

STUDY GUIDE 1

Module 1 **Introduction**

Opening prayer or song

Key Terms: Settler, Turtle Island, Doctrine of Discovery

For definitions of these terms and concepts, see the glossary at the end of this Study Guide.

Introduction to Circle Process - see HANDOUT 1

Discussion questions for Circle Process:

1. What brings you to this group? What are your hopes for this space and for discussion?
2. Why do you think it is important that your congregation learns about the Doctrine of Discovery?

Activity: Dedicating our learning and work to our ancestors

Materials needed: World map (you may choose to print the map on page 9), writing utensils, talking piece for circle process

Pick a genealogical strand (or two) from your family that you will focus on for the following activity. Taking turns, draw a line on the world map that connects the country or countries from where your family originated from to the place where they first settled in Turtle Island, or, if your family is native to Turtle Island, what region they inhabit(ed).

Discuss the following questions:

- If your family migrated, what were the circumstances in the countries of origin that contributed to your family's emigration?
- Who inhabited the land(s) that your family settled before your family arrived?
- How did your family experience discrimination, homelessness, and/or marginalization in the new setting or as a result of colonization?
- Do you know if your family contributed to the displacement of other peoples where they settled? If so, how?

Many settler Anabaptists know their family history well and can trace their genealogies back to Europe, where their ancestors experienced persecution and oppression at the hands of religious and governmental authorities. Yet their family trees also include those who migrated and were often used as a tool of different governments to settle on Indigenous lands considered "empty" under the Christian Doctrine of Discovery. People once oppressed under religious and governmental powers were later blind to the ways in which they dispossessed Indigenous peoples of their lands under religious and governmental powers.

Other Anabaptists are descended from migrants and refugees from countries outside of Europe; others' ancestors may have been forced to migrate under conditions of enslavement; others may be native to Turtle Island; others may trace their family origins to Europe, though their lineage is not Anabaptist, and still others may not know their family history at all.

We want to remember our family and our ancestors, their stories and their witness as well as their blind spots and failures, even as we may one day be remembered.

Using circle process, you are invited to name one or two ancestors to whom you wish to dedicate this time of learning and work around the Doctrine of Discovery, and to share a few words about their story.

Film showing (Optional): *The Doctrine of Discovery: In the Name of Christ*

Using circle process, reflect afterward on your initial emotional responses to the film. What are you feeling after watching it? If time allows, share any thoughts that arise.

Resources for further learning:

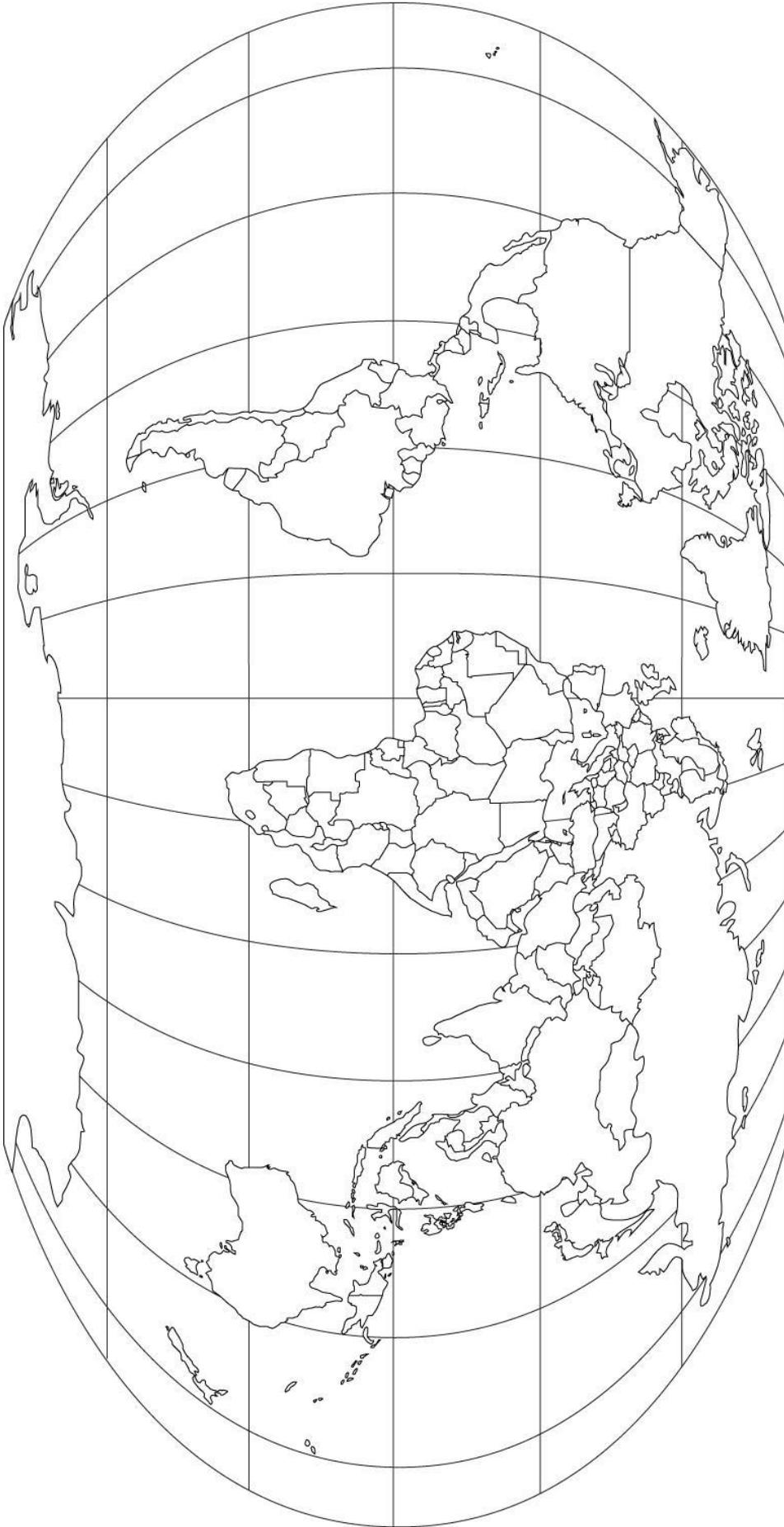
- “Yours, Mine, Ours: Unravelling the Doctrine of Discovery,” ed. Cheryl Woelk; Steve Heinrichs. Common Word, 2016. 40 authors from diverse backgrounds — Indigenous and Settler, Christian and Traditional — wrestle with Canada’s Truth and Reconciliation Commission’s call to repudiation, what it might mean to Christians across North America, and what it entails for relationships with host peoples and host lands. A great companion to this study guide, or a next step for congregations wanting to go deeper in study. (Available for order online at: <http://www.commonword.ca>).
- The Loss of Turtle Island: The Loss of Turtle Island is a participatory learning experience that depicts the historic relationship between European settlers — including Mennonites — and the Indigenous nations, the original inhabitants of the land we now call the United States of America. Blankets represent the land, and participants represent distinct Indigenous nations who experience colonization, genocide, broken treaties, forced removal, assimilation and termination — all in the spirit of the Doctrine of Discovery. Contact MCC Central States Indigenous Visioning Circle to invite a facilitator to your church or group: centralstates@mcc.org; 316-283-2720.
- Dunbar-Ortiz, Roxanne. *An Indigenous Peoples’ History of the United States*. Boston: Beacon Press, 2015.
- Heinrichs, Steve, ed. *Buffalo Shout, Salmon Cry: Conversations On Creation, Land Justice, and Life Together*. Waterloo: Herald Press, 2013.
- Robertson, Lindsay G. *Conquest by Law: How the Discovery of America Dispossessed Indigenous Peoples of Their Lands*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2005.

NOTES FOR FACILITATORS:

- Pass out Circle Process Handout and Common Circle Guidelines (HANDOUTS 1 and 2). Spend some time before starting the Circle Process to look over these handouts and affirm and/or discuss your commitments to one another in the Circle.

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Module 1



World Robinson Projection Map with Country Outlines

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MCC image from: <https://mcc.org/get-involved/events/celebrate-faithful-work-lawrence-betty-hart>

Acts of Contrition and Reparative Justice Case Study: *Return to the Earth*

Lawrence Hart, Cheyenne Peace Chief and Mennonite pastor, approached Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) with the opportunity to engage in the repatriation of the unidentifiable ancestral remains of Indigenous Americans.* These skulls and other remains were originally collected by the U.S. government for display at museums or for scientific research during colonization, and many still exist in museums to this day.

Lawrence Hart's idea became The Return to the Earth project, which MCC sees as a reconciliation project and a way of making reparations for the displacement of Native Americans by European Mennonite settlement. Congregations that engage in the program help to provide burial boxes and cloths as a way to show respect for the dead. It is also a way for non-Indigenous people to offer an apology for a history of silence and even collusion in historical wrongs done to Indigenous Americans. The program includes a study guide for groups who want to learn more about the history of colonization and their part in it. One of the requirements of the study guide is that participants do research to find out which tribes claimed or claim the homelands where the church building is located. "Southern Hills Mennonite Church in Topeka, KS, is one of the churches that participated in the Return to the Earth project, and is featured in this short MCC video: [Youtube video](#)

-MCC Central States, Indigenous Visioning Circle
<http://mcc.org/learn/what/categories/indigenous-work>

*To read more about Lawrence Hart, check out the book by Raylene Hinz-Penner, *Searching for Sacred Ground: The Journey of Chief Lawrence Hart, Mennonite* (Scottsdale, PA: Cascadia Publishing House/ Herald Press: 2007).