

**Reader 2:** Apologies not only say “sorry” but work to restore the relationship through the pursuit of justice.

**Congregation:** We desire to be truly repentant as God teaches. We understand that unless an apology goes hand in hand with restitution and a change in behavior, it is meaningless.

**Reader 1:** When we acknowledge historical mistreatment and offer public apology for horrendous wrongs done to First Nations people, we are recognizing their past experiences, which contribute to their current tribal self-understanding and identity.

**Reader 2:** We are also doing the work of God’s people – truth telling. We acknowledge that apology is only a very small beginning to reconciliation among Native peoples, descendants of European settlers and the United States government.

**Congregation:** We will speak the truth of our history. We will work toward reconciliation between all God’s children.

**Leader:** Let us pray.



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San Jose 2007 Delegate action:

**We, the delegates of Mennonite Church USA, gathered in San Jose, California in July, 2007, support the joint U.S. Senate and House bills that “acknowledge a long history of official depredations and ill-conceived policies by the United States Government regarding Indian tribes and offer an apology to all Native Peoples on behalf of the United States.”**

Our Native sisters and brothers asked our delegate body to officially support this bill currently before the House and Senate of the United States government. The joint bill does not include material restitution; it only acknowledges some of the injustices and oppression suffered by First Nations peoples of North America at the hands of white immigrants and the United States government. (For information on supporting the bill, see [www.MennoniteUSA.org/peace](http://www.MennoniteUSA.org/peace).)

One of the injustices First Nations people have suffered is inaccuracies in our understanding of the first Thanksgiving. While little is known about the “First Thanksgiving” at the Plymouth Colony in 1621, some accurate history about the events surrounding early Thanksgiving celebrations might put our understanding into context.

- Tisquantum (also known as Squanto), a member of the Patuxet Tribe within the Wampanoag Confederacy who aided the Pilgrims through the winter of 1620, was enslaved and sent to Europe by the English in 1614. His ability to speak English was likely a result of this captivity.

- During the five years it took Tisquantum to return to his homeland, approximately 90 percent of Wampanoag Confederacy citizens living on the New England coast died from diseases introduced by European colonists and merchants.
- Early Thanksgiving ceremonies were conducted for a variety of reasons, and the “First Thanksgiving” story involving the Pilgrims was only one of a number of early Thanksgiving celebrations. The 1637 Thanksgiving feast at the Massachusetts Bay Colony was conducted to celebrate the near annihilation of the Pequots during the Pequot War.

This year as you prepare for Thanksgiving, take time to listen to the stories of First Nation peoples and, if you are white, to acknowledge the benefits you have received by centuries of their mistreatment. Research which Native Americans originally lived in your community, how they were dispossessed of their land and their current living conditions.

## Congregational litany

**Leader:** As we prepare to celebrate Thanksgiving, hear the story of the Native American people.

**Reader 1:** Hear these words with openness to learning difficult truth.

**Reader 2:** Hold these words tenderly, knowing they are a first step and raise questions rather than provide solutions.

**Congregation:** We will take time to hear the story of our Native sisters and brothers. We open our hearts to their pain and to the responsibilities we carry to this day.

**Reader 1:** Native peoples have lived on Turtle Island, the North American continent, since time immemorial. These First Americans inhabited and cared for all of this land for thousands of years before white Europeans arrived.

**Reader 2:** After 1492, Europeans’ lust for gold and land, along with their slave trade, warfare and diseases, devastated and demoralized the First Americans. This is why some people say that Christopher Columbus invaded the Americas, rather than discovered them.

**Congregation:** We confess that the arrival of white people in North America meant death and hardship for First Nations people.

**Leader:** European-Americans, including Mennonites, were drawn to the frontier by cheap land and manifest destiny—the belief that God ordained the spread of white culture and values from coast to coast.

**Reader 1:** However, Native Americans had for millennia raised crops, developed trading networks, built cities and maintained effective social and political organizations on this same land.

**Reader 2:** Following the dispossession of Native peoples, the government and church groups destroyed Native culture and spirituality through forced assimilation. Native land and resources were placed “in trust” with the federal government, whose mismanagement of these resources has cost First Nations people an estimated \$10-40 billion over the past century.

**Leader:** Paul Erb, grandson of Kansas pioneers, wrote in 1974, “As we see it now, Mennonites do share a collective guilt for violating the tribal [relationship to the] land, for killing the buffalo upon which Indian life depended, and for breaking the treaties which were given to protect Indian rights.”

**Congregation:** We confess that White Mennonites directly benefited from land taken from Native Americans.

**Reader 1:** We have treated Native peoples as inferior, in need of our White, Christian help. We added to their pain with our involvement in establishing boarding schools which led to loss of culture and language and caused family disruption.

**Reader 2:** In 1991 and 1992, anticipating the sesquicentennial of Columbus’ so-called “discovery” of America, both Mennonite groups issued formal statements of apology for their complicity in “the displacement and oppression of Native populations.”

**Reader 1:** They pledged “to refrain from a triumphalist spirit,” and to work toward “an accurate understanding of the past 500 years.” And further, “as God, through his love and mercy, adopted us as children, we promise to adopt one another, Native and non-Native, as brothers and sisters in Christ.”

**Leader:** Now we ask whether these statements of repentance led to a change in our hearts and our actions. What does it mean to “adopt one another, Native and non-Native, as brothers and sisters in Christ?”