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

CALLING FOR THE UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST TO REPUDIATE THE
DOCTRINE OF DISCOVERY WHICH AUTHORIZED THE GENOCIDE OF INDIAN
PEOPLE AND THE THEFT OF INDIAN LANDS

A Resolution of Witness

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

SUMMARY

In 1095, at the beginning of the Crusades, Pope Urban II issued an edict – the Papal Bull Terra Nullius (meaning empty land). It gave the kings and princes of Europe the right to "discover" or claim land in non-Christian areas. This policy was extended in 1452 when Pope Nicholas V issued the bull Romanus Pontifex, declaring war against all non-Christians throughout the world and authorizing the conquest of their nations and territories. These edicts treated non-Christians as uncivilized and subhuman, and therefore without rights to any land or nation. Christian leaders claimed a God-given right to take control of all lands and to justify wars of conquest, colonization, and slavery.

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of Native Americans none of the Papal Bulls previously declaring all "discovered" lands belong to Europeans have been repealed.

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

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

The Doctrine remains law to this day and has effected several significant decisions in the past several decades.
This Resolution calls upon the United Church of Christ to move beyond the theology which authorized the Doctrine of Discovery. It requires us to understand the relationship between Christian faith and culture, mission and coercion and the power of the Church and its theology to judgmentally denigrate the "other." The biblical story of Conquest in which the Israelites destroyed the Canaanites was never an appropriate analogy for the invasion of Europeans into North America.

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

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

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

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

THE TEXT OF THE MOTION

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

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

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

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

Whereas the United Nations adopted a resolution entitled United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples in 2007 requesting nations to affirm, it took the United States four years before it signed it; and
Whereas the World Council of Churches called upon its member churches to adopt its Statement on the Doctrine of Discovery Impact on Indigenous Peoples, the UCC has not. The Episcopal Church and the Council of Bishops of the United Methodist Church have done so.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

FUNDING

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

IMPLEMENTATION

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