

***Héetewit Wéetés* “Precious Land” Acknowledgment**

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Preface. This acknowledgment is not simply a re-writing of a “territorial acknowledgement,” rendering it more appropriate and accurate. But it seeks to re-define the relationship between a Church community and the ancestral Peoples of this Land. It seeks to provide action behind its words. It seeks a new covenant with Indigenous peoples. It is a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) of a collaborative relationship predicated on a framework of Indigenous conceptualizations, most importantly on, 1. inherent tribal sovereignty, 2. an inclusive kinship, and 3. an ethic of sharing. Indigenous terms will be used throughout the MOU to better convey Indigenous conceptualizations, meanings, and relationships. At its heart, this MOU is about Relationships; its intent is to improve communications and collaboration.

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Short Public UUCP Version of the Land Acknowledgment (read at start of each Sunday UUCP service). “The Land on which our Church is built is part of the ancestral homeland of the *Niimípuu* “the People,” and mistakenly called the “Nez Perce” or “pierced noses” by French-speaking trappers and traders.

We acknowledge the Land is held in sacred kinship, since time immemorial. The Land and its Peoples suffered immeasurable trauma brought by Euro-American society, and we are working with its resilient Peoples to show respect and contribute to the healing and nurturing of this *Héetewit Wéetés* “Precious Land” and all its Peoples.¹

¹ Capitalizing “Precious,” “Land” and “People” is to acknowledge the sacred, spiritual nature of their interdependent kinship. The text is written in a present verb tense to reflect on-going relations.

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Memorandum of Understanding (MOU).

Long MOU UUCP Version of the Land Acknowledgment (text as appears in MOU text). The Land on which our Unitarian Universalist Church of the Palouse was built is part of the northern ancestral homeland of the *Niimípuu* “the People,” since time immemorial. All their aboriginal Lands are called *Hetes’wits Wetes* “Precious Land.” They were erroneously called the Nez Perce “pierced noses” by French-speaking traders. Other Indigenous neighboring peoples, have in the past and continue today, to occasionally frequent the homeland of the *Niimípuu*.

Given *Nimípuu’neewit*, meaning “traditional *Niimípuu* lifeways,” we acknowledge the sacred kinship relationship between the Land and its various animal, bird, fish, plant and human Peoples. As neighboring Tribes have done in the past, and given this Land is Nez Perce ceded Land, we will through this MOU, notify the Tribe of our presence on their traditional Lands and while there, seek to exhibit respect and responsibility toward that Land in a manner consistent with *Niimípuu* and Indigenous practices. The Land and its Peoples suffered immeasurable trauma brought by Euro-American society, and we seek to to work with its resilient Peoples to show respect and contribute to the healing and nurturing of this *Héetewit Wéetés* “Precious Land” and all its Peoples, who we share in kinship and collaboration, and what is expressed through a Memorandum of Understanding.

Process. This Memorandum of Understanding draft was initiated in December 2024 by Rodney Frey. It was reviewed, modified, and approved by the UUCP Board of Directors on 27 February 2025, and signed by the Minister and vice-chairperson of the Board on 28 May 2025. Collaborative talks on the MOU with the Nez Perce Cultural Resources Program (Nakia Williamson, Director, and Jonathan Moon, ethnographer) began on 18 March 2025, reviewing, modifying and eventually approving the draft. The modified MOU draft was subsequently reviewed by various tribal offices and programs, including the Natural Resources Sub-Committee on 20 June 2025, and was approved. On 24 June 2025, the Nez Perce Tribal Executive Committee (NPTEC) reviewed and approved the MOU. As a covenant, continued adjustment to the MOU text language and thus relationship between signees can occur, initiated by Tribe and/or Church partners. Upon the MOU approval by NPTEC, partnership talks with other Moscow-area churches becoming part of the MOU relationship, have begun.

MOU. The MOU results in a formal, collaborative agreement between the Nez Perce Tribal Executive Committee (NPTEC) and the governing boards of the associated Churches

of Moscow and Pullman. All participating Churches will publicly state the Land Acknowledgement.

Draft and Modification. The Land acknowledgment and MOU statement are considered “covenants,” subject to modification by all associated partners of the MOU. Both the statement and MOU can at any time be further modified or terminated upon the approval of relevant signees. All Indigenous terms used in MOU will be determined by their native speakers.

Critical Defining Land Acknowledgement and MOU Attributes. Identifying the *who*, the *what*, the *why* and the *how* of the Land Acknowledgement and MOU. The Church partners agree that we:

- **Ancestral Homeland and Representation.** Acknowledge that the Land upon which our Church was built was part of the northern ancestral homelands of the *Niimípuu*, since time immemorial. “Since time immemorial” acknowledges a “homeland” as originally brought forth by the Creator and the Animal First Peoples and as expressed in oral traditions, from the beginning of time. The Nez Perce Treaty of 1855 included the Lands of the Moscow-Pullman area to be designated for the *Niimípuu*, and in the Nez Perce Treaty of 1863, those lands were ceded to the United States. The Indian Claims Commission (ICC) of 1967 (Docket #175 18 1, 11) defined the aboriginal homeland of the *Niimípuu* of some 13 million acres, inclusive of the Moscow area. This MOU will apply to *Niimípuu* living on the Nez Perce Reservation, represented by the Nez Perce Tribal Executive Committee (NPTEC). “Homeland” is defined as a place/area associated with one’s ancestral origins and cultural and spiritual affiliation, expressed in oral traditions, and is often (though not necessarily) codified in and demarcated by legal documents and treaties. The *Niimípuu* equivalent term for “homeland” is *Héetewit Wéetés* “Precious Land.”² The “Homeland” helps identify **the who** entailed in the MOU.
- **Kinship.** Acknowledge that “sacred kinship” is a central Indigenous cultural attribute, inclusive of relationships with multiple sentient beings and with the Land. It is a critical part expressed in the *Niimípuu* concepts, *Nimípuu’neewit* “traditional *Niimípuu* lifeways” and *Yéeye* “family.” These concepts embody deeply held spiritual teachings from the Creator and the Animal First Peoples, such as Coyote or

² In the use of Indigenous terms, concepts and attributes as noted here, this Land Acknowledgement and MOU seek roles and responsibilities in alignment and consistent with an Indigenous framework. To do otherwise can perpetuate misunderstandings and potentially continue hegemonic abuse.

Salmon. To propose an “acknowledgement” relating only to a “territory” is to deny the intimate interconnectedness of the Land and its multiple sentient beings, is to perpetuate a Euro-American conceptualization of “land.” It is essential to acknowledge “Land held in sacred kinship” as the basis from which trauma occurred and to which healing and nurturing will occur. “Kinship” helps identify **the who** of the MOU, including such sentient beings as the animal Peoples, bird Peoples, fish Peoples, human Peoples, and plant Peoples. The *who* can also include Non-Indian, Euro-American Peoples of the Church community(s), working in collaboration with the others, in a granted “fictive kinship” relationship. See Notify and Respect attribute.

- **Notify and Respect.** We will inform the Tribe of our presence on their traditional Lands and while on those Lands, will seek to exhibit respect and responsibility toward that Land in a manner consistent with Indigenous practices. Not unlike the instance of a neighboring tribal family, who’s “homeland” resided elsewhere, when desiring to dig camas, for example, that *visiting* family would enter *Niimípuu* Lands only when those lands were not first occupied by a *Niimípuu* family who were digging camas, and even then, they would attempt (though not always successful) to contact the appropriate *Niimípuu* family, notifying them of their intent to dig camas. All along the assumption being, that the neighboring family would respect the Land and exhibit responsibility toward it consistent with *Niimípuu* and Indigenous practices.

Those practices are a part of a larger context of cultural conceptualizations, such as *Nimípuu’neewit*. Aboriginally, “Land” was not owned by a family. But rather, the Land and its associated fish, plant, bird and animal Peoples are bonded in an extensive kinship relationship with their human Peoples counterparts, a relationship significantly predicated on an ethic of sharing. Each human family was associated with traditionally demarcated territories (for camas digging, deer hunting, salmon fishing, etc.). Given the kinship relationships, the Land and its varied Peoples are to be honored, respected, kept in balance, entailing responsibilities toward each other (e.g., sacred songs and prayers given, and not to be over hunted, over fished or over dug). There are expected responsibilities each of the Peoples had toward the others, e.g., human to deer and deer to human, responsibilities akin to equitable stewardship. When the Land and its Peoples were abused and disrespected, a family could lose access to that Land.

In acknowledging a Church's presence on and responsibilities toward *Niimípuu* Lands, the Church's membership has in effect entered into a temporary "fictive kinship" relationship with the *Niimípuu*, such that the Nez Perce Tribe is as a "host" and the Church is as a "guest." This MOU seeks to continue these Indigenous practices; practices predicated on the Nez Perce Tribe's cultural entitlement and inherent tribal sovereignty with the Land; practices predicated on cultural, symbolic relationships, that are legally non-binding. To "Notify" and show "Respect" helps identify **the who** and **the what** of the MOU, who it entails and what is sought.

- **Trauma.** Acknowledge that the Lands and Peoples of the *Niimípuu* have suffered immeasurable and irrevocable trauma from Euro-American society and contact history. Such trauma resulted from aboriginal land displacement, disease and demographic loss, military subjection, missionary and boarding school disruption and assimilation, etc. That trauma extends to the relatives of humans, to the animal, bird, fish and plant Peoples. For example, the Salmon Peoples suffered considerable trauma resulting from dams placed along the Columbia River, as did Camas Peoples resulting from lands placed under agricultural cultivation. In the face of such historic trauma, the *Niimípuu* have consistently shown tremendous perseverance and resilience. While traumatically injured, core *Niimípuu* culture has triumphed over the forces of cultural genocide. "Trauma" helps identify **the why** of the MOU, the impetus for action.
- **Work With.** Acknowledge tribal sovereignty, fictive kinship and an ethic of sharing, such that the Church(s) seeks to build and maintain a collaborative relationship with the Nez Perce Tribe and its Peoples. It is a relationship in which the Church membership, as a guest, actively listens and acts upon the desires and voices articulated by their Indigenous host, in a partnership of equity and ethical practices. "Works With" helps identify **the who** and **the how** of the MOU.
- **Respect.** Seek to demonstrate our unwavering respect for the Land and all the Peoples of the *Niimípuu*, and the Nez Perce Tribe's inherent tribal sovereignty, and for the continued vitality and cultural integrity of the *Niimípuu*. The Land and its People are not historic artifacts but living Peoples. In essence, the Lands upon which a Church is built is as a "sanctuary" to the *Niimípuu*, reasserting that Land to its *Niimípuu* "usual and accustomed area" status as established in the Nez Perce Treaty of 1855. This "reasserting" is symbolic and non-legally binding in nature. "Respect" helps identify **the what** of the MOU, what is sought.

- **Heal and Nurture.** Seek ways, in a collaborative manner, to heal and nurture *Niimípuu* Precious Lands and all its Peoples. One way to express that commitment is through the creation and application of the services provided in a “Consultant List.” “Heal and Nurture” help identify **the what** of the MOU, what is sought.
- **Ethic of Sharing.** Acknowledge that the “ethic of sharing” is a central Indigenous cultural attribute. The collaborative relationship between Tribe and Church partners is premised on the Indigenous kinship relationship expressed in an “ethic of sharing,” similar to the *Niimípuu* concept expressed in the word, *téek’e* “to give and share food.” Relatives and friends freely assist and give to others who are in need, without thought of return or expectation of direct reciprocity, resulting in a kinship network of on-going, intertwining exchanges, of generalized reciprocity. The “ethic of sharing” helps identify **the how** of the MOU, the dynamic of interrelations, i.e., the responsibility each has toward the others. In a time of challenge and turmoil, the flow of empathy and compassion among extended kinspeople can bring comfort, renewal and fortitude.

The Nez Perce Tribe will identify and offer, in these MOU relationships, what they, on an on-going or ad hoc basis, elect to provide to other collaborative partners who are in need. Relationships are governed by an ethic of sharing with those in need, without thought or expectation of return. The Nez Perce Tribe and the *Niimípuu*, and the Church(s) are not expected or obligated to directly reciprocate for what they might receive.

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Communications and Collaboration: A Consultant List as an Option (This MOU is not contingent on also the implementation of this Consultant List option).

There are multiple ways to express respect, healing and nurturing, that can be developed between the Tribe and Church communities. The Church communities, as guests, will listen to the suggestions, needs and requests emanating from their hosts, and, if able, respond accordingly and collaboratively with the Nez Perce Tribe. Effective on-going communications shall be maintained. The means for such communications will be developed in collaboration between the partners of this MOU (TBD).

One way to express a respectful, healing and nurturing commitment will be proposed to the Nez Perce Tribe in the form of services offered associated with individuals on a “consultant list.” A model for this type of relationship was informed by numerous

applied, ethically based, collaborative research projects initiated and developed separately by an Indigenous host, the *Apsáalooke* (Crow), the *Schitsu'umsh* (Coeur d'Alene), the *Spoʔqeʔn'i* or *Spoqín* (Spokane), and the *Niimípuu* (Nez Perce), with ethnographer Rodney Frey, over the last fifty years.

Each church community is made up of a large number of currently employed and retired specialists and experts willing to offer their services to the Tribe on a volunteer basis. Services could range from consultation in health care, education, environmental systems, legal affairs, fisheries, forestry, human resources, grant writing, etc. The assemblage of consultants would be identified on a shared consultant list (name, specialization, along with credential and/or degree, level of time/schedule availability, contact information, etc.).

Membership on the consultant list will be selected through an application process, based upon technical skill and behavioral qualifications (e.g., cultural sensitivity and ability to work collaboratively), and overseen by a selection committee made up of an official from the Church from which the applicant attends, an official of the Unitarian Universalist Church of the Palouse and an official representative from the Nez Perce Cultural Resource Program.

When a Tribal initiative of any kind, scope or duration is proposed, or is on-going, the personnel with appropriate skills on the consultant list can be contacted by the Tribe for assistance. Only the Tribe can initiate a request for assistance from the list. A consultant member cannot initiate his or her services to the Tribe or propose an initiative to the Tribe. A Tribal request for services will be coordinated through the UUCP MOU representative, to help assure effective communication and services.

The benefit to the *Niimípuu* of a Tribal initiative, as stated in the Tribal initiative, will be defined and determined by the Tribe, and not by a consultant or some other external source. The consultant list does not imply or assume the Nez Perce Tribe is in any way deficient in its own expertise and skilled specialists. The consultant list is conceptualized as an added supplement, complementing any given Nez Perce program and its initiatives, a way to be a good neighbor, in an ethic of sharing relationships.

A contacted consultant specialist, upon review of a proposed Nez Perce initiative, is not under obligation to provide said services and can decline assistance. If the consultant specialist accepts the request, he or she offers services on a volunteer basis, i.e., is not to receive monetary or other compensation. If the consultant is employed by a university, that person may have to complete an Institutional Review Board (IRB) application with the university. The scope of services provided by the consultant specialist is limited to the

expertise of the consultant, and under no circumstances is the consultant to offer religious opinions or to proselytize.

Any culturally sensitive material associated with a Tribal project involving a consultant, upon completion of the project and prior to public release of findings, shall first be reviewed by the appropriate Tribal cultural resources program, for appropriateness and authenticity, adhering to Tribal sovereignty and cultural property rights.

The Tribe holds the right to end a volunteer's services at any time and without explanation. The UUCP in consultation with the Nez Perce Cultural Resources Program and a representative from the affiliated Church partners will be responsible for maintaining an updated consultant list for all participating Churches and the Tribe.

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This Land Acknowledgment and Memorandum of Understanding between the Nez Perce Tribe and the Unitarian Universalist Church of the Palouse has been reviewed and approved:

(signed)	07-24-25
NPTEC Chairman, Shannon Wheeler	Date

(signed)	7/24/25
NPTEC Secretary, Rachel Edwards	Date

(signed)	5/28/25
UUCP Board Vice-Chairperson, Suzanne Seigneur	Date

(signed)	5/28/25
Reverend Dr., Elizebeth Stevens	Date