

Fellowship of Hope Land Acknowledgement

We members of the Fellowship of Hope Mennonite Church acknowledge that our meetinghouse and many of our family dwellings are built upon land occupied by the Potawatomi and Miami native peoples. We are aware that a Potawatomi trail running toward the St. Joseph River existed several blocks west of our meetinghouse, reminding us of how the gifts of forest, prairie, and waterways sustained them for centuries of peaceful coexistence with God's provisions.

This land was taken from them by force and unscrupulous treaties by agents of the United States government. Violence was expressed most vividly by the "Trail of Death" on which over 850 Potawatomi were removed at gunpoint on a 600-mile march from Marshall County, Indiana to Kansas. At least 42 Potawatomi people died on this journey. We lament this action, one of hundreds of forced removals like it. We lament the harm it brought to Indigenous peoples and commit ourselves to remember and resist acts of racism that continue to damage the well-being of Indigenous and other persons of color. We also will seek opportunities to learn from and support the resilient members of the Pokagon Band of Potawatomi, who remain in the Northern Indiana/Southern Michigan area.

Many of our ancestors received free or below-market land deeds following the removal of Indigenous Peoples in states such as Kansas, Pennsylvania, and South Dakota in the last two centuries. We benefit yet today from the wealth passed on in various forms from these lands.

We also remember the predominantly Black community centered in the 1930s-50s in the Benham West neighborhood just North of our meetinghouse and the dwellings of some of our members. The segregation forced on this growing population led to the development of close neighbors, convenient businesses, strong churches, and full family services in the Booker T. Washington Center.

When the Urban Renewal government movement reached Elkhart, half of this neighborhood was torn down and replaced by 200 public housing units and a six-story Highrise apartment building. The heart of the Benham West neighborhood was gone, and many residents moved South to the area where Fellowship of Hope began locating in the 1970s. ...

As people in a predominantly white congregation who follow a brown-skinned Jesus who preached about God's Beloved Community defined by love of neighbor, we pledge to promote the end of racism and white supremacy in its various forms through relationships in our neighborhood, and what we do with our time, resources and abilities.