

Repudiation of the Doctrine of Discovery

Trinity Church

We, Trinity Church, repudiate [reject] the Doctrine of Discovery and lament its effects on Indigenous lands and peoples, and its ongoing grip on the Christian imagination. The Doctrine of Discovery wove a complex web of spiritual, political, and legal justifications to colonize and seize land not inhabited by Christians and set the foundation for oppressive systems of power that the Church has participated in and continues to uphold today.

Foundational elements for the Doctrine of Discovery can be found in a series of papal bulls (documents governing the church and state) beginning in the 1100s. *Romanus Pontifex*, issued by Pope Nicholas V in 1455, granted the Portuguese a monopoly of trade with Africa, authorizing the enslavement of local people. *Inter Caetera*, issued by Pope Alexander VI in 1493, justified the claim of land and waterways allegedly discovered by Christian European explorers. These documents, and more, set the tone for the Doctrine of Discovery, which eventually inspired the wording of the founding documents for the United States, as well as the Monroe Doctrine, which declared U.S. hegemony over the Western Hemisphere. The result was the justification, or “Manifest Destiny”, of American expansion westward of all land from the Atlantic to the Pacific. We lament the result of the Supreme Court case, *Johnson v. M’Intosh*, where this Doctrine of Discovery became part of U.S. federal law and was subsequently utilized to dispossess Native peoples of their land.

Therefore, we acknowledge that the land on which we gather for worship was stolen from Native peoples, who were driven out of the area and of their native lands by genocide, force (through broken treaties and laws imposed upon their nation), and systematic dispossession. The Myaamiaki, Kaskaskia, and Kickapoo peoples* and their sovereign Nations have cared for, and are deeply a part of, this land - past, present, and future.

We confess that the Doctrine of Discovery has been, and continues to be, a shameful part of United States and Church history that has done spiritual and physical harm through the stripping of human rights. We lament the Church’s lead and involvement in breaking families, communities, and displacing people through land, boarding schools, and all acts of white-body supremacy. We recognize the racism that lives on and is perpetuated through the Doctrine of Discovery that still holds a grip on the collective Church and our individual lives.

We recognize the ways the Doctrine of Discovery has evolved from easily defined historical land theft and the genocide of Indigenous people, to the legal enslavement of Native and African people, to the internment of Asian American people, to American Jim Crow legislation, to the school-to-prison pipeline, to the current embedded supremacist policies, structures, and behaviors that continue to harm Black Indigenous People of Color (BIPOC), all around the world, but particularly in the United States.

We lament the lives lost and stand with our BIPOC siblings, in Indianapolis and across our country. Today, we recognize the urgent need to declare that Black bodies are the image of

God, and that Black lives matter. We condemn the continued use of force against our BIPOC family, particularly through police brutality. We condemn the racism that thrives in the structures that have formed and continue to form our country.

As followers of Jesus, we look to his example of how to embody Christ in this world. This leads us to move with the Spirit, to stand in the face of the empire, and to build the kin-dom by working toward justice. To serve and support and stand beside the oppressed. We, as a primarily white congregation, know that this is our work to do.

As we continue to learn how the land was stolen from Indigenous peoples, abandoned, and re-stolen from the Black, Asian, and Latinx communities that settled, we resolve to elevate the stories, experiences, and efforts of the BIPOC communities in which we reside. We commit to listening and learning about our own racism, to actively move toward healing the trauma of white-body supremacy, and growing to use our privilege to love and support our neighbors of color. We invite others to journey with us as we move forward in prayer and contemplative action.

We, Trinity Church, commit to anti-racist action and the work of decolonization, to being present where there is injustice. That we might live with a renewed Christian imagination as followers of Jesus who discover and embody the good news.

Resources:

<https://upstanderproject.org/firstlight/doctrine>

<https://www.rmselca.org/repudiation-doctrine-discovery>

<http://uccfiles.com/pdf/gs29-1.pdf>

*<https://native-land.ca/>

Further Study:

The Christian Imagination by Willie James Jennings

[The Doctrine of Discovery](#) explained by Mark Charles

"The Doctrine of Discovery" explained by Soong-Chan Rah

Unsettling Truths by Rah and Charles

My Grandmother's Hands by Resmaa Menakem