



2021 Convention Land Acknowledgement - Bemidji, MN

We come to you this day from the shores of Lake Bemidji.

This land is rich with stories. We are standing on the ancestral and contemporary homelands of the Anishinaabe people, the first peoples of this land. The Anishinaabe came here millenia ago, migrating from the East Coast in accordance with a prophecy that promised they would find home when they reached the land that produced food that grows on water. That food is manoomin, wild rice, and it continues to be a significant part of life here in the northwest. When I was here last summer, I was privileged to learn all about manoomin—how it grows, how it is harvested, how it is prepared—and I was blessed, over and over again, to be given gifts of manoomin, this sacred food.

While my time here in the northwest last summer was full of joy because I got to meet so many of you, visit the faith communities here, worship with you, learn from you, and break bread with you, I know that there is deep pain here, too. When European settlers came to this area, they brought disease, greed, lies, and violence. Over and over again, treaties were made in bad faith and then broken entirely. The culture of the Anishinaabe, as with so many Native peoples in this country, was targeted for eradication, especially through boarding schools, and the painful truth is that the Church was at the forefront of that genocidal project. We are proud of the heroic and loving work of Bishop Whipple to ordain, to lead alongside, and to defend the Native people of this area—and there is still so much to grieve and so much to atone for. We as the Episcopal church are only now beginning to reckon with our part in that sinful history.

So being here in Bemidji is complicated. You who live and worship here have built vital communities. I see how you love Jesus and one another. I admire your generosity and your faithfulness. And I know that there is deep pain here, too. As followers of Jesus, we are compelled by love to speak the truth that we see, to repent fully where we have strayed from right relationship with God and with our neighbors, and to ceaselessly seek the genuine reconciliation that can only come through God's grace.