



**REPUDIATING**  
**THE DOCTRINE**  
*of* **DISCOVERY**

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*A litany for churches*





LITANY

# REPUDIATING THE DOCTRINE OF DISCOVERY

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## Introduction and Background for Leaders

This Litany responds to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's Call to Action #49:<sup>1</sup>

*We call upon all religious denominations and faith groups who have not already done so to repudiate concepts used to justify European sovereignty over Indigenous lands and peoples, such as the Doctrine of Discovery and terra nullius.*

This litany of repudiation is intended to publicly acknowledge a long, untold history; to confess wrongdoing; to declare our rejection of the attitudes and judgments that characterize the path we walk on; and to re-imagine our life together in a new way that respects all peoples, Indigenous and Settler.

*The “Doctrine of Discovery” is a philosophical and legal framework dating to the 15th century that gave Christian governments moral and legal rights to invade and seize Indigenous lands and dominate Indigenous peoples. The patterns of oppression that continue to dispossess Indigenous Peoples of their lands today are found in numerous historical documents such as Papal Bulls, Royal Charters, and*

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<sup>1</sup> *Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada Calls to Action*, Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, 2015, p. 5, [http://trc.ca/assets/pdf/Calls\\_to\\_Action\\_English2.pdf](http://trc.ca/assets/pdf/Calls_to_Action_English2.pdf).

*U.S. Supreme Court rulings as recent as 2005.<sup>2</sup>*

*In a ruling in 2014, the Supreme Court of Canada upheld European assertion of sovereignty over land occupied by Indigenous peoples.<sup>3</sup>*

*Collectively, these and other concepts form a paradigm of domination that legitimates extraction industries that displace and destroy many Indigenous peoples and other vulnerable communities, as well as harm the earth.<sup>4</sup>*

*For more than five centuries, the Doctrine of Discovery and the laws based upon it have legalized the theft of land, labor, and resources from Indigenous peoples across the world. This Doctrine originated with the Christian church, and it is now the church's responsibility to dismantle it.<sup>5</sup>*

## **Repudiation**

The church's responsibility for dismantling the doctrine begins with repudiating it. With this litany, we add our hearts and voices to the repudiation already declared by Mennonite Church Canada, the United Church of Canada, the Anglican Church of Canada, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada, the World Council of Churches, and many other Christian churches.

## **Respect and Justice**

For ongoing and future relations, this litany suggests replacing the Doctrine of Discovery with the Law of Respect which recognises a just sharing of land and societal resources. The term comes from Oren Lyons, respected Faithkeeper of the Seneca Nation.<sup>6</sup> A law to treat all people and other beings with respect is consistent with the Golden Rule taught by many faiths around the world, including Christianity.

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<sup>2</sup> "What is the Doctrine of Discovery," Dismantling the Doctrine of Discovery: A movement of Anabaptist people, <https://dofdmenno.org/>.

<sup>3</sup> "Tsilhqot'in Nation v. British Columbia," Supreme Court of Canada, <https://scc-csc.lexum.com/scc-csc/scc-csc/en/item/14246/index.do>, par.69.

<sup>4</sup> "What is the Doctrine of Discovery" in *Dismantling the Doctrine of Discovery*.

<sup>5</sup> "What is the Doctrine of Discovery" Dismantling the Doctrine of Discovery: A movement of Anabaptist people, <https://dofdmenno.org/>.

<sup>6</sup> "Oren Lyons on the Indigenous View of the World," YouTube, September 16, 2016, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kbwSwUMNyPU&t=272s>, see 6:30-7:05.

The Law of Respect, as applied here, is foundational to building healthy, respectful relationships along pathways of reconciliation and reparation.

- **Respect** acknowledges the inherent value and wisdom of Indigenous spiritualities, traditions, cultures, and knowledges (see *TRC Final Report Call to Action #60*).<sup>7</sup>
- **Reconciliation** takes action to establish relationships based on respect and trust.
- **Reparation** emerges from dialogue and negotiation between Indigenous and Settler nations. It acts to make right historic injustices, interrupt current injustices, and to ensure justice will be carried out from this moment forward.

The relationship between Indigenous peoples and settlers began with various agreements or treaties. In 1613, the Haudenosaunee and the Dutch established the Two Row Wampum Treaty. They agreed their two nations would live side by side in peace and friendship forever as equals on the land. In talks leading up to this treaty, the Dutch compared their relationship with the Haudenosaunee to that of father and son. But the Haudenosaunee replied they would be like brothers, travelling side by side—as represented in the wampum belt.

The belt's two parallel rows of purple beads symbolized their non-interference in each other's internal affairs. And so it was agreed. Agreements with the British Crown followed the same foundational principles.

We know, however, that most of those agreements were broken. In response, we created this litany.

## Designed to Meet Your Needs

Worship needs and settings vary, so we offer three versions of the litany for repudiating the Doctrine of Discovery.

- The full version—approximately fifteen minutes—introduces the Doctrine of Discovery and then responds to the injustices it inflicted with a lament and a commitment to reparation.

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<sup>7</sup> *Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada Calls to Action*, p.6.

- Two shorter versions assume congregations have already reflected on the historical teaching covered in the full version. The medium version is roughly seven minutes in length, the short version about four.
- All litanies offer opportunities to tailor the content for your congregation. For example, you might want to change the welcome or the prayer of thanksgiving in specific ways that meet your congregation's needs. When you acknowledge Traditional Lands and First People, you'll want to insert the correct information for your context.
- Each litany includes links to supportive web resources.

## Resources for Study:

- “Dismantling the Doctrine of Discovery: A movement of Anabaptist People of Faith,” <https://dofdmenno.org/>.
- “Indigenous Title and the Doctrine of Discovery,” Indigenous Corporate Training, Inc., <https://www.ictinc.ca/blog/indigenous-title-and-the-doctrine-of-discovery>.
- “Dismantling the Doctrine of Discovery,” Assembly of First Nations, <https://www.afn.ca/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/18-01-22-Dismantling-the-Doctrine-of-Discovery-EN.pdf>.
- “Resolution on The Church and the Doctrine of Discovery: 2016 Mennonite Church Canada Assembly,” <https://www.commonword.ca/ResourceView/82/19087>.
- “Repudiation of the Doctrine of Discovery,” the United Church of Canada, <https://united-church.ca/social-action/justice-initiatives/reconciliation-and-indigenous-justice/doctrine-discovery>.
- “Repudiate the Doctrine of Discovery,” Anglican Church of Canada, <http://archive.anglican.ca/gs2010/resolutions/ao86/>.
- “Indigenous Rights and Relationships,” Evangelical Lutheran church in Canada, <https://elcic.ca/CompassionateJustice/IndigenousRightsandRelationships.cfm>.

- “Statement on the doctrine of discovery and its enduring impact on Indigenous Peoples,” World Council of Churches, <https://doctrineofdiscovery.org/assets/pdfs/wcc-document-021712.pdf>.
- “Two Row Wampum – Gä•sweñta’,” Onondaga Nation, <https://www.onondaganation.org/culture/wampum/two-row-wampum-belt-guswentala/>.
- “A short introduction to the Two Row Wampum,” *Briarpatch*, <https://briarpatchmagazine.com/articles/view/a-short-introduction-to-the-two-row-wampum>.
- “Land Rights: A Global Solution for the Six Nations of the Grand River,” Six Nations Lands & Resources Department, <https://iaac-aeic.gc.ca/050/documents/p80100/130877E.pdf>.
- *The United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples*, United Nations, A/RES/61/295, September 13, 2007, [https://www.un.org/development/desa/indigenouspeoples/wp-content/uploads/sites/19/2018/11/UNDRIP\\_E\\_web.pdf](https://www.un.org/development/desa/indigenouspeoples/wp-content/uploads/sites/19/2018/11/UNDRIP_E_web.pdf).



# REPUDIATING THE DOCTRINE OF DISCOVERY

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## Full Version

### Introduction

Leader:

#### Welcome

*(Feel free to create words of welcome appropriate to your setting and congregation.)*

Welcome to this portion of our worship service. It represents a significant moment in the life of our congregation, a time to acknowledge a difficult truth, a difficult story.

Stories are powerful. Like lenses in a pair of glasses, the stories we trust can clarify or blur truth about the world we live in. Like a framework, the stories we trust give shape to our lives.

Today, our story is about the relationship between Settlers and Indigenous peoples. We are here as Settlers who displaced people indigenous to the land. We Settlers have occupied the land for only a few centuries. Indigenous peoples have lived on this land for thousands of years, and they are still here. As the original stewards of this land, Indigenous peoples hold inherent rights and responsibilities to their ancestral inheritance. Through their laws



and jurisdiction, Indigenous peoples maintain and uphold their distinct relationship to the land.

We occupy this land because of a story most of us have never heard: the Doctrine of Discovery. This story was a vital part of the philosophical framework and spiritual foundation that brought the first Europeans to North America. Though this story is largely hidden today, it is one that impacts all of us, here, on these lands.

Leader:

### **Opening**

*(Feel free to adapt this prayer of thanksgiving for your setting and congregation.)*

Creator God,

We raise gratitude to you:

For the Love you demonstrate in creating all life.

For the Love you reveal in the redeeming work of Jesus.

For the Love you bestow upon the body of Christ, your church.

We ask you to open our ears, our hearts and our minds so we may understand how our nation has desecrated your Love.

As we lament the dismissive and unjust treatment of the Original

Peoples, we ask you to help us imagine new ways of living together.  
Amen.

Leader:

### **Acknowledgment of Traditional Lands and First People**

*(Adapt this acknowledgment according to the ancestral and treaty territory your congregation is situated upon.<sup>8</sup>)*

We acknowledge our worship takes place on the ancestral and treaty territory of the Original Peoples of the Chonnonton, the Haudenosaunee of the Grand River and the Anishnaabeg People of the Mississaugas of the Credit. We recognize today that we

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<sup>8</sup> Learn about the Traditional Lands and First Peoples of your area at Native Land Digital, <https://native-land.ca/>.

benefit from the colonial violence that erased Indigenous histories, broken treaties and stolen land. We pledge to work for justice and reconciliation in a new relationship between Settler and Indigenous peoples.

## Doctrine of Discovery

Leader:

Today we also acknowledge and confess a darker truth.

All:

We acknowledge the Doctrine of Discovery was taught by the European Christian Church. It was based on another legal doctrine, *terra nullius*, which held that no one owned land prior to the assertion of European sovereignty.<sup>9</sup> The Doctrine of Discovery provided a religious rationalization for theft, murder, and the annihilation of people living on these lands which European invaders wished to appropriate for their own use.

Reader 1:

In 1455, as Portugal was conducting forays into western Africa, a document called the *Romanus Pontifex* acknowledged the Pope as the earthly representative of Jesus Christ. That document gave authorization for the King to “*invade, search out, capture, vanquish and subdue all Muslims and pagans whatsoever and other enemies of Christ ... and the kingdoms [and] ... possessions ... held by them and to reduce their persons to perpetual slavery and to appropriate to himself and his successors ... the kingdoms, possessions ... and to convert them to his and [successors] use and profit.*”<sup>10</sup>

All:

*Silence to a count of three.*

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<sup>9</sup> “The Doctrine of Discovery,” Christian Aboriginal Infrastructure Developments, <https://native-land.ca/>.

<sup>10</sup> “The Bull Romanus Pontifex (Nicholas V), January 8, 1455,” [http://caid.ca/Bull\\_Romanus\\_Pontifex\\_1455.pdf](http://caid.ca/Bull_Romanus_Pontifex_1455.pdf).

Reader 2:

In 1493, when explorers such as Columbus ventured across the Atlantic seeking lands and people to exploit economically, we acknowledge the Pope declared in the document known as *Intera Caetera* that “among other works well pleasing to the Divine Majesty ... the Christian religion be exalted ... and that barbarous nations be overthrown and brought to the faith itself” ... “any of the said islands found by your envoys ... [I, the Pope] grant and assign to you and your heirs ... with the proviso that none of the islands or mainlands found be in the actual possession of any Christian King or prince.”<sup>11</sup>

All:

Silence to a count of three.

Reader 1:

In 1496, as John Cabot travelled to parts of what is now called Canada, we acknowledge King Henry VII of England granted a *Royal Patent* which read in part, “John and his sons or their heirs and deputies may conquer, occupy and possess whatsoever such towns, castles, cities and islands by them thus discovered that they may be able to conquer, occupy and possess, as our vassals and governors lieutenants and deputies therein, acquiring for us the dominion, title and jurisdiction”<sup>12</sup>

All:

Silence to a count of three.

Reader 2:

These beliefs framed European colonizers’ mindset and attitudes during their encounters with Indigenous peoples on this land. These established but hidden foundations continue to shape rela-

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<sup>11</sup> “Intera Caetera: Division of the undiscovered world between Spain and Portugal, Pope Alexander VI, 1493,” Papal Encyclicals Online, <https://www.papalencyclicals.net/Alexo6/alexo6inter.htm>. This particular passage is paraphrased for brevity.

<sup>12</sup> “Patent Granted by King Henry VII to John Cabot and his Sons, March 1496,” Heritage Newfoundland and Labrador, accessed July 12, 2021, <https://www.heritage.nf.ca/articles/exploration/1496-cabot-patent.php>.

tions between Settler and Indigenous peoples, and they shape the legal framework of land ownership in Canada to this day.

Upon the appeal of a Supreme Court of Canada ruling, the Privy Council's final decision in 1888 included the following statement: "*title to the relevant land was always—both before and after Treaty Three was executed—held by the Crown ... The First Nations did not hold title to the land, even before they signed Treaty Three. Instead, their Indian 'title' was merely a 'personal and usufructuary right.'*"<sup>13</sup>

In the 2014 decision regarding Tsilhqot'in Nation versus British Columbia, the Supreme Court of Canada recognized that "*The doctrine of terra nullius (that no one owned the land prior to European assertion of sovereignty) never applied in Canada.*" Yet in the same paragraph, the court upholds a key feature of the Doctrine of Discovery: "*At the time of assertion of European sovereignty, the Crown acquired radical or underlying title to all the land in the province.*"<sup>14</sup>

On June 21, 2021, the Canadian government expressly rejected the Doctrine of Discovery within Bill C-15, "An Act Respecting the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples."<sup>15</sup> Despite this legislation, the Crown continues to claim underlying title to the land of Canada.<sup>16</sup>

All:

*Silence to a count of three.*

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<sup>13</sup> Karen Drake, "The Impact of St. Catherines Milling," Osgoode Hall Law School at York University, 2017, p.10. [https://digitalcommons.osgoode.yorku.ca/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=3684&context=scholarly\\_works](https://digitalcommons.osgoode.yorku.ca/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=3684&context=scholarly_works).

<sup>14</sup> "Tsilhqot'in Nation v. British Columbia," Supreme Court Judgements, <https://scc-csc.lexum.com/scc-csc/scc-csc/en/item/14246/index.do>, par.69.

<sup>15</sup> Canada. Statutes of Canada, 2021, "An Act Respecting the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples," Second Session, Forty-third Parliament, 69-70 Elizabeth II, 2020-2021, <https://parl.ca/DocumentViewer/en/43-2/bill/C-15/royal-assent>.

<sup>16</sup> A British Columbia Supreme Court decision of June 29, 2021 upholds Treaty 8 as a treaty of land surrender. Canada. British Columbia. Supreme Court, "Yahey v. British Columbia, 2021 BCSC 1287," June 29, 2021, <https://www.canlii.org/en/bc/bcsc/doc/2021/2021bcsc1287/2021bcsc1287.pdf>.

Reader 1:

The Doctrine of Discovery is not based on respect or true knowledge of the people encountered. Rather, the Doctrine of Discovery is a thin rationalization for acts of greed that declared non-Europeans and non-Christians as lower beings and unworthy of the resources and lands they had occupied for millennia. Such a hierarchical view of human beings is foundational to the modern scourge of racism in our society.

## Repudiation

All:

We repudiate the false teaching of the Doctrine of Discovery.  
We reject the Doctrine of Discovery as born of greedy intent.  
We turn our backs on the Doctrine of Discovery and the injustice it spawns.

Leader:

This is the Papal letter of 1455 known as *Romanus Pontifex*.  
(Hold up a copy and rip it.)  
This is the Papal letter of 1493 known as *Inter Caetera*.  
(Hold up a copy and rip it.)  
This is the Royal Charter of 1496 from King Henry VII to John Cabot. (Hold up a copy and rip it.)<sup>17</sup>

All:

**WE REPUDIATE THE DOCTRINE OF DISCOVERY.**  
Yes, we repudiate the Doctrine of Discovery.

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<sup>17</sup> The Papal directives noted here can be printed from related websites for demonstration purposes. See “*The Bull Romanus Pontifex (Nicholas V), January 8, 1455*,” [http://caid.ca/Bull\\_Romanus\\_Pontifex\\_1455.pdf](http://caid.ca/Bull_Romanus_Pontifex_1455.pdf); “In *Inter Caetera*: Division of the undiscovered world between Spain and Portugal, Pope Alexander VI – 1493,” Papal Encyclicals Online, updated February 20, 2020, <https://www.papalencyclicals.net/alexo6/alexo6inter.htm>; and “Patent Granted by King Henry VII to John Cabot and his Sons, March 1496,” Heritage Newfoundland and Labrador, accessed July 12, 2021, <https://www.heritage.nf.ca/articles/exploration/1496-cabot-patent.php>.

All:

*Silence to a count of seven.*

## **Lament**

Leader:

Lord have mercy.  
Christ have mercy.  
Lord have mercy.

All:

We lament the injustice that has been done and is being done  
to the Indigenous peoples of this land  
in the name of the false “Doctrine of Discovery.”  
We lament the suffering of the earth that continues to this day.  
Lord, we did not know what we are accomplices to!  
BUT NOW WE DO KNOW.

All:

*Silence to a count of seven.*

Optional Hymn suggestions: “Kyrie” (Lord have mercy), *Voices Together* #147 or #614; “Lord Jesus, Come and Overturn,” *Voices Together* #146

## **Choosing a New Law**

Leader:

In place of the Doctrine of Discovery, we call to mind an attitude  
and a way of relating that honours the Law of Respect, a frame-  
work for good relations between Settler and Indigenous nations.

Reader 1:

The universal Law of Respect states “Respect others as you would  
like to be respected.” It is a law with roots in both Indigenous and  
Settler cultures.

Reader 2:

The Two Row Wampum Treaty of 1613 reflects the Law of Respect from an Indigenous perspective. It was established between the Haudenosaunee and the first Europeans in northeastern North America. To commemorate this treaty, the Two Row Wampum Belt was created from five alternating stripes of beads: three white rows and two purple rows. The three rows of white beads represent the River of Life. They symbolize peace, friendship, and respect. The two rows of purple beads represent a canoe and a ship—the Haudenosaunee and the Europeans—who travel independently but side by side along the River of Life, embodying respect by not interfering with each other.

The Golden Rule reflects the Law of Respect from a Settler perspective. Taught by many sages throughout history, including Jesus, the Golden Rule calls us to “do unto others as we would have them do to us.”

All:

We choose the Law of Respect.

We commit to actions that support living in a new and right relationship between Settlers and Indigenous Peoples leading toward the following realities:

Leader:

*(Seven candles are required for this passage. Use the following list, or name future realities relevant to your local situation, and light a candle after each statement.)*

In light of the Law of Respect,  
we regard all peoples with equal inherent value.

In light of the Law of Respect,  
we honour all treaties and settled land claims.

In light of the Law of Respect,  
land theft stops.

In light of the Law of Respect,  
the poisoning of land, water, and air stops.

In light of the Law of Respect,  
Indigenous schools are adequately funded.

In light of the Law of Respect,  
Indigenous languages flourish.

In light of the Law of Respect,  
Settlers acknowledge and honour the wisdom, strength, and spiritualities of their Indigenous hosts and neighbours on this land.

All:

We choose the Law of Respect.

We commit to actions that demonstrate this new relationship.

We commit to holding our governing structures accountable to the Law of Respect.

## Closing Prayer

Leader:

*(Offer a prayer of commitment in closing that is appropriate to your setting and audience or use the example that follows.)*

Creator God, we have heard the true story behind the false history we have been taught. We recognize the cavalier, dehumanizing attitude behind the arrival of Europeans on these shores of Turtle Island and their arrogant proclamation of it as a “new world.”

We have repudiated the Doctrine of Discovery in **words**. Let these words of repudiation shape our **attitudes**. Help us embody these words of repudiation with **action**.

We know that we are a Settler people living on land that does not belong to us. As we confront our true history, fill our hearts with compassion and a deep hunger for justice. Don't let fear and remorse turn them to stone.



As we go from this gathering, we open our eyes with **respect** for the peoples indigenous to this land, for the beauty, resilience, wisdom and tradition they offer to our hurting world.

As we go from here, we open our hearts to **reconciliation**, striving to establish systems and policies in society that embody the vision of justice and of the Two Row Wampum: people living side by side, sharing the bounty of the land.

As we go from here, we are ready to embark on the road of **reparation** by calling on our nation to officially recognize and dismantle the many injustices that persist today. We call on the leaders of our nation to decolonize and rebuild the socio/economic, legal, and political structures of Canada in ways that respect the sovereignty and aspirations and rights of Indigenous peoples.

In all these things, with humility and solidarity, we name our hopes for a future characterized by peace, friendship, dignity, and justice for all.

By the power of the Holy Spirit, let us make it so.

Amen.



# REPUDIATING DOCTRINE OF DISCOVERY

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## Medium Version

### Introduction

Leader:

#### Welcome

*(Feel free to create words of welcome appropriate to your setting and congregation.)*

Welcome to this significant moment in the life our congregation.

Today we acknowledge a story most of us have never heard: the Doctrine of Discovery. This story was a vital part of the philosophical framework and spiritual foundation for the first Europeans to arrive in North America. Though this story is largely hidden today, it is one that impacts all of us, here, on these lands.

Leader:

#### Opening

*(Feel free to adapt this prayer of thanksgiving for your setting and congregation.)*

Creator God,  
We raise gratitude to you:  
For the Love you demonstrate in creating all life.  
For the Love you reveal in the redeeming work of Jesus.  
For the Love you bestow upon the body of Christ, your church.  
We ask you to open our ears, our hearts and our minds so we may  
understand how our nation has desecrated your Love.  
As we lament the dismissive and unjust treatment of the Original  
Peoples, we ask you to help us imagine new ways of living together.  
Amen.

Leader:

### **Acknowledgment of Traditional Lands and First People**

*(Adapt this acknowledgment according to the ancestral and treaty territory your congregation is situated upon.)<sup>18</sup>*

We acknowledge our worship takes place on the ancestral and treaty territory of the Original Peoples of the Chonnonton, the Haudenosaunee of the Grand River and the Anishnaabeg People of the Mississaugas of the Credit. We recognize today that we benefit from the colonial violence that erased Indigenous histories, broke treaties and stole land. We pledge to work for justice and reconciliation in a new relationship between Settler and Indigenous peoples.

### **Doctrine of Discovery**

Leader:

Today we also acknowledge and confess a darker truth.

All:

We acknowledge the Doctrine of Discovery was taught by the European Christian Church. It was based on another legal doctrine, *terra nullius*, which held that no one owned land prior to the

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<sup>18</sup> Find the Traditional Lands and First Peoples of your area at Native Land Digital, <https://native-land.ca/>.

assertion of European sovereignty.<sup>19</sup> The Doctrine of Discovery provided a religious rationalization for theft, murder, and the annihilation of people living on these lands which European invaders wished to appropriate for their own use.

Reader 1:

In 1493, when explorers such as Columbus ventured across the Atlantic seeking lands and people to exploit economically, we acknowledge the Pope declared “*among other works well pleasing to the Divine Majesty ... the Christian religion be exalted ... and that barbarous nations be overthrown and brought to the faith itself*” ... “*any of the said islands found by your envoys ... [I, the Pope] grant and assign to you and your heirs.*”<sup>20</sup>

Reader 2:

These beliefs framed European colonizers’ mindset and attitudes during their encounters with Indigenous peoples on this land. These established but hidden foundations continue to shape relations between Settler and Indigenous peoples, and they shape the legal framework of land ownership in Canada to this day.

Reader 1:

The Doctrine of Discovery is not based on respect or true knowledge of the people encountered. Rather, the Doctrine of Discovery is a thin rationalization for acts of greed that declared non-Europeans and non-Christians as lower beings and unworthy of the resources and lands they had occupied for millennia. Such a hierarchical view of human beings is foundational to the modern scourge of racism in our society.

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<sup>19</sup> “The Doctrine of Discovery,” Christian Aboriginal Infrastructure Developments, <https://native-land.ca/>.

<sup>20</sup> “Intera Caetera: Division of the undiscovered world between Spain and Portugal, Pope Alexander VI, 1493,” Papal Encyclicals Online, <https://www.papalencyclicals.net/Alexo6/alexo6inter.htm>. This particular passage is paraphrased for brevity.

## Repudiation

All:

We repudiate the false teaching of the Doctrine of Discovery.  
We reject the Doctrine of Discovery as born of greedy intent.  
We turn our backs on the Doctrine of Discovery and the injustice  
it spawns.

## Lament

Leader:

Lord have mercy.  
Christ have mercy.  
Lord have mercy.

All:

We lament the injustice that has been done and is being done  
to the Indigenous peoples of this land  
in the name of the false “Doctrine of Discovery.”  
We lament the suffering of the earth that continues to this day.  
Lord, we did not know what we are accomplices to!  
BUT NOW WE DO KNOW.

All:

*Silence to a count of seven.*

Optional hymn suggestions: “Kyrie” (Lord have mercy), *Voices Together* #147 or #614; “Lord Jesus, Come and Overturn,” *Voices Together* #146

## Choosing a New Law

Leader:

In place of the Doctrine of Discovery, we call to mind an attitude  
and a way of relating that honours the Law of Respect, a frame-  
work for good relations between Settler and Indigenous nations.

Reader 1:

The universal Law of Respect states “Respect others as you would like to be respected.” It reflects the Two Row Wampum Treaty of 1613 that said our peoples will live side by side, sharing the land in friendship, peace, and respect. It reflects the Golden Rule taught by Jesus and many other sages throughout history.

Reader 2:

*(Use the following list or name future realities relevant to your local situation.)*

In light of the Law of Respect,  
we regard all peoples with equal inherent value.

In light of the Law of Respect,  
we honour all treaties and settled land claims.

In light of the Law of Respect,  
land theft stops.

In light of the Law of Respect,  
the poisoning of land, water, and air stops.

In light of the Law of Respect,  
Indigenous schools are adequately funded.

In light of the Law of Respect,  
Indigenous languages flourish.

In light of the Law of Respect,  
Settlers acknowledge and honour the wisdom, strength, and spiritualities of their Indigenous hosts and neighbours on this land.

## Closing Prayer

Leader:

*(Offer a prayer of commitment in closing that is appropriate to your setting and audience or use the example that follows.)*

Creator God, we have heard the true story behind the false narrative historically shared. We recognize the cavalier, dehumanizing

attitude behind the arrival of Europeans on these shores of Turtle Island and their arrogant proclamation of it as a “new world.”

We have repudiated the Doctrine of Discovery in **words**. Let these words of repudiation shape our **attitudes**. Help us embody these words of repudiation with **action**.

We know that we are a Settler people living on land that does not belong to us. As we confront our true history, fill our hearts with compassion and a deep hunger for justice. Don't let fear and remorse turn them to stone.

As we go from this gathering, we open our eyes with **respect** for the peoples indigenous to this land, for the beauty, resilience, wisdom and tradition they offer to our hurting world.

As we go from here, we open our hearts to **reconciliation**, striving to establish systems and policies in society that embody the vision of justice and of the Two Row Wampum: people living side by side, sharing the bounty of the land.

As we go from here, we are ready to embark on the road of **reparation** by calling on our nation to officially recognize and dismantle the many injustices that persist today. We call on the leaders of our nation to decolonize and rebuild the socio/economic, legal, and political structures of Canada in ways that respect the sovereignty and aspirations and rights of Indigenous peoples.

In all these things, with humility and solidarity, we name our hopes for a future characterized by peace, friendship, dignity, and justice for all.

By the power of the Holy Spirit, let us make it so.

Amen.



# REPUDIATING DOCTRINE OF DISCOVERY

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## Short Version

### Introduction

Leader:

#### Welcome

*(Feel free to create words of welcome appropriate to your setting and congregation.)*

Welcome to this significant moment in the life our congregation.

Today we acknowledge a story most of us have never heard: the Doctrine of Discovery. This story was a vital part of the philosophical framework and spiritual foundation for the first Europeans to arrive in North America. Though this story is largely hidden today, it is one that impacts all of us, here, on these lands.

#### Acknowledgment of Traditional Lands and First People

*(Adapt this acknowledgment according to the ancestral and treaty territory your congregation is situated upon.)<sup>21</sup>*

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<sup>21</sup> Find the Traditional Lands and First Peoples of your area at Native Land Digital, <https://native-land.ca/>.



We acknowledge our worship takes place on the ancestral and treaty territory of the Original Peoples of the Chonnonton, the Haudenosaunee of the Grand River and the Anishnaabeg People of the Mississaugas of the Credit. We recognize today that we benefit from the colonial violence that erased Indigenous histories, broke treaties and stole land. We pledge to work for justice and reconciliation in a new relationship between Settler and Indigenous peoples.

## Doctrine of Discovery

Leader:

Today we also acknowledge and confess a darker truth.

All:

We acknowledge the Doctrine of Discovery was taught by the European Christian Church. It was based on another legal doctrine, *terra nullius*, which held that no one owned land prior to the assertion of European sovereignty.<sup>22</sup> The Doctrine of Discovery provided a religious rationalization for theft, murder, and the annihilation of people living on these lands which European invaders wished to appropriate for their own use.

Reader 1:

In 1493, when explorers such as Columbus ventured across the Atlantic seeking lands and people to exploit economically, we acknowledge the Pope declared *“among other works well pleasing to the Divine Majesty ... the Christian religion be exalted ... and that barbarous nations be overthrown and brought to the faith itself” ... “any of the said islands found by your envoys ... [I, the Pope] grant and assign to you and your heirs.”*<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> “The Doctrine of Discovery,” Christian Aboriginal Infrastructure Developments, <https://native-land.ca/>.

<sup>23</sup> “*Intera Caetera*: Division of the undiscovered world between Spain and Portugal, Pope Alexander VI, 1493,” Papal Encyclicals Online, <https://www.papalencyclicals.net/Alexo6/alexo6inter.htm>. This particular passage is paraphrased for brevity.

Reader 2:

The Doctrine of Discovery is not based on respect or true knowledge of the people encountered. Rather, the Doctrine of Discovery is a thin rationalization for acts of greed that declared non-Europeans and non-Christians as lower beings and unworthy of the resources and lands they had occupied for millennia. Such a hierarchical view of human beings is foundational to the modern scourge of racism in our society.

## Repudiation

All:

We repudiate the false teaching of the Doctrine of Discovery.  
We reject the Doctrine of Discovery as born of greedy intent.  
We turn our backs on the Doctrine of Discovery and the injustice it spawns.

## Lament

Leader:

Lord have mercy.  
Christ have mercy.  
Lord have mercy.

All:

We lament the injustice that has been done and is being done to the Indigenous peoples of this land in the name of the false “Doctrine of Discovery.”  
We lament the suffering of the earth that continues to this day.  
Lord, we did not know what we are accomplices to!  
**BUT NOW WE DO KNOW.**

All:

*Silence to a count of seven.*

Optional hymn suggestions: “Kyrie” (Lord have mercy), *Voices Together* #147 or #614; “Lord Jesus, Come and Overturn,” *Voices Together* #146

## Choosing a New Law

Leader:

In place of the Doctrine of Discovery, we call to mind an attitude and a way of relating that honours the Law of Respect, a framework for good relations between Settler and Indigenous nations.

Reader 1:

The universal Law of Respect states “Respect others as you would like to be respected. “It reflects the Two Row Wampum Treaty of 1613 that said our peoples will live side by side, sharing the land in friendship, peace, and respect. It reflects the Golden Rule taught by Jesus and many other sages throughout history.

Reader 2:

*(Use the following list or name future realities relevant to your local situation.)*

In light of the Law of Respect,  
we regard all peoples with equal inherent value.

In light of the Law of Respect,  
we honour all treaties and settled land claims.

In light of the Law of Respect,  
land theft stops.

In light of the Law of Respect,  
the poisoning of land, water, and air stops.

In light of the Law of Respect,  
Indigenous schools are adequately funded.

In light of the Law of Respect,  
Indigenous languages flourish.

In light of the Law of Respect,  
Settlers acknowledge and honour the wisdom, strength, and spiritualities of their Indigenous hosts and neighbours on this land.

## Closing Prayer

Leader:

*(Offer a prayer of commitment in closing that is appropriate to your setting and audience or use the example that follows.)*

Creator God, we have heard the true story behind the false narrative historically shared. We recognize the cavalier, dehumanizing attitude behind the arrival of Europeans on these shores of Turtle Island and their arrogant proclamation of it as a “new world.”

We have repudiated the Doctrine of Discovery in **words**. Let these words of repudiation shape our **attitudes**. Help us embody these words of repudiation with **action**.

We know that we are a Settler people living on land that does not belong to us. As we confront our true history, fill our hearts with compassion and a deep hunger for justice. Don't let fear and remorse turn them to stone.

As we go from this gathering, we open our eyes with **respect** for the peoples indigenous to this land, for the beauty, resilience, wisdom and tradition they offer to our hurting world.

As we go from here, we open our hearts to **reconciliation**, striving to establish systems and policies in society that embody the vision of justice and of the Two Row Wampum: people living side by side, sharing the bounty of the land.

As we go from here, we are ready to embark on the road of **reparation** by calling on our nation to officially recognize and dismantle the many injustices that persist today. We call on the leaders of our nation to decolonize and rebuild the socio/economic, legal, and political structures of Canada in ways that respect the sovereignty and aspirations and rights of Indigenous peoples.

In all these things, with humility and solidarity, we name our hopes for a future characterized by peace, friendship, dignity, and justice for all.

By the power of the Holy Spirit, let us make it so.

Amen.





**Ron Flaming** is grateful for help received in writing this litany. Ron lives in Waterloo, Ontario on the Haldimand Tract, land covering six miles on either side of the Grand River and granted to the Haudenosaunee of the Grand River in 1784.

Active in planning and leading worship at Waterloo North Mennonite Church, Ron is a member of the Mennonite Church Eastern Canada Truth and Reconciliation Working Group, the Truth and Reconciliation Working Group of KW and Area, and the Waterloo North Mennonite Church Truth and Reconciliation Action Group.

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