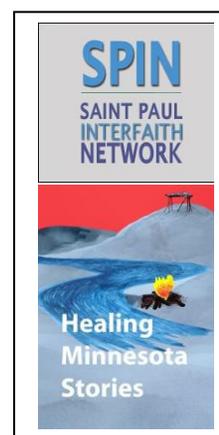


Moving Towards Reconciliation & Healing

What does reconciliation and healing look like? Faith communities and government bodies have started making small steps to figure that out. Some faith communities have made symbolic statements repudiating the Doctrine of Discovery. Some governments have created Truth and Reconciliation Commissions in an effort to improve relationships with Native people and seek ways to repair past harms. Below is a summary of ongoing efforts.



Denominational Action

Episcopal Church:¹ In 2009, the Episcopal General Convention repudiated the Doctrine of Discovery “as fundamentally opposed to the Gospel of Jesus Christ and our understanding of the inherent rights that individuals and peoples have received from God.” It sought a review of “policies and programs with a view to exposing the historical reality and impact of the Doctrine of Discovery” and eliminating its presence in policies, programs and structures. In 2012, Presiding Bishop Katharine Jefferts Schori wrote a pastoral letter, saying: “Our Christian heritage has taught us that a healed community of peace is only possible in the presence of justice for all peoples.”

Unitarian Universalist Association (UUA):² In 2012, the UUA General Assembly repudiated the Doctrine of Discovery. Its resolution said the Doctrine was “a relic of colonialism, feudalism, and religious, cultural, and racial biases having no place in the modern day treatment of indigenous peoples.” It invited indigenous partners to a Truth and Reconciliation process that would look at the church’s “complicity in the structures and policies that oppress indigenous peoples and the earth.”

United Methodist Church:³ In 2012, the United Methodist’s General Conference condemned the Doctrine of Discovery. The statement said the church: “will work toward eliminating the Doctrine of Discovery as a means to subjugate Indigenous peoples of property and land.” It would “bring attention to and educate the Methodist Church on the damaging results and further implications of the Doctrine.” For the church “to repent for past sins it needs to be aware of this ancient doctrine,” it said.

New York Friends Meeting (Quakers):⁴ The New York Friends repudiated the Doctrine of Discovery in 2012. Its statement read: “We cannot accept that the Doctrine of Discovery was ever a true authority for the forced takings of lands and the enslavement or extermination of peoples. ... We honor the inalienable rights of Indigenous Peoples to their homelands, water, spiritual practices, languages, cultural practices, and to self-government ...”

¹ http://www.episcopalarchives.org/cgi-bin/acts/acts_resolution.pl?resolution=2009-D035

² <http://www.uua.org/multiculturalism/dod/230890.shtml>

³ http://unyumc.s3.amazonaws.com/8900C008724A490D97978F6CFCD9B260_UMC%20Repudiation%20W%20%282%29.pdf

⁴ http://www.nyym.org/sites/default/files/Minute_Doctrine_of_Discovery.pdf

[United Church of Christ \(UCC\)](#):⁵ In 2013, the UCC General Synod passed a resolution repudiating the Doctrine of Discovery. It said the church: “declares and confesses that the doctrine has been and continues to be a shameful part of United States and our Church’s history.” The church joins in efforts “to explore ways to compensate American Indians, Alaskan Natives, and Native Hawaiians for lands and resources that were stolen and are still being stolen.”

Truth and Reconciliation Commissions

A number of countries have set up Truth and Reconciliation Commissions to heal conflicts—from Argentina to South Africa. Here are two that focus on indigenous people of North America.

[Maine Wabanaki-State Child Welfare Truth and Reconciliation Commission](#):⁶ In 2011, Wabanaki Chiefs, Maine Governor Paul LePage and the Maine Indian Tribal-State Commission agreed to create the commission. This “represents the first truth and reconciliation effort within U.S. territory that has been collaboratively developed between Indian nations and a state government,” its website said. It has three goals: 1) to create a common understanding about what happened and is happening to Wabanaki children in the child welfare system; 2) to use the information to implement systems change to better support the children and families served; and 3) to promote healing both among Wabanaki children and their families and the people who administered a widely acknowledged less than ideal system.

[Reconciliation Canada](#):⁷ The work of Reconciliation Canada grew out of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, which was a response to Indian Residential Schools Settlement Agreement. That work has become part of a larger Truth and Reconciliation effort. The group’s website says: “Reconciliation Canada is building new relationships between Aboriginal peoples and all Canadians – relationships built on a foundation of openness, dignity, understanding and hope. Our focus extends beyond the Indian Residential School experience to those communities who have received official apologies from the government of Canada, including the Jewish, Sikh, Chinese and Japanese peoples. Our initiatives engage people from every part of Canadian society in open and honest conversation about our diverse histories and experiences in order to build resilient and sustainable communities.”

Questions

- What is your initial reaction reading the words of these various resolutions and commissions? Do you feel hopeful? Overwhelmed? Confused? Energized?
- Do you think these resolutions will make a difference? What phrases spoke to you most?
- Is it important to you that your church or denomination take action to move toward reconciliation and healing? What are some ideas that give you a sense of fairness and hope?

⁵ <http://uccfiles.com/pdf/g29-1.pdf>

⁶ <http://www.mainewabanakitrc.org/>

⁷ <http://reconciliationcanada.ca/welcome/history/>