

Understanding Episcopal Liturgy

#36. What is The Deeper History of the Place Where We Meet

One of the most important characteristics of St. Paul's is that we meet for worship at the crossroads of Central New York, in the center of the city of Syracuse. But for centuries before Christians met for worship here, this place was the crossroads for the Onondaga Nation. The Onondaga Nation is part of a group of First Nations peoples in the Northeastern United States, known as the Haudenosaunee Confederacy, or the Iroquois Confederacy. Haudenosaunee means 'people who are building long houses'. Around the year 1700 the Haudenosaunee Confederacy included six groups of First Nations peoples, extending across land that currently includes New York, extending north into Ontario and Quebec, extending south into the Ohio Valley, Kentucky, and Virginia, and east into the New England States. Onondaga means 'People of the Hills'. The Onondaga Nation was at the geographical center of the Haudenosaunee Confederacy. Historically, members and representatives of the six nations met right here, in the center of what we call Onondaga County, for cultural gatherings and to meet as a governing body. Although the British promised the Haudenosaunee the right of self-control and self-governance, the British 'gave' the territory of the Onondaga Nation to the United States government in the Treaty of Paris that was signed at the end of the Revolutionary War in 1783.

The Onondaga people have deep spiritual traditions and practices. Thanksgiving is a central element of Onondaga culture, often expressed in their singing and dancing. According to *The Journal of American Folklore* the Onondaga peoples historically practiced a type of confession of sins during religious services. With humility and gratitude, we acknowledge that we gather for worship on the territory of the Onondaga Nation.