

Report to NEJNAMC on attending the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues, 10/18

That we ask the right questions is more important than assuming we know the right answers. When I attended the 18th session of United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues in April, 2018, as a representative of the Northeastern Jurisdiction Committee on Native American Ministries, I didn't know what the right questions might be. I came to listen and learn. I had been aware of the Forum's yearly gathering and work as an advisory body to the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations but knew little of its actual workings. My hope was to expand my understanding of the challenges which face indigenous peoples throughout the world.

The theme of the Permanent Forum this year was "Indigenous peoples' collective rights to lands, territories, and natural resources." Indigenous peoples gathered to voice their concerns and share their knowledge and experiences. On a global stage, this diverse group echoed the challenges which face Native Americans in the United States and more. Individuals spoke of challenges to land rights, human rights violations, environmental injustice, erosion of language and culture, and the need for self determination.

The common thread in their stories was the continued affects of the Doctrine of Discovery, colonialism, and assimilation which undermine indigenous peoples rights to sovereignty and self determination and their ability to preserve land, language, and culture. The Doctrine of Discovery, a series of Papal Bulls issued by the church in the 1500s, some prior to Columbus's arrival in the "New World," gave explorers permission to claim the "non-Christian" lands they "discovered" for their monarchy and to convert, enslave, or kill the people who were living there. Today, the Doctrine of Discovery continues to subjugate Indigenous peoples.

Reflecting on my experience, I now have a question. How do we help raise the voice of our native brothers and sisters' stories to a level that those in power will hear and respond with meaningful actions? The testimonies shared brought home the need for every member of the United Methodist Church to continue raising awareness of injustices and to stand in solidarity with our Native brothers and sisters. We can do this as part of the journey we began with the Act of Repentance. We can all play a vital role as we listen to and share the stories of those who have lost much and continue to be impacted by unjust systems. Some of these stories are available on the Northeastern Jurisdiction Native American Ministries Committee Facebook page. I encourage you to listen and share what you learn.

Motivated by my experience, on August 18-19, 2018, I attended a conference in Syracuse, Taking on the Doctrine of Discovery, What are our Next Steps? It was held at the Skä·noñh—Great Law of Peace Center. The purpose of the conference was to share current actions, understand history and law, and examine current realities and efforts toward decolonization.

Next Steps discussed at the conference included:

- Need to operate from position of equality for all our relations. Work toward leadership roles for indigenous people in situations where there is a sharing of power.
- Educate regarding Doctrine of Discovery which is still law in the United States and other countries.
- Work within UNPFII.
- Continue to focus on Roman Catholic repudiation.
- Develop allies (Patagonia paid for the Onondaga signs indicating danger of eating fish from Onondaga Lake. Syracuse City posts them; Onondaga county will not).
- Work with churches to address history and continued injustices (The United Methodist Church adopted a resolution at the 2016 General Conference that outlines the history and impact of the

church on Native Americans entitled, “Native Peoples and the United Methodist Church,” specifically rejecting the Doctrine of Discovery.).

- Stress education of our indigenous youth so identity is not lost to western society.
- Revise education curriculum in public schools
- Celebrate Indigenous Peoples Day as a way to educate.
- Support/participate in anti-racism training

I am thankful to have attended the Permanent Forum. I pray my voice remains strong and is joined by others as we call for all our brothers and sisters to be included as equal members of God’s creation.

In love and faith,

Sharon Schmit

Questions for our group:

1. Where do you see the Doctrine of Discovery and colonization at work in current events today? (stereotypes, mascots, poverty, racism, legal decisions, exploitation of resources, hunting and fishing rights, education curriculum, denial of sovereignty ...)
2. How can NEJNAMC and our CONAMs respond?

Suggested Resources

Pagans in the Promised Land: Decoding the Doctrine of Christian Discovery, Steven Newcomb. Fulcrum, 2008

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5nU9AtP9yJ8> Lakota Nation and UCC member Toni Buffalo describes how the Doctrine of Discovery — used by invaders to claim the lands of indigenous peoples — has impacted indigenous peoples over time, destroying their spirituality and culture. The video also explains the role of the UCC in working to right the wrongs done in previous times and that are still prevalent today.

Study Guide Dismantling the Doctrine of Discovery

https://doctrineofdiscoverymenno.files.wordpress.com/2015/06/dofd_studyguide_handouts.pdf

What is the Doctrine of Discovery, Mark Charles <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=N3oc84aLC-Q> A brief 7 minute video describing the Papal Bulls of the 14th Century known as the Doctrine of Discovery and their influence on the foundations of the United States of America.(7min)

World Council of Churches Executive Committee. “Statement on the Doctrine of Discovery and Its Enduring Impact on Indigenous Peoples.” WCC website, February 17, 2012. Accessed October 30, 2017. www.oikoumene.org/en/resources/documents/executive-committee/2012-02/statement-on-the-doctrine-of-discovery-and-its-enduring-impact-on-indigenous-peoples.

Web sites:

doctrineofdiscovery.org

Doctrine of Discovery at Creation Justice Ministry: <http://www.creationjustice.org/indigenous.html>