

Resolution 17-1

Repudiation of the Doctrine of Discovery And Commitment to Partner with our Ojibwe Neighbors

(Submitted by Living Waters Conference, Proposed by Rev. Mark Olson)

Whereas, we confess with our Native sisters and brothers that the whole of Creation is God’s work, that God declares it all as good, and that God’s Spirit dwells within it; and

Whereas, we confess that Jesus Christ became incarnate in human form to show God’s love and mercy to all humanity, in all its variety, and to every race and people on every continent of the earth; and

Whereas, we acknowledge with pain and regret the damage done to the indigenous inhabitants of the Americas by the European conquest and migration to what Europeans called a “new world,” but which was in reality already the homeland of many peoples; and

Whereas, we recognize that Christian churches were and remain complicit in that conquest, migration and dispossession, and that Christian churches helped develop conceptions of Native peoples that blamed them for their own ills and that continue to perpetuate prejudice and injustice against them and their descendants; and

Whereas, we deplore and reject the so-called “doctrine of discovery”: the legal principle, originating with Pope Alexander VI in 1493 and further entrenched in U.S. federal law in Johnson v. McIntosh (1823), that Native inhabitants have no property or any other rights which colonizing European nations and their sovereigns are bound to respect. This principle promotes the myth that the Americas were a largely empty land that European conquerors and migrants had a right to claim, occupy, and possess simply by virtue of their Christianity and their European civilization; and

Whereas, we realize that our culpability in the ongoing influence of the Doctrine of Discovery is a shared reality within geographic boundaries of the Northeastern MN Synod, which we share with five federally recognized tribes: the Bois Forte (Nett Lake) Band of Chippewa, the Fond du Lac Band of Lake Superior Chippewa, the Grand Portage Chippewa, the Leech Lake Band of Ojibwe, and the Mille Lacs Band of Ojibwe—our oldest neighbors.

Therefore be it resolved, that the 2017 Northeastern Minnesota Synod, joining with the Churchwide expression of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada, The Episcopal Church, The United Church of Christ, The United Methodist Church, and The Moravian Church, explicitly and clearly repudiates the European Christian-derived “doctrine of discovery” as fundamentally opposed to the gospel of Jesus Christ and as a violation of the inherent rights that all individuals and peoples have received from God, with its continuing impact upon tribal governments and individual tribal members to this day, and acknowledges and repents of its complicity in the evils of colonialism in the Americas; and

Be it further resolved, that the 2017 Northeastern Minnesota Synod Assembly offers herewith a statement of repentance and reconciliation to Native nations on its territory for damage done in the name of Christianity and “civilization,” and supports the ongoing effort to identify an appropriate ELCA synodical ceremony of repentance and reconciliation with tribal leaders, and provide resources for similar congregational observances with local tribal leaders, at all such times and places as are appropriate; and

Be it further resolved, that the Northeastern Minnesota Synod, along with the ELCA, and with the help of Native communities, also commits itself to the development of resources, in the next triennium, to help its congregations and people understand and reduce the negative impact of the “doctrine of discovery” and its consequences for Native people in Northern Minnesota; and

Be it further resolved, that the Northeastern Minnesota Synod supports a renewed strategy for ministry and partnership with Native communities within the synod territory, with a particular commitment to long-term, stable funding of ELCA American Indian and Alaska Native ministries, reflected in the 2019 Budget of the Northeastern MN Synod and beyond, increasing partnerships with congregations, and promoting efforts with the Native communities within which our congregations reside, and

Be it further resolved, that the Northeastern Minnesota Synod pledges to form a Bridge Building Task Force that will meet regularly, reporting to the Synod Council quarterly, and the Synod Assembly annually, regarding the task force’s efforts to build upon the above commitments to identify intercultural resources, educational opportunities, and strategic initiatives so that the Northeastern MN Synod might join in the work to bridge cultural divides between native and nonnative residents in our congregations and communities