

Church Story Map - The Land We Inhabit

How can seeing and knowing the places we inhabit deepen our relationships and lead to collective healing, regeneration, and resilience?

Acknowledgements

This Church Story Map resource, which includes tools and guiding questions to help you identify different aspects of your place's history; its current landscape; and to begin to articulate your story, was adapted from Creation Justice Ministries' ***Faithful Resilience Guide***, compiled by Avery Davis Lamb. The original guide can be downloaded [here](#), and please go to creationjustice.org to learn more about their crucial work in regenerating and safeguarding creation.

Grounding: Holy Land

“If you extend your soul to the hungry and satisfy the afflicted soul, then your light shall dawn in the darkness, and your darkness shall *be* as the noonday. The Lord will guide you continually, and satisfy your soul in drought, and strengthen your bones; you shall be like a watered garden, and like a spring of water, whose waters do not fail. Those from among you shall build the old waste places; you shall raise up the foundations of many generations; and you shall be called the Repairer of the Breach, The Restorer of Streets to Dwell In.” – Isaiah 58: 10-12 (NKJV)

The land our churches inhabit is holy and repairing shalom among it is holy *work* and *worship*. This guide is intended to aid your congregation in considering the stewardship of its land as an act of worship to God and an act of resilient care for the beloved human-earth community.

Getting Started: Conversation Framework & Guiding Questions

1. Land History/Ancestral Homelands

Question: What is the collective memory held by your land? How can your faith community foster a spirit of reconciliation through commemoration and action? (Consider the example of the Sand Creek Massacre atonement and healing initiatives in the [United Methodist Church](#).)

- Begin by exploring this [Native Land map](#) to learn about the indigenous caretakers of the land you inhabit, and where their descendants may reside today.
- Consider writing a living land acknowledgement that reflects the local history of your place.
 - Overview: [Guide and Call to Acknowledgement](#)
 - Writing Guidance: [Guide to Indigenous Land](#).
 - Example from Mind & Life Institute: “[Land and People’s Acknowledgement](#)”

- Land Acknowledgement Next Steps:
 - Once written, consider opening your church meetings, worship services, and gatherings with your unique land acknowledgement, and/or placing a dedication in your sanctuary or garden.
 - Living Land Acknowledgements have relational impetus; they are only the beginning of deepening and healing relationship. Research whether there is any effort toward land reparations in your community, and how your church might support it. Land reparations may include initiatives such as land title return, land stewardship and decision-making rights, and farming opportunities.

2. Local Ecosystem

Question: What are the characteristics of your local ecosystem and its general health?

- Learn about your [local watershed here](#). How big is it? Is it impaired? Who in my watershed has access to greenspace? Who does not?
- Explore the [ecoregions in your area](#)
- Explore the [endangered species in your area](#).
- Explore the with [native plants and species in your area](#).

3. Environmental Justice

Question: As you explore these maps, what do you notice? What stories do they communicate about the relationships between race, health, and the environment in your community? Who is most vulnerable and why?

- Explore the [Environmental Justice Screening and Mapping Tool](#) (Note: this is a powerful mapping tool designed to reveal layers of information. It's helpful to begin by reading about how it works [here](#)).
- Explore the [racial and income make up of your area](#).
- Explore the [Racial Dot Map](#).
- Explore the [Inequality Redlining Map](#).
- Learn about the [Nature Gap](#) to see if it is an issue in your community.

4. Local Environmental Concerns

Question: How is your community currently being impacted by climate change? (*i.e.*, *Increased wildfires, storm frequency and/or intensity, habitat disruptions or changes, etc....*) What are the environmental issues in your area?

- Explore the [air pollution in your area](#).
- Explore the [hazardous waste cleanups in your community](#).
- Explore the [Environmental Justice Screening and Mapping Tool](#), paying particular attention to the pollution maps and layers.

5. Policy - Engage with Local Leaders and Policies

Questions: Who are your local, state, and federal elected officials and who are advocates environmental issues in your community? What local policies and programs are impacting your environment or land use?

- Consider researching:
 - Use of and access to public lands and common spaces.
 - Public land being leased for resource extraction. (i.e. [America's Public Lands Giveaway](#)).
 - Local development impacts on surrounding communities and ecosystems.

Going Deeper: Church Story Map

Maps tell stories; they name histories and reveal pathways to new realities. **Your church has a story.** But before we can imagine new realities, we have to get to know our histories in all their beauty, pain, complexity, and mystery. We encourage you to gather the answers to the relevant questions above and begin building the story map of your church.

Below are a few examples of web-based story maps. Please know your story map can take on **any** form. It can be as simple as a word document with notes and pictures, a written narrative, or a multi-media presentation. This “map” is meant to reflect who you are, where you are, and the story of your shared place in whatever form is most accessible and authentic.

Examples of Story Maps:

- [Living Nations, Living Words: A Map of First Peoples Poetry](#)
- [Changing Wildfires, Changing Forests](#)
- [What's Gender got to do with it? Global Gender & Environment Outlook](#)
- [Mapping Environmental Racism](#)
- [America's Public Lands Giveaway](#)

Other Related Resources:

- [For More on Place-Based Care for Creation, visit Creation Justice Ministries' Sense of Place resource.](#)
- [ArcGIS StoryMaps Guide](#) and helpful articles.
- [Our Watershed Moment](#), a toolkit by Eco-Faith Network of the ELCA Minneapolis-St. Paul Synod
- [Fund for Sacred Places](#)
- [National Congress of American Indians](#)
- [Watershed Discipleship Blog](#)
- Book: [Watershed Discipleship](#), edited by Ched Myers. This compilation of writings by young faith-rooted activists provides examples of how people are practicing bioregional spirituality in communities across the United States.