

## The Doctrine of Discovery

The Doctrine of Discovery originated as a Papal Bull (written document) in 1493, issued by Pope Alexander the VI that played an important role in the Spanish conquest of the New World. It informed the way Colonial powers could claim lands belonging to non-Christian nations. The document has been primarily used to justify decisions invalidating indigenous peoples' right to inhabit lands. An important Supreme Court Decision stated that "the "Doctrine of Discovery" was an established legal principle of English and American colonial law that had also become the law of the American state and federal governments." As a direct result of the adoption of the Doctrine of Discovery into U.S. law, the Manifest Destiny concept was born. There were three basic beliefs that were contained in Manifest Destiny:

- The righteousness and superiority of the Christian moral values and institutions of the United States
- A belief that the U.S. spread these moral values to benefit the world and to fulfill God's wishes
- Faith that God has blessed the U.S. to succeed and that every success confirms this blessing.

What has caused the recent discussion of the Doctrine of Discovery? It has become increasingly clear to members of the Presbyterian Church (USA) and Presbytery de Cristo and Grand Canyon with their Native American congregations, that we must embrace a deeper understanding of the injustices and tragic history of our Native American brothers and sisters, specifically addressing how the church has been involved.

Presbytery de Cristo and Presbytery of Grand Canyon feel that it is important to recognize the physical reality of the lands that were acquired because of the Doctrine of Discovery. During the 223<sup>rd</sup> General Assembly, the Presbyterian Mission Agency Board, on behalf of the Doctrine of Discovery team, made 18 recommendations. Recommendation number eight "encourages mid councils to begin their meetings with acknowledgement of those land they are meeting on and that greetings to the assembly include a welcome from those Indigenous peoples currently living on the land."