

Educating and Engaging Your Congregation/Community

For religious and spiritual communities wishing to engage in concrete acts to repudiate the Doctrine of Discovery, it's important that the work begin with a commitment by membership to learning and personal transformation. This work needs to be rooted in justice, not charity. It needs to be rooted in understanding the systems of colonialization that brought us to this point in our history. This work needs to be ongoing, not just a one-time event. Some communities have been on this path for a while, others are just getting started.

Here are some steps that religious and spiritual communities can take to engage in reflection, dialogue and both individual and community growth.

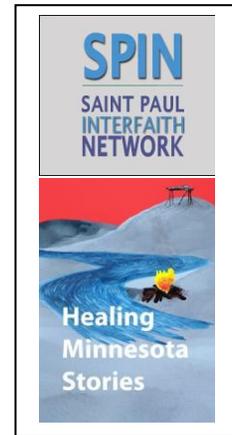
Liturgical Changes

Holidays: Reflect on how your community recognizes (or does not recognize) such holidays at Columbus Day or Thanksgiving. Does it continue the dominant narrative that Columbus “discovered” America or that the Pilgrims and Natives lived in harmony? How might this be an opportunity for your community to learn about and critique the Doctrine of Discovery? Other religious communities have developed alternative services for these holidays that could be borrowed and modified.

Honoring Statements: Reading an “Honoring Statement” at the beginning of a service or gathering is one way to remind people about the Doctrine of Discovery’s impact. It honors the original people of the land. This has become commonplace in Australia and is gaining traction here in the United States. Here is our example, but communities need to develop their own, based on their own indigenous history:

Healing Minnesota Stories acknowledges the Dakota peoples on whose land we meet. We thank them and their relatives for their care of the land, and we recognize their continuing connection to the land, waters and community. We pay our respects to them and their culture; both past and present.

Review Your Artwork: What does your art say about your view of history and who is welcome in your worship space? One issue that some Christian churches wrestle with is the image of the white Jesus. White Jesus is a clear reflection of the Doctrine of Discovery. It subtly continues the narrative that whiteness is divine, that God intended America for white people. The art you have not only sends a message to newcomers to your community, but it reinforces narratives for long-time members. Gloria Dei is currently discussing replacing its white Jesus imagery. Cherokee Park United could not afford to remove its white Jesus stain glass window, but it projects alternative images of Jesus on the wall on Sundays, reflecting different cultural communities. These conversations are difficult but essential.



Adult and Youth Education

How have you built a discussion of repudiating the Doctrine of Discovery into your adult and youth education classes? Some religious communities have developed materials that could be used broadly. The [Unitarian Universalist Association](#) has a [detailed webpage](#) with a curriculum. Others have created Doctrine of Discovery videos, including the [The Episcopal Church](#) and the [United Church of Christ](#). Some have used a book as a study guide, such as the United Methodist Church's use of [On This Spirit Walk](#). There are many, many resources available, for youth and adult education – more than can be listed on this page. Please contact us if you are looking for help with resources.

Events

Religious communities also can offer special events to educate their members and the broader community on the present day realities of the Doctrine of Discovery. Here are a few recent examples that Healing Minnesota Stories has either led or supported.

Sacred Site Tours: Healing Minnesota Stories and other groups offer tours of sacred Dakota sites in the Twin Cities area. These tours take people to places of great trauma and great healing, and help them get out of their heads and into their hearts.

Retreats: Clouds in Water Zen Center created a three-day [Bearing Witness Retreat](#); it was Native-led and aimed at an interfaith audience. The event included a sacred site tour, panel discussions, dialogue, and reflection.

Film Screenings: The United Methodist Church organized a series screenings of Sheldon Wolfchild's Doctrine of Discovery: Unmasking the Domination Code: one in the west metro, one in Minneapolis, and one in St. Paul. Each event included a post-film Q&A with Wolfchild. At the end of the third screening, Bruce Ough of the Minnesota Annual Conference, announced the church's intention to rematriate the sacred Red Rock to the Dakota people. Healing Minnesota Stories can help coordinate these screenings.

Community Gatherings: Grace Lutheran Church of Apple Valley hosted an event called the Dakota Experience which highlighted both trauma experienced by Native peoples and the incredible gifts they bring to community. The indoor/outdoor gathering included storytelling, a bon fire, Native foods, teepees, horses from the Shakopee Mdewakanton Community and a discussion of the importance of horses to Dakota people, an eagle from the Raptor Center and discussion about the significance of eagles to Dakota people, a display showing the images of Manifest Destiny in the Minnesota Capitol art, and Tents of Witness brought by World Without Genocide. The event drew hundreds, many from outside the regular church community.