



Commemorating the 350th Anniversary of the Expulsion of Native People to Deer Island

Laying the Groundwork: Preparing for the Sacred Journey on October 13, 2025

In [a joint letter June 16, 2025](#), the Rt. Rev. Julia E. Whitworth, Bishop of Massachusetts and The Rt. Rev. Douglas J. Fisher, Bishop of the Diocese of Western Massachusetts, announced a sacred journey to Deer Island on Monday, October 13, 2025 (Indigenous Peoples Day). As the letter explains, Deer Island was “the internment site where hundreds of Native people from the ‘praying towns’ died from exposure and starvation in the winter of 1675-1676.” The bishops also called upon “all of our worshipping communities to mark Sunday, October 12, 2025, as a Day of Remembrance and Lamentation for the anguish caused by the expulsion, enslavement, and genocide of Native people across our Commonwealth.”

Both of these events are commemorations of the 350th anniversary of the start of Metacombet’s Resistance (aka King Philip’s War) in 1675. This resource is offered to assist Episcopalians across Massachusetts in preparing for these commemorations.

If you have not already done so, [please consider making a donation](#) to offset the speakers’ fees and other costs associated with these events. In the drop-down menu under “Designation,” choose “Indigenous Peoples’ Day Event.”

What to Expect

Sunday, October 12

In our parishes: To mark this Day of Remembrance and Lamentation in our churches across the Commonwealth, [resources are available](#) for those wishing to incorporate liturgical elements into their worship.

Service of Holy Listening, on zoom, 4:00 pm: Intended for those participating in the journey as well as those who are unable to attend, this service invites Episcopalians and others from across the Commonwealth to gather in a virtual circle to receive the gift of story from several Native voices, each bringing a unique perspective to their experience of Deer Island, Metacombet's Rebellion/King Philip's War, and their meaning and relevance today. [Registration is required](#) to get the zoom link.

Monday, October 13

Arrival

Our day together will begin at [St. Paul's Episcopal Church, 139 East Central St., Natick](#). Participants are invited to arrive at St. Paul's, between 9:00 AM and 9:45 AM to enjoy a continental breakfast and meet others with whom they will be sharing this experience.

Participants from Western Massachusetts will meet at Christ Church Cathedral, 35 Chestnut St., Springfield, for an 8:00 AM departure to St. Paul's, Natick.

Parking is available in the municipal parking lot beside the Church, accessible via Church Street, as well as on East Central and surrounding streets. Because of the holiday, parking in the lot and on the streets is free all day.

St. Paul's is a 10-minute walk from the Natick Center stop on the [MBTA Framingham/Worcester Line \(Commuter Rail\)](#).

Opening

Our bishops will gather us in prayer before we board the bus. Each moment of the journey invites intention, attention and the awareness of God with us.

On the Bus

During the approximately 60-minute bus ride, participants will be invited to imagine making this trek on foot and on boat, in the middle of the night, not knowing where one

is headed and for how long, while we learn about what the Harbor Islands have meant for Native people for millennia.

At Deer Island

Participants will gather outside, facing the Boston Harbor, for a Sacred Gathering led by Native people, honoring the experience of the ancestors and its legacy today.

Afterwards, participants will have time for silent contemplation on the island, walking the land and recalling in our bodies as well as our hearts and minds the events of 350 years ago.

Chaplains will be available for those who might desire one-on-one pastoral support to help them process potentially strong emotions from the experience.

Note: This will be an outdoor gathering, *regardless of the weather*. Please dress accordingly. (Unlike those taken from their homes to Deer Island 350 years ago, we have the luxury of being able to prepare for whatever the elements have in store for us.)

Lunch will be served while on Deer Island, after which we will board the buses for our return to Natick.

Return

On our return ride, participants will be invited to share their thoughts and emotions with those close to them on the bus, as well as to consider how they and/or their worshiping community might want to respond. We should be back to St. Paul's by 5:00 pm.

How to Prepare: Soul Work

As you consider the following resources, remember that preparing for this sacred journey is not just “head work,” gathering facts, but also soul work. Consider the following as invitations.

- Take a walk around your neighborhood. Walk slowly and imagine. Imagine what the land might have looked like before European settlement came to your area. What animals do you imagine would have lived here? What was the plant life native to the area? How might the first people have lived on this land and its waterways? What traces of what might have been still exist along your walk? Study those—what stories do they tell?

- Do you see any place names or physical markers that suggest Native presence. What might their significance be in understanding the land on which you are walking?
- If you are still living on the land on which you were born, what stories of your own heritage are held in the land? If you have moved from the land of your birth, imagine standing on the land of your birth. What stories of your own people are held in the soil, the rocks, the waterways? What joys and sorrows is your land holding for you? What stories do you hope future generations remember?

These materials may bring up strong reactions, such as:¹

- Stunned silence and confusion
- Deep grief and sadness
- Deep anger and distress
- Deep guilt and confusion
- Denial of any responsibility or need for a response
- Passionate desire to know more and or to do “something”

As you move through these materials,

- Pray for an open mind to receive these stories which may be new to you
- Pray for a loving heart with which to empathize with those whose stories we read
- Pray for courage to sit with the hard truths and traumas of these stories and the history whose path we will be trodding

How to Prepare: Learning the Story

Before European Arrival, the Land Was Settled

The entire Northeast, it is vital to recall, constituted active Native homelands prior to and following contacts with Europeans: homelands used, accessed, traveled, remembered, storied and valued, even if a village site was not immediately located on a plot at any given moment.

- Christine M DeLucia, *Memory Lands: King Philip’s War and the Place of Violence in the Northeast* (p. 43), Yale University Press, ©2018.

To the English colonists who first arrived in numbers in the 1630s, the New England countryside appeared largely unused and only lightly populated, more a

¹ From [The Episcopal Church and the Doctrine of Discovery](#) (video).

wilderness than an inhabited country. Yet this seemingly virginal land was in use and subject to private ownership by various tribes of the Algonquian language group. ...Compared to the arriving white settlers, the Indians lived lightly on the land. Seasonal migrations and small village sizes reduced the Indians' impact on any one location.

- Eric T. Freyfoglet, "Land Use and the Study of Early American History," *Yale Law Journal*, Vol. 94: 717, 1985, pp. 719-720,

In their 10-minute video [Ecologies of Land Acknowledgement](#), artists Sarah Kanouse and Nicholas Brown feature the voices of three Native women as they describe their relationship with the land, including Deer Island and the other Boston Harbor islands.

A Clash of Cultures, Values, and Land Use Customs

On the fourth Thursday of November each year, we happily celebrate the gracious hospitality of Native people to the English separatist colonists we know as pilgrims in 1620. The First People were gracious in their welcome, but most scholars agree that Massasoit Ousamequin's motives were as much about forming a political alliance with these new people as they were hospitality to the strangers. The English settlers arrived just after deadly epidemics driven by European diseases had dramatically reduced coastal indigenous populations and significantly altered pre-existing power balances among groups.

Following the establishment of that first colony in 1620, more colonies quickly followed, with the Massachusetts Bay Colony (1630) added as a base for Puritan expansion across the region. As the settlers' settlements multiplied and expanded, clashes between different perspectives and customs triggered conflicts among people, as did the European (Christian) hunger for more and more land to be set aside for their exclusive use.

[A Clash of \(Agri\)cultures](#), by writer Jane Shaw Stroup, describes how differing Native and European approaches to agriculture played a critical role in the escalating tensions.

John Eliot, Praying Towns, and the Expulsion to Deer Island

Migrants came to colonize our area for a variety of reasons: some, to seek economic fortune; some, to escape their scandalous past and begin anew; and some came on a religious mission.

As Calvin Seminary professor Matthew Tuininga explains in his introduction to his book *The Puritan Conquest of America's First People*, "Tens of thousands of devout English

colonists known as Puritans came to America. They believed that bringing Christ’s kingdom to the Natives would liberate them from darkness. But their understanding of Christianity also spurred them to dominate the Natives. A conquest they believed would be spiritual, peaceable, and benevolent devolved into a conquest that was virtually genocidal.”

One of the most famous of the proselytizers was John Eliot, commonly known as “the missionary to the Indians,” who immigrated from England to the Massachusetts Bay Colony in 1631 at the age of 27. Following are three short articles about Eliot, his approach to incorporating Native converts into the culture of the colonists, and how those who had resettled were eventually taken to Deer Island in late October 1675.

[From Paradise to Prison](#), by Lance Young, Nemasket Nation Walmsley Wolf Clan Chief Sachem, written for Partnerships of Historic Boston

[John Eliot: Father of “Praying Villages”](#) on the Boston Harbor Islands National and State Parks blog.

[John Eliot Speaks to the Natick Indians](#), from the Smithsonian National Post Office Museum, gives a history of a mural in the Natick Post Office, Smithsonian Museum as well as basic background on John Eliot and the removal to Deer Island, which the mural portrays.

Digging Deeper

The Lead up to Metacomet’s Resistance/King Philip’s War

In [The Land is a Living Witness](#), a 40-minute lecture followed by an extensive Q&A session, Lance Young, chief of the Nemasket tribe, walks listeners through Native concepts of land as a living, breathing resource for the common good—and the devastating consequences of the clash of two conceptions of the land.

[Pokanoket Tribal Historian Strong Turtle](#) gives an introduction to the social, political, and territorial interaction between Native people and European settlers leading up to the War, the War itself, and its aftermath, particularly with Native people who live with its legacy even to this day.

Doctrine of Discovery

Permission, even encouragement, given to European colonizers to dominate and enslave Native peoples and claim for themselves the lands they “discover” was official, sanctified church doctrine from as early as the 1450s.

For the Western world, the Doctrine of Discovery took root in what historians have called the Age of Discovery, the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries of European expansion. Foundational to this account of colonial expansion is the notion that other territories and peoples are empty commodities to be exploited. Space lies open for mariners, explorers, traders, and their chaplains to uncover, hold, and claim as their own.

- The [Doctrine of Discovery and Beloved Community](#), A report from Theology Committee of the House of Bishops for its March 2022 gathering, p. 2.

If you are unfamiliar with The Doctrine of Discovery, a good place to start is with the resources offered by [The Coalition to Dismantle the Doctrine of Discovery](#).

The Lakota Law Project produced this five-minute video introduction to [The Doctrine of Discovery](#), featuring Steven Newcomb, Shawnee-Lenape scholar and author. Newcomb is also the featured speaker in [this 25-minute video](#) from the Indigenous Peoples Forum on the Doctrine of Discovery at the Arizona State House in 2012.

Children’s Resource

[Colonization and the Wampanoag Story, by Linda Coombs \(Crown Books for Young Readers, 2023\)](#)

From the publisher: Christopher Columbus, the Pilgrims, and the Colonists didn't arrive to a vast, empty land ready to be developed. They arrived to find people and communities living in harmony with the land they had inhabited for thousands of years, and they quickly disrupted everything they saw.

Coombs is recognized by many as one of the leading Native scholars in the region, and in this book geared for middle schoolers, she interweaves “When Life Was Our Own”—chapters describing traditional pre-contact Wampanoag life—with chapters retelling the history of the beginning of our nation from her Native perspective, offering a developmentally appropriate discussion of concepts such as racism, the Doctrine of Discovery, and colonization.