

Discussion Guide

for Considering the Report and Responsive Resolution from
the UUA Board on the Doctrine of Discovery

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Introduction

Human beings tell stories to make sense of the world. With our stories we construct identity, an idea of who we are and what we stand for. As our experiences accumulate, so do our stories change; we examine, deconstruct, and reconstruct our narratives. But sometimes we encounter information so different from what we embrace as right and true that we have difficulty hearing it.

The Doctrine of Discovery—the legal justification for the colonization of the Americas and the subordination of aboriginal people—is a narrative unfamiliar to many, both in the United States and elsewhere in the Americas. Yet the Doctrine is so deeply embedded in American and Western culture that it hides in plain sight. And though it is hard to hear that a policy of manifest destiny and Christian and white supremacy has determined United States history and development, we must strive to listen, because the Doctrine of Discovery is key to understanding and reconstructing many of today’s public debates, particularly debates about immigration.

The UUA Board of Trustees, at the request of our immigration justice partner organizations in Arizona, requests that Unitarian Universalists not only acknowledge the Doctrine of Discovery, but engage with a different narrative about our nation’s history and system of laws. The Board asks that we hear—truly listen to, and integrate—a narrative told by people on the margins of dominant United States culture. The Board calls us to open our minds, hearts, and spirits to the implications and the potential of a new, truer story of how this continent was settled and our nation formed.

This discussion guide helps organize conversations to grapple with the Doctrine of Discovery and the UUA Board Report and Resolution. Three one-hour sessions define the issue, contextualize it with native voices, and guide a plan of action. In short, the sessions ask: What? So what? and Now what? Session 1 can stand alone. Participants read the Board report, blog posts, and short essays, and watch video presentations that offer a new window into what is commonly perceived as an “immigration problem.” Discussion and journaling questions, which can be used independently of this program, invite Unitarian Universalists to shape new cultural, civic, and religious identity stories that include and embrace the perspectives of those who have been marginalized.

Because of the sensitivity of the topics, discussions should be led by a skilled facilitator who can create safe space for different points of view and life experiences.

Acknowledgement

The chalice lightings come from the International Council of Unitarians and Universalists (ICUU) [Global Chalice Lighting](#) archive. Each month, ICUU publishes a chalice lighting from a member organization, for congregations around the world to use in worship.

Session 1: The Doctrine of Discovery – Hidden in Plain Sight

Learning Objectives

Participants will:

- Gain knowledge of the Doctrine of Discovery
- Reflect on the [Report and Responsive Resolution from the Board on the Doctrine of Discovery](#)
- Consider ways the Doctrine of Discovery narrative conflicts with the dominant historical narrative
- Consider and discuss the theological grounding the Board report provides for the proposed responsive resolution
- Reflect on how and why our Unitarian Universalist faith calls us to action.

Materials

- Chalice, candle, and matches, or LED/battery-operated candle
- Newsprint, markers, and tape
- [From Your Minister, November 2011](#), a reflection written by Rev. Meg Riley, and published on the Church of the Larger Fellowship's Quest for Meaning website. There is also a [recording](#) of Rev. Riley reading this sermon, about seven minutes long.
- [Report and Responsive Resolution from the Board on the Doctrine of Discovery](#)
- Optional: [The Doctrine of Discovery- The True Story of the Colonization of the United States of America \(14:27\)](#). There is also a script for the video.
- Optional: A computer with Internet access and/or audio speakers and a projector, for broadcasting Rev. Riley's sermon and/or screening The Doctrine of Discovery video

Preparation

- Read/preview readings and audio/visual resources for this session. Decide which materials you will use. If you choose to include The Doctrine of Discovery video, adjust discussion times accordingly.
- Copy Rev. Riley's reflection for all participants. If you plan to share the audio of Rev. Riley's reflection or The Doctrine of Discovery video, test your equipment.
- Print the Report and Responsive Resolution from the Board on the Doctrine of Discovery and copy for all participants.
- Write these questions on newsprint, and set aside. (You may wish to keep these to use again in Session 2.)
 - How does the narrative of the Doctrine of Discovery change your understanding of your country? How does it change your own family story?
 - How do your personal theology and your Unitarian Universalist faith guide your response to the narrative of the Doctrine of Discovery?
- Prepare a centering table with chalice.

Description

Light the chalice, sharing these words by Mark Allstrom, the Global Chalice Lighting for January 2012, submitted to the ICUU by the Australian and New Zealand Unitarian Universalist Association:

*A golden thread binds us to all that has been and will ever be.
Here the tender soul yearns.
Here the greatest dreams are sighted.
Here the sacred flame burns.*

Welcome participants and thank them for gathering to reflect together on the Doctrine of Discovery, honoring the request of the UUA Board of Trustees and our immigration justice partners in Arizona. Invite the group to begin by naming history they have been taught or have learned about our country, especially in regard to native people. Post blank newsprint and record everyone's contributions. Encourage participants to recall television and movie presentations, classes in school, and public speeches at civic occasions. Brainstorm for about five minutes.

Now, post a new sheet of newsprint. Ask participants to suggest adjectives or phrases to describe the overarching ideals of the United States. Record their contributions. Allow five minutes for this brainstorm.

Distribute Rev. Meg Riley's November 2011 reflection. Invite participants to read it (and listen to it, if you will play the audio clip). Tell them it begins with the story about Thanksgiving she learned as a child. While participants read/listen, post a sheet of newsprint and write:

- Papal decree, or bull
- Discovery
- Doctrine of Discovery
- 1823 U.S. Supreme Court

Invite comments and observations about Rev. Riley's reflection. Ask, "How does Rev. Riley wrestle with a difficult story, while still holding gratitude and joy in living?" Allow 15 minutes for reading and shared responses.

If you have decided to do so, show The Doctrine of Discovery video and invite responses.

Distribute the Report and Responsive Resolution from the Board on the Doctrine of Discovery. Give participants a few minutes to read it. Then, lead a discussion, using these questions:

- What surprised you about the history in this report?
- Is some of this history familiar to you? How does it fit with and how does it contradict history as you have previously understood it?
- What connection do you find between the Doctrine of Discovery and immigration justice?

Allow about 15 minutes for this discussion. Then, invite participants to turn their attention to the “theologies” part of the report. Remind participants that theology is inquiry into religious questions, and the application of a system of religious precepts, such as the Unitarian Universalist Principles, to daily life.

Point out that the report lists three affirmations from our Unitarian Universalist Principles as the grounding for the responsive resolution: the work for equality and justice named in our second Principle, the search for truth named in our fourth Principle, and the respect for the interdependent web of existence named in our seventh Principle. Ask:

- How and why do those theological stances call us to repudiate the Doctrine of Discovery? How and why do they call for the implementation of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People?
- Are there other parts of our Unitarian Universalist tradition, Principles, or values that pertain to this situation?
- What aspects of your personal theology guide your response to the narrative of the Doctrine of Discovery?

Allow 15 minutes for this part of the discussion.

Post the newsprint with these two questions for follow-up journaling:

- How does the narrative of the Doctrine of Discovery change your understanding of your country? How does it change your own family story?
- How do your personal theology and your Unitarian Universalist faith guide your response to the narrative of the Doctrine of Discovery?

You may wish to send the journaling questions to participants electronically and/or publish them in your newsletter with links to the readings.

Extinguish the chalice and share these words of Rev. Wayne B. Arnason, from Reading 698 in *Singing the Living Tradition*:

*Take courage friends.
The way is often hard, the path is never clear,
and the stakes are very high.
Take courage.
For deep down, there is another truth:
you are not alone.*

Session 2: Native Voices on the Doctrine of Discovery and Immigration

Learning Objectives

Participants will:

- Gain knowledge of the Doctrine of Discovery
- Respond to Rev. Colin Bossen’s experience learning about the Doctrine of Discovery, and reflect on their own experiences learning about it
- View and respond to films produced by Tonatierra
- Read Oren Lyon’s open letter to Unitarian Universalists and consider his call to action
- Reflect on how and why our Unitarian Universalist faith calls us to action.

Materials

- Chalice, candle, and matches, or LED/battery-operated candle
- Newsprint, markers, and tape
- A computer with Internet access, a digital projector or a large monitor, and [videos](#) produced by Tonatierra, Nahuacalli Embassy of Indigenous Peoples:
 - [Tupac Enrique – SB170](#) (6:34)
 - [Wakeup Call from the Nightmare of Manifest Destiny](#) (3:31)
- “[Immigration and Indigenous Theology](#),” a reflection by Rev. Colin Bossen posted in the UUA immigration justice resource collection, Cooking Together: Recipes for Immigration Justice Work
- [Open Letter from Oren Lyons](#), Faith Keeper, Turtle Clan of the Onondaga Nation, January 2012
- [Report and Responsive Resolution from the Board on the Doctrine of Discovery](#)

Preparation

- Read/preview the documents and videos for this session.
- Write on newsprint, and post (or use the newsprint saved from Session 1):
 - How does the narrative of the Doctrine of Discovery change your understanding of your country? How does it change your family story?
 - How do your personal theology and your Unitarian Universalist faith guide your response to the narrative of the Doctrine of Discovery?
- Print Rev. Colin Bossen’s reflection “Immigration and Indigenous Theology,” the Report and Responsive Resolution from the Board on the Doctrine of Discovery, and the open letter from Oren Lyons. Copy for all participants.
- Test equipment and queue the videos.
- Write these questions on newsprint, and set aside. (You may wish to keep these to use again in Session 3.)
 - What new information did you learn about the Doctrine of Discovery and its relationship to current immigration law?
 - What puzzles you or makes you uncomfortable?
 - How does the Doctrine of Discovery pose a religious or theological issue, as well as an historical, legal, and political one?
- Prepare a centering table with chalice.

Description

Light the chalice, sharing these words by Rita Nakashima Brock and Rebecca Ann Parker, the Global Chalice Lighting for August 2011, submitted to the ICUU by the Unitarian Universalist Association of Congregations:

What words tell the truth? What balms heal? What proverbs kindle the fires and passion of joy? What spirituality stirs the hunger for justice? We seek answers to these questions—not only for ourselves, but for our communities and our society. What are the ways of being with one another that enable life to flourish, rich with meaning? When violence has fractured communities, isolated people, and broken hearts, how can life be repaired? We ask these questions not to arrive at final answers, but because asking them is fundamental to living.

Welcome participants and thank them for gathering to reflect together on the Doctrine of Discovery, honoring the request of the UUA Board of Trustees and our immigration justice partners in Arizona. Explain that this discussion will focus on a call from Tonatierra, which is the Nahuacalli Embassy of Indigenous Peoples, and a call from Oren Lyons, a spiritual elder of the Onondaga Nation who has been working with Unitarian Universalists on a resolution to repudiate the Doctrine of Discovery.

Remind people of the major points of the Session 1 discussion. Call attention to the posted journaling/reflection questions that were offered at end of the previous session. Invite participants, one at a time, to share anything they wish from their reflections on the Doctrine of Discovery since the group's last meeting. Allow ten minutes for sharing.

Distribute Rev. Colin Bossen's reflection, "Immigration and Indigenous Theology," and invite participants to read it. While participants read, post blank newsprint. Then, lead a discussion, using these questions:

- Why would a legal system grounded in the Doctrine of Discovery produce laws like SB1070 and men like Sheriff Arpaio?
- Rev. Bossen quotes Tupac Enrique, saying "the purpose of SB1070 was to consolidate the perceptions of some white Americans around the idea of an America that is white in a continent that belongs to them." How is the perception of an America that is white in a continent belonging to white people manifested in our culture, our history, our politics, and our institutions?
- Tupac Enrique questions the entire framework of laws that rest on the Doctrine of Discovery. He states that colonization is illegal. What impact would it have on the United States' laws and culture if there was broad repudiation of the Doctrine of Discovery?

Record comments, observations, and insights on newsprint. Allow 20 minutes for reading and follow-up discussion conversation.

Introduce the videos from Tonatierra, the Nahuacalli Embassy of Indigenous Peoples. Explain that the person speaking in both videos is Tupac Enrique. Show both videos, pausing after each for comments and observations. Ask: "What new pieces of information does Tupac Enrique provide to help us understand the Doctrine of Discovery

and its relationship to current immigration law?” Allow 15 minutes for viewing and discussing the videos.

Distribute the open letter from Oren Lyons and invite participants to read it. If participants do not have copies of the Report and Responsive Resolution from the Board on the Doctrine of Discovery, provide these as well. Lead a discussion with these questions:

- Given his statement about the universal laws of nature prevailing over the laws of men, what response might Oren Lyons offer to the statement that those who are in the United States without papers are “illegal?”
- What insight does this letter provide into why the trustees of the Unitarian Universalist Association have asked the General Assembly to adopt a resolution repudiating the Doctrine of Discovery?
- How does the Doctrine of Discovery pose a religious or theological issue, as well as an historical, legal, and political one?

Allow ten minutes for reading and discussion of the letter.

Post the newspaper with these questions for follow-up journaling:

- What new information did you learn about the Doctrine of Discovery and its relationship to current immigration law?
- What puzzles you or makes you uncomfortable?
- How does the Doctrine of Discovery pose a religious or theological issue, as well as an historical, legal, and political one?

You may wish to send the journaling questions to participants electronically and/or publish them in your newsletter with links to the readings.

Extinguish the chalice and share these words from Talmud:

*Do not be daunted by the enormity of the world's grief.
Walk humbly, now.
Do justly, now.
Love mercy, now.
You are not obligated to complete the work,
but neither are you free to abandon it.*

Session 3: How Are We Called to Respond?

Learning Objectives

Participants will:

- Gain knowledge of the Doctrine of Discovery
- Respond to Dave Weiman’s experience learning about the Doctrine of Discovery and share reflections on their own experience learning about it
- View and respond to the video *The Episcopal Church Exposes the Doctrine of Discovery*
- Reflect on how and why our Unitarian Universalist faith calls us to action.

Materials:

- Chalice, candle, and matches, or LED/battery-operated candle
- Newsprint, markers, and tape
- [“Restoring Indigenous Peoples Rights: A Pathway from Australia to Arizona”](#) by Dave Weiman
- [“Under Our Charge – the Utes and the Unitarians”](#)
- [Report and Responsive Resolution from the Board on the Doctrine of Discovery](#)
- A computer with Internet access, a digital projector or a large monitor, and the video [The Episcopal Church Exposes the Doctrine of Discovery](#) (13:59)

Preparation

- Read and view all materials for this session.
- Write on newsprint and post (or use newsprint saved from Session 2):
 - What new information did you learn about the Doctrine of Discovery and its relationship to current immigration law?
 - What puzzles you or makes you uncomfortable?
 - How does the Doctrine of Discovery pose a religious or theological issue, as well as an historical, legal, and political one?
- On a second piece of newsprint, write this quote, and post: “It is terribly arrogant to suppose that because we can see, with hindsight, mistakes of the generations before us, it's okay to demonize them. Without demonizing them, we need to be as clear as we can be about their gifts to us and their mistakes, because the consequences of both still shape us.” — Alice Blair Wesley
- Test all equipment and prepare to screen video.
- Print the article “Restoring Indigenous Peoples Rights: A Pathway from Australia to Arizona;” the article “Under Our Charge: the Utes and the Unitarians,” and the Report and Responsive Resolution from the Board on the Doctrine of Discovery. Copy for all participants.
- Write on newsprint, and set aside:
 - If the resolution to repudiate the Doctrine of Discovery is adopted at General Assembly, what might be next steps for my congregation, or for clusters of congregations to do together?
 - What are my personal next steps?
- Prepare a centering table with chalice.

Description

Light the chalice, sharing these words written by the Coruña congregation, the Global Chalice Lighting for November 2008, submitted to the ICUU by the Unitarian Universalist Society of Spain:

May this chalice, that we are lighting here together, pervade and light this place, showing in our hearts the right direction to take, that we not forget during the following week.

May its rays of light shine deeply in our souls, kindling new wisdom and new projects inside us that symbolize the light of duty and understanding and the magnificence of justice and truth, and bringing peace to us.

You might also wish to share the words in the original Spanish:

Que este cáliz, que encendemos juntos aquí, impregne e ilumine este lugar, aclarando en nuestros corazones la dirección a tomar, que solemos olvidar durante la semana que va a partir.

Que sus haces de luz brillen profundamente en el alma, prendiendo en su interior sabiduría nueva y nuevos proyectos. Que simbolicen la luz del deber y el entendimiento y el esplendor de la justicia, la verdad, y que nos den calma.

Welcome participants and thank them for gathering to reflect together on the Doctrine of Discovery, honoring the request of the UUA Board of Trustees and our immigration justice partners in Arizona. Explain that this discussion will provide an opportunity to consider how Unitarian Universalists might respond to this call. If the General Assembly votes to repudiate the Doctrine of Discovery, what does that mean in practice? Tell the group they will also consider the story of the Unitarians and the Ute people, a story told at General Assembly 2009 in Salt Lake City. Remind the group of the major points of the discussions in Session 1 and Session 2. Then, call attention to the posted journaling/reflection questions that were offered at end of the last session. Invite participants, one at a time, to share anything they wish from their reflections on Doctrine of Discovery since the group's last meeting. Allow ten minutes for sharing.

Distribute copies of "Restoring Indigenous Peoples Rights: A Pathway from Australia to Arizona" and invite participants to read it. Lead a discussion, using these questions as guides:

- What strikes you most about Dave Weiman's account of how he became active in the movement to repudiate the Doctrine of Discovery?
- Do you join Dave in feeling called to respond to the appeal of indigenous people for repudiation?
- What will you do about the knowledge you now have?

Record comments, observations, and insights on newsprint. Allow ten minutes for reading and for the conversation that follows.

Distribute "Under our Charge – the Unitarians and the Utes" and invite people to read it. Say, this is a story that was long buried, but is now part of the story we tell about

ourselves in *Faith Like A River*, our UU history program. Point out the Alice Blair Wesley quote you have posted and ask:

- How does this story fit with the Doctrine of Discovery narrative?
- What do you see as the gifts in this story? The mistakes?
- What is the enduring legacy of this story for Unitarian Universalists?

Allow ten minutes for this reading and discussion.

Introduce the film *The Episcopal Church Exposes the Doctrine of Discovery*, explaining that the U.S. Episcopal Church passed a resolution at its General Convention in July 2009 repudiating the Doctrine of Discovery and urging the U.S. government to endorse the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. Point out that this film shows how Episcopalians are applying their theology and practices as they consider how they are called to respond.

Post blank newsprint while the group is viewing the film. When it is finished, lead a discussion about how Unitarian Universalists and the Unitarian Universalist Association might apply their theology and practices to respond. Ask:

- If the resolution to repudiate the Doctrine of Discovery is adopted at General Assembly, what might be next steps for the UUA?
- What might be next steps for my congregation, or for clusters of congregations to do together?
- What are my personal next steps?

Record responses on newsprint.

Consider making these comments available to others in your congregation, cluster, or district.

Allow 25 minutes for viewing the film and follow-up conversation.

Offer two questions for follow-up journaling:

- If the resolution to repudiate the Doctrine of Discovery is adopted at General Assembly, what might be next steps for my congregation, or for clusters of congregations to do together?
- What are my personal next steps?

You may wish to send the journaling questions to participants electronically and/or publish them in your newsletter with links to the readings.

Extinguish the chalice and share these words from Latina writer Gloria Anzaldúa:

Empowerment comes from ideas—our revolution is fought with concepts, not with guns, and is fueled by vision. By focusing on what we want to happen we change the present. The healing images and narratives we imagine will eventually materialize.