

Dear Friends in Faith Communities,

A call to faith communities has been issued by two very different organizations: the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues, and the World Council of Churches. Indigenous and religious leaders are urging all people of faith to take a deep look at the Doctrine of Discovery, the 15th century papal edict that authorized European Christian nations to “invade, capture, vanquish, and subdue all...pagans and other enemies of Christ...to reduce their persons to perpetual slavery...and...to take away all their possessions and property” (Pope Nicholas V).

Why do we need to dredge up the Doctrine of Discovery now, more than 500 years later? Because over the centuries, the Doctrine has been embedded in a world view of European superiority and domination and in the legal codes of the lands the Europeans colonized. It continues to be cited by courts in our country and others as justification for denying Indigenous Peoples their rights. The notion of European superiority and domination has been perpetuated by our schools and other institutions. The consequences can be seen in the disproportionate poverty and ill health of Native American people today. How much has it influenced our own thoughts and actions?

At the Boulder, Colorado, Quaker meeting, the Indigenous Peoples Concerns (IPC) Committee responded to the call from Indigenous and religious leaders by undertaking a study of the Doctrine of Discovery and of the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. The Declaration, approved by the UN General Assembly in 2007, is an effective antidote to the Doctrine of Discovery because it defines Indigenous Peoples’ inalienable rights, which the Doctrine of Discovery systematically violates. Boulder’s IPC committee asked itself, “How can we help educate Friends and other faith communities about these issues and encourage them to answer the call to repudiate the Doctrine of Discovery and support implementation of the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples?”

With the guidance and encouragement of Native American educators, we developed a 2-hour participatory workshop and a Resource Kit, and we presented these to the Boulder Friends meeting. Our meeting was led to approve a minute repudiating the Doctrine of Discovery and endorsing the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. Our minute now stands with similar statements that have been issued by various church bodies in Canada and the U.S.

In October 2013, the Boulder Friends Meeting established the Toward Right Relationship project to carry this work to the wider community. By now, we have presented our workshops more than 80 times in 16 states, at the invitation of churches, schools, colleges, universities, and civic organizations. Our goal is to raise awareness and concern about our broken relationships with the Indigenous peoples of our land, and to set our feet on a path toward right relationship.

The workshop for adults is called, *Roots of Injustice, Seeds of Change: Toward Right Relationship with Native Peoples*. It begins with a participatory exercise in which we hear the voices of America's past – the Native Peoples and the European popes, monarchs, and colonizers – and the voices that today are calling for healing and right relationship among all peoples and with the land. The exercise is followed by a period of reflection and sharing.

We also offer a 50-minute program for middle school and high school students, called *“Re-Discovering America: Understanding Colonization.”*

Native American facilitators in the Toward Right Relationship project also present workshops to Native audiences (tribal schools, colleges, and communities), called *“Native History, Native Rights: Roots of Injustice, Seeds of Change.”*

In the Doctrine of Discovery, we find the roots of injustice. In the U.N. Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, we find the seeds of change. How can we nurture these seeds to bring forth the fruits of right relationship among all peoples?

“This workshop is an innovative and impactful step towards healing. Working with the truth that has never been told about the American myth, is vital to all of us in our country if we are to move forward in a more healthy way.” -- Brett Shelton (Lakota), Staff Attorney, Native American Rights Fund

“Like everyone else I ask, I did not know about the Doctrine of Discovery. The [workshop] was an amazing experience that I expect to remember till my dying day. The mix of clear statements, together with the experiential learning, sent those lessons deep into my understanding.”

--Jim Grant, Acadiana Friends Meeting, Louisiana

“I respected very much the talking circle after the exercise. This program brought up emotions that I haven’t let myself feel for a while. Now I am ready for action and my mind is spinning with ideas.”

--Nico Larson, Naropa University student

Please contact me if you would like to learn more about the Toward Right Relationship workshops or request a presentation in your community.

In Friendship,

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