

WITNESS FOR JUSTICE

UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST
JUSTICE AND WITNESS MINISTRIES

700 Prospect Ave.
Cleveland, OH 44115-1110
Phone: 216.736.3700
Fax: 216.736.3703



Elizabeth Leung
Minister for Racial Justice

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Doctrine of Discovery

Elizabeth Leung

The week before the celebration of July 4, the Supreme Court ruled on Arizona's SB 1070 and the Affordable Care Act (Health Care Law), both of which have serious implications for the ideals in the Declaration of Independence - "life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness."

For example, the Supreme Court upheld for SB 1070 the "show me your papers" provision, thus opening the doors wide open to racial profiling. As an online comment says, "[i]f race is not a basis for suspecting somebody is undocumented, then the only way for Arizona to apply this is to ask EVERYBODY for papers." With the decision on the Health Care Law, the implementation of the new Medicaid provisions is expected to slow down, which means that significantly fewer people than the projected 17 million, of which 75% of those individuals are people of color, would be covered under the Medicaid expansion.

If we aspire to be witnesses for racial justice, there is one more step beyond being "colorblind." Our eyes need to be wide open to the realities of layers of racial inequity inherent in our social structures and mechanisms. Systemic inequities found in our institutions might even be validated by Christian teachings long forgotten. The Doctrine of Discovery is one such example.

The Doctrine of Discovery (DOD) is a principle of law developed in a series of 15th century Papal documents and 16th century charters by Christian European monarchs that contained a theological justification for the colonization of the rest of the world. For more than 500 years, it is legal and “moral” to seize the lands and resources of originally free and independent people, and to undermine their sovereignty.

After the 1776 Declaration of Independence, the Doctrine of Discovery continued to be expounded by the Supreme Court to support a series of decisions invalidating or ignoring aboriginal possession of land in favor of colonial or post-colonial governments. The DOD still governs United States Indian Law today and has been cited as recently as 2005 in the decision *City Of Sherrill v. Oneida Indian Nation of N.Y.*

In February 2012, the World Council of Churches (WCC) Executive Committee denounced the “Doctrine of Discovery” that which has been used to subjugate and colonize Indigenous Peoples, and issued a statement calling the nature of the doctrine” fundamentally opposed to the gospel of Jesus”. The Unitarian Universalists also voted in their June 2012 General Assembly to repudiate the Doctrine of Discovery and to demand that the U.S. government fully implement the standards of the 2007 United Nation Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.

The truth that all are created equal would only be self-evident if, our inalienable rights are not built on the backs of those whose ancestors showed hospitality to our founders, and of those who build our nation in generations past and present with their ingenuity, toil and health. Let us be forever working towards the ideal that is GREATER life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness for ALL.

The United Church of Christ has 5,194 churches throughout the United States. Rooted in the Christian traditions of congregational governance and covenantal relationships, each UCC setting speaks only for itself and not on behalf of every UCC congregation. UCC members and churches are free to differ on important social issues, even as the UCC remains principally committed to unity in the midst of our diversity.

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