

Your guide to Welcome to Country and Acknowledgements of Country

- What they are, which to use and when to use them



“When we talk about traditional ‘Country’... for Aboriginal Australians... we might mean homeland, or tribal or clan area and we might mean more than just a place on the map. For us, Country is a word for all the values, places, resources, stories and cultural obligations associated with that area and its features. It describes the entirety of our ancestral domains.”

– Professor Mick Dodson

A **‘Welcome to Country’** or an **‘Acknowledgement of Country’** is a ceremony that connects with the welcoming protocols that have existed for Australia’s First Nations peoples for over 60,000 years. Traditionally, crossing into another group’s Country required a request for permission to enter. When permission was granted the land owners would welcome the visitors, offering them safe passage and protection of their spiritual being during their journey. It was also an opportunity for visitors to show their respect for the people, history, protocols, land and water upon which they found themselves while travelling.

The Salvation Army is committed to honour and recognise Australia’s First Nations peoples. One way of doing this is to conduct a **‘Welcome to Country’** or **‘Acknowledgement of Country’** at the beginning of an event, meeting, speech or formal occasion. Incorporating the appropriate ceremony into these group events recognises Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people as the First Australians and Traditional Custodians of the land/waterways, promoting reconciliation, awareness of the past and the ongoing connection to place of Australia’s First Nations peoples.

An **‘Acknowledgement of Country’** is offered by a member of the group holding the event on behalf of those gathered. It may be given by either a First Nations person who is from another area or any other host of the event. An **‘Acknowledgement of Country’** is only needed to be given once at the beginning of the event and that speaker does it on behalf of all gathered.

Here are some things to consider when preparing your ‘Acknowledgement of Country’:

1. *A good place to start is by building upon what binds us together! It shows a deep and meaningful respect and a willingness to connect with our First Nations peoples as well as God.*
2. *Some may wish to acknowledge our Heavenly Father, the Great Creator, who shaped Earth and predestined our First Nations peoples here as the traditional custodians of the environment since time immemorial.*
3. *Allocate time to honour and respect both First Nations people as well as God and the role God has appointed to us all as His representatives on this earth (**Genesis 1:26-31**). Your acknowledgement can naturally lead into a prayer of thanksgiving.*
4. *The land and waterways have a heartbeat and all things come together to declare the glory and majesty of God (in both our own Biblical story as well as a traditional First Nations cultural viewpoint) (**Psalms 95:4-7, Psalm 19: 1-6, Job 12:7-10, Job 38**).*



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5. *Humans are God's intended caretakers of the world. The First Nations people of Australia are the oldest living and continuous civilisation on earth as well as the first stewards of the land, waters and life of all creation in this country we all call home. For over 60,000 years, First Nations people have cared for this land in a way that was reflective of **Genesis 1**. They walked in step with this land and fostered its health and productivity, seeing God in all creation as a heartbeat that connected all things.*

Suggested Acknowledgement of Country

"We acknowledge our God who is Father, Son and Spirit; and who is the Creator of this world and the giver of all life. We acknowledge the first people of this land who are the people and we pay our respects to their elders past present and future. We commit ourselves to work for reconciliation and justice alongside Australia's First Nations people"

"I would like to begin by acknowledging the Traditional Owners of the land on which we meet today – the people and pay my respects to elders past, present and future."

A '**Welcome to Country**' is delivered by a Traditional Custodian of the land on which the event is taking place and can take many forms including singing, dancing or a speech in either the traditional language or English.

A '**Welcome to Country**' is specific to the land area the event is taking place on. Not all First Nations people are able to perform the ceremony on behalf of the Traditional Custodians. If you are looking to include a '**Welcome to Country**' in your event but you don't know a local Elder, the best place to start is connecting with your local Land Council. ([*List of Aboriginal land councils in Australia*](#)).

Providing a cultural service such as a '**Welcome to Country**', Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander people are using their intellectual property. As such, appropriate remuneration and/or assistance should be negotiated prior to the event between the cultural service provider and The Salvation Army host, taking into consideration travel to and from the event and the public profile of the event.

<https://www.creativespirits.info/aboriginalculture/selfdetermination/aboriginal-land-councils#toc3>

Suggested 'Welcome to Country' response

On behalf of, thank you for your Welcome to Country. I wish to acknowledge the people as the traditional custodians of this land on which we meet. We commit ourselves in action and prayer, in the spirit of reconciliation to show respect to you, your people and your culture, and commit ourselves to work for reconciliation and social justice for Australia's First Nations people.

The Salvation Army Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander team are able to provide support and guidance with regards to cultural capability, community engagement and capacity building.

Please contact them via emailing the General Manager Shirli Congoo:

shirli.congoo@salvationarmy.org.au

