



dofdmenno.org

## Coalition Activities July 2018-June 2019

Five years ago, thanks to a grant from PSMC, more than 20 Mennonites concerned with justice for Indigenous People around the world gathered in San Francisco to meet for the first time. From that gathering, the Dismantling the Doctrine of Discovery Coalition emerged — an Anabaptist movement to dismantle laws, policies, theologies and church practices that historically disadvantage and continue to harm Indigenous Peoples. We are so grateful to PSMC for continuing to support us as ministry partners. Now in our fifth year, we are on fire! See below for what has been happening among Coalition members.

### **But first... some background**

Some quick background about the Doctrine of Discovery. The Doctrine of Discovery is a philosophical and legal framework dating back to the 15th century that gave Christian governments moral and legal rights to invade and seize Indigenous lands and dominate Indigenous peoples. This same framework also gave Christian governments the right to enslave anybody who wasn't Christian, which justified the slave trade. And, as Paul Schrag said in a recent [article](#) in Mennonite World Review, the Doctrine of Discovery is "not a relic of history but a persistent way of thinking that undergirds racial injustice to this day."

Paul's article continues: "As we have begun to understand this 500-year-old heresy, the scales have fallen from our eyes. We now see more clearly how white Europeans and their descendants have distorted the Christian faith to dehumanize indigenous people and attempt to justify genocide... As the word "doctrine" suggests, the church came up with this idea, and religious beliefs sustained it. Today, Mennonites and other Christians have awakened to the fact that what has been done in the name of Christ must be undone in the name of Christ. This is one of the basic principles of Mennonite efforts to dismantle the Doctrine of Discovery. Because a distortion of faith has caused harm, our faith now compels us to repent and atone." We couldn't have said it better ourselves.

## What we've been doing

Here's what we've been doing to dismantle the Doctrine of Discovery:

### Educating and Energizing the Church

- In 2017, the Coalition supported the development of a full-length play about the Doctrine of Discovery called *Discovery: A Comic Lament*. Ted & Company Theater-Works have been touring the play since then, and thousands of Mennonites have seen it. We are in the process of developing a curriculum based on the play for youth and young adults.
- The documentary that we created in 2015, *Doctrine of Discovery: In the Name of Christ*, continues to be used by Christian groups around the country. The study guide and Bible reflections that accompany this documentary are also in widespread use. These materials are free and available on our [website](#).
- We continue to maintain a regularly updated Facebook page — @dismantleddiscovery.
- Coalition members worked with Mennonite Church USA to create widely-used [worship materials](#) on the Doctrine of Discovery for Mennonite Heritage Sunday in October 2018.
- Members of our Coalition gave presentations at congregations across the country. Sarah Augustine, our Coalition's co-founder, did a speaking tour in southern California in early 2019, which included presentations at Pasadena Mennonite Church, Full Circle Thrift, ReconciliAsian, and Pilgrim Place Retirement Community.
- Workshops on the Doctrine of Discovery were developed and accepted for Kansas City 2019. In addition, the Coalition is organizing joint booth space for a variety of justice organizations that work within the church.
- Articles on the Doctrine of Discovery were published in *Anabaptist Witness*, [the Mennonite](#), and the book *The Politics of Power: Responding to Abuse in a Peace Church* (in press)
- Sarah Augustine is co-developing a program on the Doctrine of Discovery with Mennonite Women USA and is also working on a book proposal for Herald Press.
- We are in the process of developing a board game curriculum to accompany the "Settlers of Cataan" game to provoke thought and insight about settler colonialism.
- The Doctrine of Discovery was this year's theme for a group of AMBS professors (including Coalition members) who did research on a theology of reparations, how to integrate dismantling work into the AMBS curriculum and how to read the Exodus story other than simply that of conquest.
- Our Coalition connected and accompanied Eileen Saner at Eighth Street Mennonite with Aaron Martin, a Pokagon Band Potawatomi artist, who designed a Land Acknowledgment sign they commissioned for Goshen/ Elkhart churches.

## Dismantling Legal and Political Structures

- In 2018, a federal court struck down the Indian Child Welfare Act, a vital piece of legislation that protects Indigenous families from being separated. The Indian Child Welfare Association approach Coalition members, asking for help from people of faith to uphold this law, By March 2019, the Coalition organized visits across the United States, including among PSMC congregations (see photos below).
- In 2016, the Coalition began organizing people of faith across the United States to support human rights for Indigenous Peoples at the request of the Miskitu people of Nicaragua. Delegations traveled to Washington D.C., educating law makers about the connection between economic development and the suppression of human rights for Indigenous Peoples. The Nicaragua Human Rights and Anticorruption Act of 2018 is a result, tying dollars issues by the U.S. government to human rights standards.
- Currently, there is a resolution before the Democratic party in California to make dismantling the Doctrine of Discovery a part with the Democratic platform.

## Reparations

- \* Florence Schloneger recently gave a portion of her family farm inheritance to the Kanza People of Kansas and has inspired others to do the same. Florence was inspired to do this partly because of the work of our Coalition's education work. You can read about it in this [article](#) in Mennonite World Review.
- \* PSMC congregation Shalom Mennonite Fellowship has put an ongoing financial restitution to Indigenous people into their budget as a result of Coalition's educational work.

## Organizing for the Future

To advance our work, we are now seeking partners to help us staff a position for one of our founders, Sarah Augustine. Sarah will be able to devote her time to responding to congregations who are ready to hear the message and join the movement. Sarah speaks regularly in communities across the country and has represented Indigenous Peoples around the world to the United Nations, Inter-American Human Rights Commission, the World Council of Churches and others. Sarah is also a co-founder of Suriname Indigenous Health Fund. She identifies as Indigenous and is a descendent of the Pueblo people.



Shalom Mennonite Church in Tucson Arizona demonstrates their solidarity with Native peoples by supporting the Indian Child Welfare Act on March 10, 2019. Photo provided by Carol Rose.



A delegation from First Mennonite Church of San Francisco held a vigil for the upholding of the Indian Child Welfare Act in Oakland California in front of the Federal Building. Photo provided by Sheri Hostetler.