres to the Rosebud Sioux](#) in South Dakota. (The U.S. government gave the property to the Jesuits in the 1880s for mission work.)



Financial Donations to Native-Led Land Recovery Work: Other opportunities include providing financial support to Native-led groups that raise money to buy back land. Here are three Minnesota examples.

- [Indian Land Tenure Foundation](#): Its tagline is "Indian lands in Indian hands," and its mission is to make sure "Land within the original boundaries of every reservation and other areas of high significance where tribes retain aboriginal interest are in Indian ownership and management. It is a national organization based in Little Canada. Individual and organization can target their donations to help particular communities.
- [Makoce Iki cupi](#) (Dakota for Land Recovery) Its mission is to buy back some of the Dakota people's original land. Its website says: "The Makoce Iki cupi project seeks to bring some of our relatives home, re-establish our spiritual and physical relationship with our homeland, and ensure the ongoing existence of our People. Our cultural survival depends on it. "
- [White Earth Land Recovery Project](#): Its mission is to: facilitate the recovery of the original land base of the White Earth Indian Reservation while preserving and restoring traditional practices of sound land stewardship, language fluency, community development, and strengthening our spiritual and cultural heritage.

Collaboration: This is a big undertaking, and there are opportunities for religious and spiritual communities to work together. The United Church of Christ statement repudiating the Doctrine of Discovery included this language: "BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the ... United Church of Christ joins with its ecumenical partners to explore ways to compensate American Indians, Alaskan Natives, and Native Hawaiians for lands and resources that were stolen and are still being stolen and which are now the United States of America."