

# Doctrine of Discovery: Frequently Asked Questions

## **Q: What is the Doctrine of Discovery?**

**A:** The Doctrine of Discovery refers to the legal and religious justification used to take lands from Native peoples. The Doctrine first appeared in 15<sup>th</sup> Century papal edicts that allowed Christian European empires to claim “discovered” lands and forcibly convert or enslave Native peoples. The Doctrine appears in a more secular form in U.S. Supreme Court decisions and still defines U.S.-Indian law. Religious and secular actions that have stemmed from this world view have deeply hurt Native peoples and their languages, cultures and religions.



## **Q: The Doctrine of Discovery is 500 years old. Why is it relevant for people of faith today?**

**A:** The Doctrine of Discovery is the starting point for a much larger discussion. The Doctrine’s world view has continued for centuries. It is reflected in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century concept of Manifest Destiny. It is reflected in the broken promises and treaties. It is reflected in the boarding school era that broke apart Native families and crushed Native languages and cultures. By many statistics—such as poverty, income and health—the historical trauma suffered by Native Americans is still very present today. This history calls for a response from people of faith.

## **Q: This is such a huge and complicated issue. How can we expect to make any progress?**

**A:** This is a huge and complicated issue with no easy path to healing. The scope of the challenge should not deter the undertaking. It starts with learning more about our state’s history and being open to hearing stories from Native Americans that are very different from the ones many of us learned in history classes. Some denominations have taken the symbolic step of formally repudiating the Doctrine of Discovery. More concretely, there is much work to be done to undo the harm to Native American language and culture. Gaining clarity on what to do next has to start with learning and dialogue.

## **Q: What are possible next steps?**

**A:** Encourage your faith community to take these issues seriously and learn more about this history. See: <http://spinterfaith.org/healing-minnesota-stories/doctrine-of-discovery.html>