



ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF COUNTRY & WELCOME TO COUNTRY GUIDELINES

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1. PURPOSE

To encourage the use of correct protocols across the Australian College of Theology (ACT) and its Affiliated Colleges for 'Acknowledgement of Country' and 'Welcome to Country', and to provide examples.

2. DEFINITIONS

Acknowledgement of Country is where a community leader, for example the **Dean** or a **Principal**, makes an acknowledgement of the local traditional custodians of the land, for example a Clan or Nation group, where an event or gathering is taking place.

ACT is the Australian College of Theology Limited.

Affiliated College is an institution approved to offer an accredited higher education award of the **ACT**.

Dean is the Dean and Chief Executive Officer of the **ACT**.

Elder is an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander person who has gained recognition as a custodian of knowledge and lore, and who has permission to disclose knowledge and beliefs.

Officer is a person who is a member of one of the governing boards or committees of the **ACT**.

Principal is the Principal or equivalent officer of an **Affiliated College**.

staff is any person employed or engaged by the **ACT** or an **Affiliated College**.



student is a student of the **ACT**. They may be a prospective, enrolled or former student.

Welcome to Country is a ceremony where a traditional Aboriginal custodian/s welcome guests to the land where an event is taking place. It is carried out by a recognised elder or appointed member of the traditional custodians.

3. SCOPE

These Guidelines may assist all **staff, students** and **officers** responsible for giving Acknowledgements of Country and organising a Welcome to Country at events connected with the ACT. These guidelines apply to the official Welcome or Acknowledgement at the beginning of an event, and not to any informal personal acknowledgement an individual may wish to give.

4. RATIONALE

The ACT affirms that all people are made in the image of God with sanctity and dignity, and because of this, appropriate respect is due to every person. As Christians, we understand what it means to be reconciled to Christ and to follow the reconciling way of Jesus. As the ACT grows in its awareness and understanding of the cultures and traditions of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and communities, we wish to respectfully acknowledge the traditional custodians of the lands on which we live and work.

'Acknowledgement of Country' and 'Welcome to Country' recognise the unique position of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in Australian culture and history. Incorporating Acknowledgement and Welcome into ACT events enables our wider community to share in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures and heritage, fostering respectful relationships and reconciliation between Indigenous peoples and other Australians.

5. BACKGROUND

The contemporary practice of Acknowledgement of Country began around the time of the historic Mabo decision in 1992. In 2010, Federal Parliament made the decision to open each session with an Acknowledgement of the Ngunnawal Clan-Nation. It is now official protocol to begin Parliament with the Lord's Prayer and an Acknowledgement of Country. Many Christian organisations and denominations, such as Anglicare Sydney, Baptist Associations, the Uniting Church in Australia, and some ACT Affiliated Colleges commence their public occasions with a Welcome by or Acknowledgement of the traditional custodians of the land, and follow this with prayer. Examples of Acknowledgements and Prayers are included in the Appendix below.



6. GUIDELINES – ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF COUNTRY

- 6.1 An 'Acknowledgement of Country' may be given at functions such as public and formal events, board meetings, conferences, public lectures, workshops, seminars, online conferences and events, and other special occasions for students and staff.
- 6.2 On such occasions, and where possible, the 'Acknowledgement of Country' should be given by the most senior person present, e.g. the Dean, a Principal, a Chair or a distinguished guest.
- 6.3 The 'Acknowledgement of Country' should occur at the beginning of the event.
- 6.4 Ascertain as best you can the name/s of the Clan/s or Nation applicable to your area. For example, the ACT Office is located on the traditional lands of the Gadigal of the Eora Nation. This is the AIATSIS Map of Indigenous Australia for your reference: <https://aiatsis.gov.au/explore/map-indigenous-australia>
- 6.5 The 'Acknowledgement of Country' should acknowledge that the event is taking place on the country or lands of the traditional custodians.
- 6.6 Be culturally sensitive and respectful—see Cultural Considerations below.
- 6.7 Examples of Acknowledgement are set out in the Appendix below. You may select one and insert the name of your local Clan/s and or Nation.

7. GUIDELINES – WELCOME TO COUNTRY

- 7.1 A 'Welcome to Country' may be given at major functions such as retreats, graduation ceremonies, and other occasions where official guests and dignitaries are in attendance. If there is uncertainty as to whether an 'Acknowledgement' or 'Welcome' is appropriate, advice may be sought from either the Dean or the Moderation and Inclusion Manager.
- 7.2 Be culturally sensitive and respectful in negotiating the 'Welcome to Country' — see Cultural Considerations below.
- 7.3 A 'Welcome to Country' is conducted by a representative/s of the local Aboriginal custodians (usually an Elder and preferably an Aboriginal Christian leader), who welcomes the delegates and all people in attendance.
- 7.4 A 'Welcome to Country' may consist of a single speech by the Elder/representative of the local Aboriginal community, or it may also include a traditional welcoming song, or other appropriate cultural elements, mutually agreed upon by the Elder and the ACT or Affiliated College. A sample brief and Welcome Statement are included in the Appendix below.



8. CULTURAL CONSIDERATIONS

- 8.1 Please do not mention the name of a deceased Aboriginal person, or display photographic/video images of a deceased Aboriginal person, unless agreed to by the family.
- 8.2 When negotiating a 'Welcome to Country' the Aboriginal Elder/representative/s should first be contacted by telephone (to be asked personally) and then through a formal letter of invitation.
- 8.3 Where possible, an Aboriginal Christian leader should be invited to conduct the 'Welcome to Country'.
- 8.4 All arrangements thereafter for the 'Welcome to Country' should be mutually negotiated. It is important that the Aboriginal Christian leader/Aboriginal Elder/representative/s has been involved in, and is comfortable with, the arrangements. Consideration should be given to how the 'Welcome to Country' is compatible with the Christian ethos of the ACT.
- 8.5 Provision should be made for those performing the 'Welcome' to be paid. Fees should be negotiated prior to the event.

9. OTHER EXPRESSIONS OF ACKNOWLEDGMENT

Other expressions of acknowledgment include the following:

- 9.1 A website acknowledgement,
- 9.2 A handbook acknowledgement,
- 9.3 An email footer acknowledgement,
- 9.4 A permanent artwork/plaque acknowledgement,
- 9.5 Affiliated Colleges with a denominational relationship may use denominational resources, for example those of the Uniting Church in Australia.
- 9.6 Individuals, for example presenters at a conference, may wish to include their own brief personal 'Acknowledgement' as part of their presentation. This is separate to an official 'Acknowledgement of Country'.

10. ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Anglicare Sydney, Baptist Churches of South Australia, Common Grace, Uniting Church in Australia, Morling College, Ridley College, Trinity College Queensland, University of Divinity, and the Indigenous Student Support Unit, Charles Sturt University, who consulted with the Wagga Elders Group, the Council of Wiradjuri Elders and the NSW Aboriginal Education Consultative Group.



11. VERSION HISTORY

Version	Approved by	Approval Date	Effective Date	Changes made
1	Dean & CEO	21 April 2021	21 April 2021	New document
2	Dean & CEO	11 May 2023	11 May 2023	Clarify Acknowledgements for online meetings; whether or not statement of prayer



APPENDIX

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF COUNTRY EXAMPLES

An Acknowledgement of Country is usually a statement, but it may alternatively be expressed as a prayer, as long as any praying is made explicit (i.e, “let’s now pray...” or “Let us bow our heads together in prayer...”). The Acknowledgement could also be a statement accompanied by a prayer.

Australian College of Theology Acknowledgement of Country

We would like to acknowledge the traditional custodians of the land on which we gather today, the _____ people of the _____ nation. We pay our respects to their Elders past, present and emerging and pray for the flourishing of their people. We would also like to acknowledge and pray for any other Aboriginal peoples present.

Anglicare Sydney Acknowledgement of Country

I would like to acknowledge the _____ people/nation who are the first and traditional custodians of this land on which we meet today. I would also like to pay respect to the elders both past and present, and express our gratitude that we share this land today, our sorrow for the cost of that sharing, and our hope that we can move towards a place of justice and partnership together.

Ridley College Acknowledgement of Country

Recognising the sovereignty of the one Creator,
the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ,
who made all peoples in his own image,

we acknowledge the Wurundjeri people of the Kulin Nations who are the traditional custodians of this land upon which we meet.

We give thanks for the elders of this nation and pray for gospel blessings on their descendants.

Uniting Church in Australia Acknowledgement of Country

We acknowledge the _____ peoples, the first inhabitants of this place from time beyond remembering. We acknowledge that through this land, God nurtured and sustained the First Peoples of this country, the Aboriginal and Islander peoples. We honour them for their custodianship of the land on which we gather today.



For Acknowledgements of Country in Languages other than English, please see:
<https://assembly.uca.org.au/hef/item/3016-acknowledgement-of-country-poster>

ZOOM / ONLINE ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF COUNTRY

I would like to acknowledge the traditional custodians of the land on which I am present today, the _____ people of the _____ nation. I pay my respects to their Elders past, present and emerging. I would also like to acknowledge the traditional custodians of the lands from where each of you are attending. I invite you to write in the chat function from which traditional lands you are attending.

College	Traditional Custodians
ACT, Sydney NSW	Gadigal of the Eora Nation
BCSA, Malvern SA	Kurna Meyunna (the land is referred to as Kurna Meyunna Yerta)
BST, Toowong Qld	Turrbal (the land is called Meanjin)
Christ College, Burwood NSW	Wangal (the Wangal word for the land around the Parramatta area is called Baramada)
CTCA, Burwood NSW	Wangal (the Wangal word for the land around the Parramatta area is called Baramada)
MAC, Sydney NSW	Gadigal of the Eora Nation
Malyon, Gaythorne Qld	Turrbal (the land is called Meanjin)
Morling, Macquarie Park NSW	Wallumattagal of the Dharug Nation
Morling, Bentley WA	Wadjuk of the Noongar
Morling, Hurstville NSW	Bidjigal of the Eora (the Bidjigal word 'Wolli' means 'camping place')
Morling, Orange NSW	Wiradjuri
MST, Wantirna Vic	Wurundjeri and Bunurong of the Kulin Nation
MST, St Leonards Tas	Kanamaluka and All Tasmanian Aboriginals
MST, Bella Vista NSW	Dharug



MST, Albury NSW	Wiradjuri (in Wiradjuri the area is known as Bungambrawatha)
MST, Murrumbateman NSW	Ngunnawal
MST, Port Macquarie NSW	Birpai (the Birpai name for Port Macquarie is Guruk)
PTC, Box Hill North Vic	Wurundjeri of the Kulin Nation
QTC, Spring Hill Qld	Turrbal (the land is called Meanjin)
Ridley, Parkville Vic	Wurundjeri of the Kulin Nation
RTC, Melbourne Vic	Wurundjeri and Bunurong of the Kulin Nation
SMBC, Croydon & Croydon Park NSW	Wangal (the Wangal word for the land around the Parramatta area is called Baramada)
TCQ, Auchenflower Qld	Turrbal (the land is called Meanjin)
TTC, Leederville WA	Wadjuk of the Noongar
YWC, Newtown NSW	Gadigal of the Eora Nation
YWC, Scotts Head	Gumbaynggirr (the Gumbaynggirr name for South Beach is Gaagal Wanggaan)

ACCOMPANYING PRAYER EXAMPLES

“Holy Spirit, we ask for your blessing on this country and on us as we gather today. Father God, help us to join together in reconciliation. Help us to heal one another and the land, so that all may flourish and that we may live with love and deep respect. In your Son’s name we pray. Amen.”

“Heavenly Father, our hope for reconciliation is in you because you gave your son Jesus to reconcile the world to you. We pray for your strength and grace to forgive, accept and love one another, as you love us and forgive and accept us in the sacrifice of your son. May your power and love be the foundations on which we work towards reconciliation, through Jesus Christ our Lord.” – adapted from a Wontulp-Bi-Buya Indigenous Theology Working Group prayer for the Anglican Mission Board.



"God of all the nations, we acknowledge your presence among us. As we continue to learn to live together on these ancestral lands, we ask that you would increase our understanding of each other and unite us all in a knowledge of your son, in whom all things were created, in heaven and on earth, whether visible or invisible – all things have been created through him and for him. Guide and bless us in our time together today. This we ask in the name of Christ our lord and saviour. Amen." – adapted from an Anglicare Sydney prayer.

"O God, you set humanity at the heart of your creation, charging us with stewardship of all you have made. May we be mindful of the calling you place on humanity to care for creation and we give thanks for those who have heeded your call. May we learn from the _____ people, whose stories are entwined with the stewarding of this place and may we walk with them in reconciliation, in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. Amen." – adapted from a Uniting Church prayer.

EXAMPLES OF OTHER EXPRESSIONS OF ACKNOWLEDGMENT

Ridley College's website acknowledgement: "We respectfully acknowledge the Wurundjeri People, who are the Traditional Owners of the land on which the Ridley College campus is built."

Morling College's handbook acknowledgement: "Morling College acknowledges the traditional custodians of the lands where the Morling College campus, hubs, and students are located and pay our respects to their Elders past, present and emerging."

Ridley College's email footer example: "I live and work on Wurundjeri land."

WELCOME TO COUNTRY SPEECH EXAMPLE

Though there is no exact wording when conducting a 'Welcome to Country', we have endeavoured to provide an example. Generally, the Elder, Aboriginal Christian leader, or representative will offer participants local cultural information and will go on to welcome guests, delegates and participants to the country/land. It is also expected that if the Elder is unfamiliar with the ACT or the Affiliated College, they will be provided with information about the beliefs and purpose of the ACT or College as well as the purpose for the particular event or occasion.

"Hello, my name is [insert name of speaker] an Aboriginal Christian leader/Elder/representative of the [insert name of people and nation]. I would like to begin by telling you a little about Aboriginal peoples. Before colonisation, there were over 500 different nations on this continent, many with distinctive cultures, beliefs and



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languages. My people, who are the traditional custodians of the land on which we meet today, are [include specific information about the clan/nation]. And this land is [insert features of the land and water]. On behalf of the [insert name of people and nation], I welcome you all to [insert name of event or occasion] today.”