

Becoming Better Relatives UCL Indigenous Month July History

The Beginnings

The Task Force on Dismantling White Supremacy was established by the UCL Board in March 2020 in response to a Congregational Study Action Issue (CSA), Undoing Intersectional White Supremacy. Members of the task force included Christine Davis, Jackie Egan, Dan Payzant, JoEllen Polzien, Morissa Raymond, Emily Cameron Shattil, Mary K Stillwell, Lori Straatmann, and B. J. Wheeler.



UCL Task Force to Dismantle
White Supremacy
was charged to explore three areas of
inquiry:

- Training and Education
- Building Local Relationships
- Mobilizing for Change

Suddenly the pandemic changed church life: YouTube became the platform for church services and ZOOM offered a variety of ways to stay connected.

The Task Force on Dismantling White Supremacy continued its work online. One of the Task Forces major initiatives was participation in Beloved Conversations: Within, a program developed by the Meadville Lombard Theological School. Offered digitally during the pandemic, the Beloved Conversations program of study gave over 50 UCL church members the opportunity to be more open and curious about our personal assumptions, to take a look at how white people, informed by the Western tradition, may have values and attitudes that we take for granted, but may not be the same as others in our pluralistic society, to be more cognizant and respectful of cultural differences, to better listeners, for example. The semester-long course included individual study: videos and readings accompanied by prompts for reflection, bi-weekly small group conversations, and larger, monthly, facilitated meaning-making sessions.



The survey: When doors opened again, church members—like the rest of Lincoln and the world-- were hungry for connection with each other and with our wider community, past and present. The Task Force launched a survey, asking members where their interests lie in furthering the goals of Beloved Conversations within our community.

A surprise finding of the survey was the congregation's desire to create a land acknowledgement, one that went beyond words and was grounded in relationship. We wanted to learn more about the peoples who once lived where we lived and well as deepen our relationship with those who currently live in our community.

Among those who worked to bring the land acknowledgement into being were: our former settled minister, Oscar Sinclair, the UCL Worship Associates, and many committee members who came and went and are currently active. Among the initial participants were Judy Hart, Arden Hill, Judy Kelly, Suzanne V Shackelford, Emily Cameron Shattil. We were joined by Jackie Egan, Tim Hopkins, Jackie Kehl, Erica Birky Rios, Mary Sommermeyer, Jamie Todd, Mark Weddleton, Ellen Wilson, and Nathan Woodruff.

We sought a variety of avenues—sermons, films, art works, speakers, events, conversations, lectures—that would lead to engagement and understanding of both our heritage and our community.

Guidance: We turned to Dr. Margaret Jacobs, Director of the Center for Great Plains Studies, and journalist Kevin Abouezk, member of the Rosebud Sioux tribe, for guidance. Their project, Reconciliation Rising, through films and podcasts, showcase the lives and work of Indigenous and non-Indigenous people engaged in facing often traumatic histories. With their help, we began developing our month-long program consisting of speakers at Sunday services and special events during the week. Little did we know what lay ahead.

Community Involvement:



Not long after, in April 2022, the Lincoln City Council approved zoning changes and annexations that would allow the construction of a 75-acre development of single-family homes, town houses, apartments, and 30,000 square feet of commercial space, disrupting one of the city's oldest and most used Native sweat lodges. When a group local of Native Americans erected the *Niskithe* Prayer Camp on the proposed site and lobbied the city council,¹ many church members rallied at the camp and in the council chamber to offer support and resources. A strong relationship with our Native community neighbors took root.

The Return of the Otoe-Missouria to Their Homeland:

The following month, Abourezk and Jacobs invited church members to a potluck dinner to meet with a small group of Otoe-Missouria tribal members who were visiting the Lincoln area. A year earlier, while Margaret Jacobs was helping harvest corn with Debra Echo-Hawk, Keeper of the Seeds for the Pawnee Nation, she met Cory DeRoin, an Otoe-Missouria relative of Echo-Hawk. "We got to talking as we were processing corn, shelling corn, roasting corn, and joking around the fire," Jacobs recalled. "We got to talking with Cory about whether it would be possible for the Otoe-Missouria to re-establish ties with their homeland."'²

Our Program: Speakers, research, discussions, films, and art exhibits made up our summer program and all the while we learned more about the land on which we lived and the people who came before us. Members met to discuss, draft, and revise a land acknowledgement.

¹ *Niskithe*, Omaha, meaning Saltwater.

²

<https://nebraskapublicmedia.org/en/news/news-articles/our-people-made-it-otoe-missouria-descendants-welcomed-back-to-nebraska-200-years-after-being-forced-out/> (5/29/2020)

Working toward Land Acknowledgement – A Summer of Reckoning & Reconciliation

From Mary K. Stillwell

At the 2012 General Assembly in Phoenix, AZ, UUA members passed a resolution condemning the Doctrine of Discovery as “a relic of colonialism, feudalism, and religious, cultural, and racial biases” and called on all Unitarian Universalists to study the doctrine and its impact on current-day policies, programs, and beliefs. Only through knowing the truth about the genocide of our continent’s Native people can we take corrective measures, move toward reconciliation, and form right relationships with their descendants living in our community.

This work continues at the Unitarian Church of Lincoln in a six-week summer program in July and August. We will focus on Indigenous and European history in North America and, specifically, on the history of past inhabitants of Lincoln and ask ourselves how we might take steps toward right relationship and reconciliation with our Native neighbors who live with us in community today. Based on our work this summer - six sermons and seven presentations, the congregation will come together in August to craft a meaningful land acknowledgement.

Summer of Reckoning & Reconciliation - July 2022 Calendar of Events

- **Sunday, July 3, 10:00AM - 11:00AM**

UCL service: **Getting Our House in Order: the Land**, an overview of the summer program. Mary K. Stillwell, UCL Worship Associate.

- **Sunday, July 3, 1:00PM - 3:00PM in the Gallery**
Roots of Injustice, Seeds of Change, An in-person participatory event to build awareness of Native-



European history and relationship in North America. (Limited space/ registration required.)

NOTE: Masks and vaccinations are strongly recommended.

Social distancing cannot be guaranteed due to the active participation of those who attend.

- **Saturday, July 9, 4:00PM - 6:00PM**

Two Rivers, a film about one town’s journey toward truth, repair, and reconciliation. Discussion to follow.

- **Sunday, July 10, 10:00AM - 11:00AM**

UCL service: **In Search of Reconciliation on America’s Stolen Lands**. Margaret Jacobs, Director, Center for Great Plains Studies.

- **Friday, July 15, 7:00PM - 9:00PM**

Dawnland, a film about the first state-sanctioned truth and reconciliation commission that sent Native and non-Native commissioners across Maine to gather testimony and bear witness to the devastating impact of the state’s child welfare practices on families in the Maliseet, Micmac, Passamaquoddy and Penobscot tribal communities. Collectively, these tribes make up the Wabanaki people.

- **Sunday, July 17, 10:00AM - 11:00AM**

UCL service: **Next Steps, Niskithe Prayer Camp**. Kevin Abourezk, Journalist and Lakota activist.



Sumer Programming (continued)

- **Saturday, July 23, Podcast – Unlearning Conversations** with Rev. Kia Bordner, member of the Tigua & Yaqui Nations provide Indigenous lenses to activate awareness of how non-Indigenous people relate to our cultures, knowledge, & traditions. (Listen on your own schedule. Link will be provided.)

- **Sunday, July 24, 10:00AM - 11:00AM**



Rev. Oscar Sinclair read the Land Acknowledgement drafted by the congregation from the pulpit on September 18. The Acknowledgement was to be a “living document,” to be edited as need arose.

Our Original Land Acknowledgement:

We acknowledge the land and the people who have called this place home for thousands of years. The Otoe-Missouria, Omaha, Ponca, Kansa, and Pawnee have lived here at one time. Many others have visited to collect salt at the local salt basin. “Niskithe,” by which this area continues to be known, is the Omaha word for salt water. We thank them all for their good care of this sacred ground.

We also take this opportunity to formally renounce the Doctrine of Discovery that paved the way for the degradation of Native inhabitants and the unlawful appropriation of the land. We recognize that we continue to benefit from these past actions. While we cannot change the past, we are committed to right relationship with our Native neighbors. Indigenous peoples of many nations make their home in Lincoln today.

We value their contribution to our community’s vitality and diversity. These are not idle words; our commitment is to action. We pledge to show up in support of local and national policies, programs, and measures that demand redress for lands taken, that offer justice for harm committed, and that seek to promote self-determination and equity for all peoples.

Otoe-Missouria Day:

Three days later, UCL members were present when Lincoln Mayor Leirion Gaylor Baird proclaimed Sept. 21 Otoe-Missouria Day and welcomed nation back to their ancestral homelands. Jacobs spoke during the ceremony: “You [the Otoe-Missouria] have so much to teach us about how to persist through hard times; how to face up to (and honor) our histories and our ancestors; how to rebuild and restore one's culture and society; how to be good stewards to our precious lands and waters; and how to be good relatives. I hope that this is only the beginning of a long and fruitful kinship.”

The UCL hosted a welcome home dinner for the Otoe-Missouria tribal members who had made the trip from Oklahoma to Lincoln for the proclamation. Each visitor received a small bag of salt to commemorate the salt beds that lay on their homeland in Nebraska.

Our relationship with the Indian Center Continued to grow. They were selected as 2022-2023 Share the Plate recipients.

Year Two: 2023

While the congregation turned its attention to learning about the 8th Principle, focus on our relationship with our Indigenous community continued.

The UCL's relationship with the NAACP is long-standing. Early church minister Arthur Weatherly was, in fact, one of the organization's founders. Church members continued to be active in the organization. The local quarterly NAACP newsletter was edited by a UCL member in 2025.

May 2023 Congregational Meeting:

After months of study and discussion, the UCL adopted the 8th Principle at the May 2023 Congregational Meeting.

We join the other 230+ Unitarian Universalist congregations that have adopted the 8th Principle:

"We, the member congregations of the Unitarian Universalist Association, covenant to affirm and promote: journeying toward spiritual wholeness by working to build a diverse multicultural Beloved Community by our actions that accountably dismantle racism and other oppressions in ourselves and our institutions."

Otoe-Missouria Day 2023: In July Jacobs invited Judy Hart, then UCL Board Chair, and Mary K Stillwell to meet with Kevin Abourezk and several others to plan the upcoming return of the Otoe-Missouria tribal members in September for Otoe-Missouria Day.

Although housing and a welcoming lunch would be provided by the University for the travelers, no funds were available for activities and materials. Judy Hart wove 50 welcoming baskets. UCL members crocheted washcloths and other items for the baskets. The Wachiska Audubon Society, the Lincoln Indian Center, the Intertribal Medicine Collective, and other community groups who supplied mugs, tea, sweetgrass, beaded earrings, and pottery.

For the second year in a row, UCL members celebrated Otoe-Missouria Day on September 21 with a proclamation by the Lincoln mayor followed by speeches, drumming, and a luncheon at the University. Through the dining room windows, we looked out on teepees erected by the UNL Unite, a student group created to promote and support Indigenous students at the University.

Travelers Stop by the UCL for Lunch:

The following day, after a rainy morning on the prairie, Otoe-Missouria travelers stopped by the Church to share lunch with members. No longer were UCL members and visitors strangers to one another. In the afternoon we saw them off on their journey home by way of Indian Cave State Park.

Walking in the Footsteps of our Ancestors: As the year came to an end, UNL's Center for Great Plains Studies announced that the Center and the Otoe-Missouria Tribe, now based in Red

Rock, Oklahoma, received a three-year, \$1.58 million grant from the Mellon Foundation. Jacobs and Christina Faw Goodson, Otoe-Missouria Tribe member and Native language specialist served as codirectors of the project, *Walking in the Footsteps of Our Ancestors: Re-Indigenizing Southeast Nebraska.* *Ahadada Wathigre H̄jnéwi Ke*, as the project is known in *Jiwere Nut'achi*, seeks to “promote healing and reconciliation in southeast Nebraska by reconnecting the Otoe-Missouria to their homelands and engaging non-Native people with the history and ongoing presence of the Tribe and other Indigenous peoples in our region.”³ Two members of the UCL were invited to join the project’s Building Relationships Group to help plan and implement Otoe-Missouria Day each year.

2024 July Programming:



Healing: Indigenous Programming during July

From Mary K. Stillwell, she/her

Sunday services, weekday activities, films, and other events will focus on the theme of Indigenous healing. A full calendar of activities, including events you can attend on your own, is available [here](#). Highlights include:

Sunday, July 7, 10 AM: Introduction to *Walking in the Footsteps of Our Ancestors: Re-Indigenizing Southeast Nebraska* with Judy Hart and Mary K. Stillwell.

Sunday, July 14, 10 AM: Erin Poor, Intertribal Medicine Collective founder, Native educator, and activist, will speak on Native healing arts and host a sacred tea ceremony. The last week of the month, Erin will offer a workshop on Garden Therapy.

Thursday, July 18, 6:30 - 8:00 PM: Third Thursday

³ <https://plains.unl.edu/projects/walking-footsteps-our-ancestors/>

service - An Evening of Short Indigenous Films

Sunday, July 21, 10 AM: Greg Victors, descendant of Standing Bear and member of the Ponca Tribe, known as the Wichita War Dancer, will perform during service. A Q&A with Mr. Victors will follow.

Sunday, July 21, 11 AM to 1 PM:

Fry Bread Indian Tacos
\$8.00 each/Cash Only
To go or eat here
FREE Lemonade and water

Sunday, July 28, 10 AM: Gabriel Bruguier, Ihanktonwan Oyate (Yankton Sioux Tribe), Assistant

Professor University Libraries, will speak on his work with Native students. Dr. Bruguier is a member of the Building Relationships Advisory Group for Walking in the Footsteps of Our Ancestors.

Watch for updates to the Summer Indigenous Programming Calendar, Resource Guide, and Friday eblasts for up-to-date information.

Indigenous programming July 2025:



The BEACON

News from the Unitarian Church of Lincoln • July 2025

July Celebration of the Otoe-Missouria Tribe



The Unitarian Church of Lincoln will continue to celebrate our indigenous friends and neighbors during the month of July. This summer we will focus on the Otoe-Missouria Tribe. UCL welcomed the Otoe-Missouria back home to Nebraska and has enjoyed a growing relationship for the last three years. Here's an overview of July services. [Click here for the full schedule of services and events.](#)

July 6: "Celebrating Otoe-Missouria Homecoming" with Dr. Angel M. Hinzo (Winnebago Tribe of Nebraska), assistant professor of history and ethnic studies at the University of Nebraska – Lincoln. Hinzo is a member of the Changing the Narrative Advisory Group of the Walking in the Footsteps of Our Ancestors (Ahadada Wathigre Hjinéwi Ke), WFOA, a joint project of the



Center for Great Plains Studies and the Otoe-Missouria Tribe of Oklahoma.

Worship Associate: Christine Davis
Music: TBD

July 13: Marci Black and Lena' Black, Otoe-Missouria tribe members, will speak on "Exactly Where I Was Meant to Be." Lena' Black, a current student at UNL, and her mother will speak on growing relationships in the homeland of Nebraska. Lena' Black, a youth advisor to the Building Relationships Group, WFOA, was featured in the 2024 celebration of



Otoe-Missouria Day during [half-time at the Huskers game](#). Marci is a member of the Visualizing Reconciliation Advisory Group, WFOA.

Worship Associate: Charlie Ahern
Music: Oscar Rios

July 20: Filmmaker Rebekka Schlichting (Ioway Tribe of Kansas and Nebraska), will present "The Art of Rematriation through Traditional Foods." Schlichting, known for her documentary *Seed Warriors*, is now at work on the documentary, *Walking in the Footsteps of our Ancestors*, about the Otoe-Missouria Tribe of Oklahoma's return to their ancestral homelands in Nebraska.



Worship Associate: Kathy Disney
Music: TBD

July 27: Cory DeRoin, a member of the Bear Clan, will speak on "In the Beginning." DeRoin, a member of the Otoe-Missouria and mayor of Red Rock, Oklahoma, will offer the traditional origin story of the tribe, which is the source of the Clan structure that still serves the Otoe-Missouria today. DeRoin serves as chair of the Building Relationships Group, WFOA.



Worship Associate: Jason Slaughter
Music: Nicholas Baxter, drums

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Summer Indigenous Programming

From Mary K. Stillwell, she/her, Worship Associate

July 4 • 12:00 PM • Zoom: Cliff Taylor, an enrolled member of the Ponca Tribe of Nebraska, poet, memoirist, and cultural healer through words, will speak via Larksong Writers Place. FREE. [Registration](#) is required.

July 11 • 7:00 PM • Unitarian Church of Lincoln: Movie Night. "Seed Warriors" (Directed by Rebekka Schlichting). Follow a group of seed keepers in their ancestral homelands of Nebraska as they work to return to the healthy, traditional lifeways of the Pawnee people. Discussion to follow.

July 12 • 2:00 PM • Sheldon Museum of Art, 12th and R Streets, Lincoln: "Visualizing Survivance, Visualizing Permanence" (curated by Dr. Angel Hinzo) and "Exploding Native Inevitable" (Traveling exhibit/Bates College). For more information click [here](#). The public tour will assemble at the Sheldon.

July 14 • Time TBA • Mary Riepma Ross Media Arts Center, 313 North 13th Street: "Ohiyesa: The Soul of an Indian." Vision Makers at The Ross series. Click [here](#) for information or call [402-472-5353](tel:402-472-5353).

Click [HERE](#) for a printable version of the Sunday Services and Programming Events.

July 17 - July 20: Otoe-Missouria Tribe Summer Encampment, Red Rock, Oklahoma. Info [here](#).

July 24 - July 27: The Winnebago Tribe's 159th Annual Homecoming celebration, Winnebago, NE. Click [here](#) for information.

A film you don't want to miss: PBS, Independent Lens: "Without Arrows" pbs.org/independentlens/documentaries/without-arrows/ (1:22:22) After 11 years living in Philadelphia, Delsin Fiddler, Jr., a champion grass dancer, embraces indigenous culture by returning to his ancestral home on the Cheyenne River Reservation in South Dakota.

RESOURCES: Rebekka Schlichting recommends [Sogorea Te' Land Trust](#) for resources on Rematriation, Unsettling, Decolonization, Allyship, and Land Return.

For more information about the Otoe-Missouria's history click [here](#). For information about the Walking in the Footsteps of Our Ancestors (Ahadada Wathigre Hjinéwi Ke) project click [here](#).

Share the Plate: Walking in the Footsteps of Our Ancestors Student Support Fund

From Erica Birky Rios, she/her Visibility Team

On Sunday, July 13, in conjunction with our July worship services that focus on Indigenous lives and relationship building, we will welcome Dr. Margaret Jacobs, Director of the Center for Great Plains Studies. She will talk about the Walking in the Footsteps of Our Ancestors Student Support Fund, the first recipient of our 2025-2026 Share the Plate organizations. Dr. Jacobs, along with Tom Lynch, professor emeritus in the University of Nebraska English Department and former editor of the journal Western American Literature, initiated the fund.



Walking in the Footsteps of Our Ancestors (Ahadada Wathigre Hjinéwi Ke) is a joint project of the Center for Great Plains Studies and the Otoe-Missouria Tribe of Oklahoma that aims to promote healing and reconciliation in southeast Nebraska by reconnecting the Otoe-Missouria to their homelands and by educating non-Native people about the history and ongoing presence of the Tribe and other Indigenous peoples in our region.

The Walking in the Footsteps Student Support Fund provides crucial financial support to students from the Otoe-Missouria tribe as well as other tribes with historical connections to Nebraska. The goal of the fund is to enable students not only to walk, but also to study, in the footsteps of their ancestors. Funds can be used for all educational costs, including tuition, room and board, books, and student fees.

Becoming Good Relatives Continues:

ULC members continue to be involved with the Lincoln Indian Center and with the Following in the Footsteps of Our Ancestors. Join us for July 2026 Services and Events.

[add calendar here when it's available]

