

At the Congregational Meeting on February 4, 2024, the Congregation will vote to approve the amendment of the Church Bylaws to add the following Article XIV to the current Bylaws:

ARTICLE XIV

LAND ACKNOWLEDGEMENT AND COMMITMENTS

A. Land Acknowledgement

This Church was founded in 1734 as a mission to the Mohican people with the intent that they would live and worship in harmony with European settlers. What began as a hopeful experiment led, within fifty years, to this Christian tribe being dispossessed of, and driven from, their homeland.

As followers of Christ, we are called, in the words spoken by Isaiah, to “maintain justice and do what is right”. Accordingly, we offer this land acknowledgment using the language approved by the Stockbridge-Munsee Community.

It is with gratitude and humility that we acknowledge that we are learning, speaking, gathering, and worshiping on the ancestral homelands of the Mohican people, who are the indigenous peoples of this land. Despite tremendous hardship in being forced from here, today their community resides in Wisconsin and is known as the Stockbridge-Munsee Community. We pay honor and respect to their ancestors past and present as we commit to building a more inclusive and equitable space for all.

B. Commitments

The approval of this Land Acknowledgement demonstrates the commitments of The First Congregational Church, United Church of Christ, Stockbridge, Massachusetts to continue engagement and collaboration with the Stockbridge-Munsee Community. This will involve ongoing education as we become aware of tribal issues. We respect the history, culture, and archeological significance of this land. As stewards, we intend to consult with the Stockbridge-Munsee Community prior to engaging in ground disturbing activity as described in the policy maintained in secure Justice Task Force and Board of Trustees files in the church administrator’s custody.

We commit, as well, to continue our own education around social justice issues and to find opportunities to provide appropriate responses and actions to build a more inclusive and equitable space for all.

POLICY FOR GROUND DISTURBING ACTIVITIES

The language of this policy is taken directly from a November 2023 email discussion with Bonney Hartley, Tribal Historic Preservation Manager for the Stockbridge-Munsee Mohican Community. Bonney is an enrolled member of the Stockbridge Munsee Community. Her office is located at Williams College, Williamstown, MA.

The burial places of Stockbridge-Munsee Mohican people in Stockbridge are not limited to the “Indian Burying Ground” site. They are known to extend further along the landform, often on the ridge overlooking today’s golf course. Past testing has confirmed the presence of burials within the church property.

The Stockbridge-Munsee Historic Preservation office has determined that the entire site is highly sensitive. There are Mohican archaeological resources located throughout the church property, including burials, archaeological resources such as those associated with the first meeting house and precontact home sites, as well as other native artifacts.

Even when the soil has been disturbed, it doesn’t mean artifacts, or human remains, are not still present. It’s also quite common for intact layers to be situated below disturbed layers, especially when pits, including burials, are present. The Stockbridge-Munsee Preservation Office does not require consultation on every ground disturbance activity on the Church property. Vegetable gardening, flower planting, lawn maintenance and other shallow disturbances can be done without consultation. But, the Preservation Office requests that tree/shrub planting, posthole digging, trenching and all other ground disturbing activities be done only in consultation with the Preservation officers. They are based nearby and committed to review projects in a timely manner to determine their likely impact to Stockbridge-Munsee cultural resources.

Human remains and burial items of indigenous ancestors should not be disturbed, meaning for the remains or items to be uncovered, handled, photographed, or moved. If remains are inadvertently uncovered the following Inadvertent Discovery Policy applies.

To contact the Tribal Historic Preservation Office of the Stockbridge-Munsee Mohican Community:

preservation@mohican-nsn.gov

<https://www.mohican.com/services/cultural-services/historic-preservation/>

November 2023