

1 The Executive Council recommends this resolution be sent to a committee of the General Synod

2
3 **CALLING FOR THE UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST TO REPUDIATE THE**
4 **DOCTRINE OF DISCOVERY WHICH AUTHORIZED THE GENOCIDE OF INDIAN**
5 **PEOPLE AND THE THEFT OF INDIAN LANDS**

6
7 **A Resolution of Witness**

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9 **Submitted by the Dakota Association of the South Dakota Conference,**
10 **the Council for American Indian Ministry and the Justice and Witness Ministries.**

11
12 **SUMMARY**

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14 In 1095, at the beginning of the Crusades, Pope Urban II issued an edict – the *Papal Bull Terra*
15 *Nullius* (meaning empty land). It gave the kings and princes of Europe the right to "discover" or
16 claim land in non-Christian areas. This policy was extended in 1452 when Pope Nicholas V
17 issued the bull *Romanus Pontifex*, declaring war against all non-Christians throughout the world
18 and authorizing the conquest of their nations and territories.

19 These edicts treated non-Christians as uncivilized and subhuman, and therefore without rights to
20 any land or nation. Christian leaders claimed a God-given right to take control of all lands and to
21 justify wars of conquest, colonization, and slavery.

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23 By 1492, this *Doctrine of Discovery* was a well-established idea in the Christian world. As
24 Columbus reached the Americas he performed a ceremony to "take possession" of all lands
25 "discovered," meaning all territory not occupied by Christians. By this means Pope Alexander VI
26 declared the "Christian Empire" would be propagated. While later popes denounced the
27 dehumanization of Native Americans none of the Papal Bulls previously declaring all
28 "discovered" lands belong to Europeans have been repealed.

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30 King Henry VII adopted the Doctrine of Discovery granting his explorers to assert dominion and
31 title over all non-Christian lands with the Church's blessing.

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33 In a unanimous decision, Chief Justice John Marshall wrote the Christian European nations had
34 assumed complete control over the lands of America during the "Age of Discovery." Upon
35 winning independence in 1776 he asserted the U.S. inherited authority over these lands from
36 Great Britain, "notwithstanding the occupancy of the natives, who were heathens..." thus
37 incorporating the theological justification into American Federal law. This is found in a
38 unanimous decision, *Johnson v. M'Intosh*, 21 U.S. 543, 5 L.Ed. 681,8 Wheat. 543, March 10,
39 1823. Walter Echo-Hawk has recorded ten more Supreme Court decisions which reaffirm the
40 Doctrine. Justice John Marshall ominously described the American judicial system as "the
41 Courts of the conqueror."

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43 The Doctrine remains law to this day and has effected several significant decisions in the past
44 several decades.

47 **BIBLICAL, THEOLOGICAL, AND ETHICAL RATIONALE**

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49 This Resolution calls upon the United Church of Christ to move beyond the theology which
50 authorized the Doctrine of Discovery. It requires us to understand the relationship between
51 Christian faith and culture, mission and coercion and the power of the Church and its theology to
52 judgmentally denigrate the "other." The biblical story of Conquest in which the Israelites
53 destroyed the Canaanites was never an appropriate analogy for the invasion of Europeans into
54 North America.

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56 The Doctrine is a case study of the danger when church and state coalesce into a single mission
57 with a church providing theological rationale and the state enforcing the church's theology. It
58 calls us to be clear about the relationship between church and state and the theological value of
59 the separation.

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61 God's mission is about healing, serving, transforming and justice as love made visible. We
62 choose to believe in the biblical mandate to love God, neighbor and self. This calls for building
63 up, not tearing down.

64
65 Micah 6:8 summarizes it: "He has told you, O mortal, what is good; and what does the Lord
66 require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and walk humbly with your God."

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68 Our mandate is to do God's mission with the Micah verse to inform our own spirits.

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70 **THE TEXT OF THE MOTION**

71
72 *Whereas* from the Crusades through the 16th century the Roman Catholic Church promulgated
73 several Papal Bulls which authorized and justified the destruction, killing and appropriating
74 lands of indigenous peoples. These Papal Bulls formulated the theological base for what became
75 the tragic genocide of American Indians; and

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77 *Whereas* Protestant churches beginning as early as 1609 when English clergy in Jamestown
78 developed a coherent narrative that brought together a legal rationalization for invading America,
79 debasing American Indians and made a Christian commitment to convert Indians – a
80 commitment which they never delivered; and

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82 *Whereas* the Supreme Court in 1823 in Johnson v. McIntosh incorporated into American law the
83 Doctrine by claiming the United States inherited the American conquest from the English; and

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85 *Whereas* 1845 was the first time the phrase Manifest Destiny was used to affirm the USA was
86 called by Providence to dominate the continent for the free development of America's inevitable
87 growth. Manifest Destiny grew out of, and was based on, the Doctrine of Discovery; and

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89 *Whereas* the United Nations adopted a resolution entitled United Nations Declaration on the
90 Rights of Indigenous Peoples in 2007 requesting nations to affirm, it took the United States four
91 years before it signed it; and

92 *Whereas* the World Council of Churches called upon its member churches to adopt its Statement
93 on the Doctrine of Discovery Impact on Indigenous Peoples, the UCC has not.. The Episcopal
94 Church and the Council of Bishops of the United Methodist Church have done so.

95 *Whereas* there is a growing awareness and concern in the United States about the Doctrine, the
96 United Church of Christ, given its commitment to justice, has not yet participated in a formal
97 manner; and

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99 *Whereas* not only has the Doctrine never been repudiated, court decisions against Indians have
100 been made within the past several decades based on the Doctrine.

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102 THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the Twenty-ninth General Synod of the United Church of
103 Christ repudiates the Doctrine of Discovery and declares the doctrine to be a shameful part of
104 United States history.

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106 BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Twenty-ninth General Synod of the United Church of
107 Christ joins with its ecumenical partners to explore ways to compensate Indians for lands that
108 were stolen and are still being stolen and which are now the United States of America.

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110 BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Twenty-ninth General Synod of the United Church of
111 Christ requests that Justice Witness Ministries join with the Council for American Indian
112 Ministry to prepare educational materials for the churches.

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114 BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Twenty-ninth General Synod of the United Church of
115 Christ requests that the substantive study materials developed by JWM and CAIM be presented
116 to the Thirtieth General Synod with suggestions for how the UCC might undertake various forms
117 of action. The Episcopal Church provides a model for such follow through.

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119 BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED the Twenty-ninth General Synod of the United Church of Christ
120 calls upon the United States government to repudiate the Doctrine of Discovery.

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122 **FUNDING**

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124 The funding for the implementation of this resolution will be made in accordance with the
125 overall mandates of the affected agencies and the funds available.

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127 **IMPLEMENTATION**

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129 The Collegium of officers, in consultation with appropriate ministries or other entities the United
130 Church of Christ will determine the implementing body.