

Pray for Native Peoples at InterVarsity Events

A Worksheet for Customizing Prayers for Your Campus or Conference

Why?

"...and he [God the Creator] made from one man every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth, having determined allotted periods and the boundaries of their dwelling place, that they should seek God..." Acts 17:26, 27 ESV

Many Native tribes among us also believe these words, have long sensed the benevolent hand of the Creator in their dwelling place -- their homelands, and have sought him, just as Paul says. **Their connection to the land, as in Old Testament times, is spiritual and not just circumstantial.** Many of these same tribes did *not* experience peaceful interactions with the waves of mostly European immigrants that ultimately displaced them. It is sobering to think that the violence, the broken treaties, etc. may well be sins – not just against those people – but against *the God who established them here.* Our God.

When sin occurs, both parties (sinners and the ones sinned against) need God's healing. As a country, we have realized that the sin of slavery has long-reaching consequences for everyone; similarly, we are beginning to see that sins against Native people matter, too. The winners still benefit, the losers still suffer, and the causes of it all in our hearts have not gone away. A good place to start moving into God's grace is by *seeing* and *honoring* Native people, especially those whose land we are on. We can do that, following cues from Native traditions, by adopting the use of protocol prayers.

A Simple Protocol for Opening Prayers

"Protocol" comprises customs of etiquette that honor and build relationships in Native contexts. We can have an opening prayer at an IV event which honors both God and the original people of the land. Another possibility is to have a special prayer at times when the past comes up, such as Columbus Day/Indigenous Peoples' Day.

Here is an example from an IV conference in Anaheim, CA. The shaded portions should be customized for your situation. There are some notes at the end that can help you.

Leader's Introduction: As we continue to get settled in and prepare for what God has for us this week, we'd like to take a moment to recognize and remember the Native brothers and sisters who are the first peoples of these lands. **The Tongva people have inhabited Southern California for over three thousand years.** We'd like to honor them, thank God for them and pray for them. Would you stand and join us in this responsive prayer?

Leader: Creator God, thank you for the **Tongva people.**

PEOPLE: We recognize that it is a good gift that we can come and meet on their lands.

Leader: Forgive us, those of us who are immigrants to and settlers in this country, for so often forgetting that we are guests of the First Nations people of North America.

PEOPLE: Please help us to live on these lands with respect.

Leader: We pray for the Tongva people today.

PEOPLE: Creator, hear our prayers.

Leader: May they have unity in their tribe.

PEOPLE: Creator, hear our prayers.

Leader: May their remaining sacred lands be honored and protected.

PEOPLE: Creator, hear our prayers.

Leader: May you bless their efforts to revitalize their language and their culture.

PEOPLE: Creator, hear our prayers.

Leader: May we and all the people who live in and visit these lands remember that we are guests.

PEOPLE: Creator, hear our prayers.

Leader: May all the Tongva people know that they are loved by a good and powerful Creator.

PEOPLE: Creator, hear our prayers.

TOGETHER: Creator of every tribe, nation and tongue, may you richly bless the Tongva people. Amen.

Do Some Research

While Native names, lands, and peoples are all around us, we are typically not accustomed to being aware of them. This is complicated by the fact that original meanings for names were translated badly or lost, inhabitants may be gone or were moved, and those Natives currently in the area may be from elsewhere. Doing a good job of protocol will take a little study. A good place to start is to check out an internet resource like <http://native-languages.org/states> or <https://native-land.ca> to find out who was originally on the land where your campus settled, then browse Wikipedia or tribal sites for more details. Customize the shaded areas above.

Next Steps

Develop relationships with Native people on your campus and in your area! The best way to do protocol is with a Native elder or representative present to welcome people. Get some advice on starting a Native Bible study at the site above or by contacting native@intervarsity.org. There is a growing list of resources available at <https://native.intervarsity.org>.