

## Doctrine of Discovery Resolution

Mountain Sky Conference United Women in Faith

*Whereas*, in 2007 the United Nations passed the “Declaration of Indigenous Peoples” that called into question the validity of the Christian Doctrine of Discovery, which for centuries served as “legal” rationale for stealing land and dehumanizing aboriginal peoples, as well as justification for the establishment of boarding schools throughout North America to “civilize” Indian children; and

*Whereas*, in 2009 President Obama pledged to the Native people the United States’ support of the “Declaration of Indigenous Peoples”; and

*Whereas*, “The Declaration of Indigenous Peoples” seeks to right the historical wrongs resulting from the use of the papal bulls of the Roman Catholic Church that are official decrees by the pope sanctioning the seizing of indigenous lands worldwide; and

*Whereas*, in 1452 the Papal Bull *Romanus Pontifex*, declaring war against all non-Christians throughout the world and sanctioning and promoting the conquest, colonization, and exploitation of non-Christian nations and their territories; and

*Whereas*, in 1453 Spain was given rights of conquest and dominion over one side of the globe and Portugal the other; and

*Whereas*, in 1823 the Christian Doctrine of Discovery was adopted into law by the US Supreme Court (*Johnson V. McIntosh*). Chief Justice Marshall observed that Christian European nations had assumed dominion over the lands of America— and upon discovery, Indians had lost their rights to complete sovereignty as independent nations and retained a mere right of occupancy in their lands;

*Whereas*, in 2005, Supreme Court Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg cited the doctrine of discovery in her majority opinion denying the right of the Oneida Nation of New York (ONNY) to reinstate their sovereign rights on parcels of land claimed to be part of the City of Sherrill, NY. (*City of Sherrill v. Oneida Indian Nation of New York*);

*Whereas*, in 2012, Resolution #3331 in the United Methodist Church’s Book of Resolutions was adopted calling for the condemnation of the Doctrine of Discovery as a legal document and the basis for the seizing of native lands and

abuses of human rights of indigenous peoples; and resolving to work toward the elimination of the Doctrine of Discovery to subjugate indigenous peoples of property and land;

*Whereas*, the Charter for Racial Justice (Resolution #3371 in the Book of Resolutions for the United Methodist Church) also cites the Christian Doctrine of Discovery and calls upon the church for a renewed commitment to the elimination of institutional racism;

*Whereas*, in March 2023, the Vatican formally repudiated the Doctrine of Discovery, stating that the papal decree “did not adequately reflect the equal dignity and rights of Indigenous peoples;

*Therefore, be it resolved*, all levels of United Women in Faith are called to condemn the Doctrine of Discovery as a legal document and basis for the seizing of native lands and abuses of human rights of indigenous peoples; and *Be it further resolved*, that United Women in Faith will work toward eliminating the Doctrine of Discovery as case law to subjugate indigenous peoples of property and land. Such actions that United Women in Faith will take include (but are not limited to)

- Advocating for the National Office to host a presentation about the Doctrine of Discovery for all members, using all available resources including the expertise of national directors, legal research organizations, and tribal representatives;
- Incorporating additional books into the United Women in Faith Reading Program addressing the Doctrine of Discovery so that UWFaith members can learn more and become advocates for the repudiation of the Doctrine of Discovery;
- Hosting a session about the Doctrine of Discovery, its history, impacts, and repudiation at the 2026 UWFaith Assembly;
- Urging the United Methodist Church to re-examine and strengthen its efforts to advocate for the repudiations of the Doctrine of Discovery at the 2024 General Conference;
- Contacting Members of Congress (US House of Representatives and Senators) to advocate for the repudiation of the Doctrine of Discovery and to join as co-sponsors to any bill introduced to repudiate the Doctrine;

- Contacting the Executive Branch of the United States government to advocate for an Executive Order repudiating the Doctrine of Discovery and urging the beginning of a healing process with Indigenous peoples.

Considered and Approved, October 14, 2023, Billings, MT