Workshop Seeks Right Relationship with America’s Native Peoples

Last year, a call to faith communities went out from two very different organizations: the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues, and the World Council of Churches. Indigenous and religious leaders urged all people of faith to take a deep look at the Doctrine of Discovery, the 15th century papal edict that authorized European Christian nations to “invade, capture, vanquish, and subdue all...pagans and other enemies of Christ...to reduce their persons to perpetual slavery...and...to take away all their possessions and property” (Pope Nicholas V).

Why do we need to dredge up the Doctrine of Discovery now, more than 500 years later? Because over the centuries, it became embedded in the European world view (handed down to us) and in the legal codes of the lands they colonized. It continues to be cited by courts in our country and others, as justification for denying Indigenous Peoples their rights. It’s easy to see how it continues to shape American foreign policy. It may be more difficult, and just as important, to see how it influences our own private thoughts and actions.

At the Boulder, Colorado, monthly meeting, the Indigenous Peoples Concerns (IPC) Committee responded to the call from Indigenous and religious leaders by undertaking a study of the Doctrine of Discovery and of the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. The Declaration, approved by the UN General Assembly in 2007, is an effective antidote to the Doctrine of Discovery because it defines Indigenous Peoples’ inalienable rights, which the Doctrine of Discovery systematically violates. Boulder’s IPC committee asked itself, How can we help educate Friends and other faith communities about these issues and encourage them to answer the call to repudiate the Doctrine of Discovery and support implementation of the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples?
We developed a 90-minute participatory workshop and a Resource Kit, and we presented them first to the Boulder meeting. Boulder meeting was led to approve a minute repudiating the Doctrine of Discovery and endorsing the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. Our minute now stands with similar minutes that have been approved by QEW and several yearly meetings.

Now the IPC committee is taking our workshop on the road to Intermountain Yearly Meeting and Friends General Conference, to the QEW steering committee meetings in Boulder, and to faith communities nationwide. Our goal is to raise awareness and caring about our broken relationships with all the peoples of our land, and with the land itself, and set our feet on a path toward right relationship.

The workshop is called, “This Land Was Your Land: Seeking Right Relationship with America’s Native Peoples.” It begins with a 40-minute participatory exercise in which we hear the voices of America’s past – the Native Peoples of Turtle Island and the European popes, monarchs, and colonizers – and the voices that today are calling for healing, reconciliation, and right relationship among all peoples and with the land. The exercise is followed by a period of silent reflection and worship sharing. A Resource Kit provides materials and suggestions for individuals and groups who want to take steps toward right relationship in their own communities.

Some quotes from participants’ evaluation forms:

“This workshop is an innovative and impactful step towards healing. Working with the truth that has never been told about the American myth, is vital to all of us in our country if we are to move forward in a more healthy way.” -- Brett Shelton (Lakota), Staff Attorney, Native American Rights Fund

“The way this workshop was able to condense a massive and complicated history into a short time was extremely impressive. This is a wonderful way to educate the general public. The interactive nature is much more effective than a simple lecture or even a documentary. I have been interested in these issues for a while, and this has rekindled my passion and interest.” -- Jake Matlak, Philanthropiece

“I respected very much the talking circle after the exercise. This program brought up emotions that I haven’t let myself feel for a while. Now I am ready for action and my mind is spinning with ideas.” -- Nico Larson, Naropa University student

We are eager to present this workshop wherever it can be useful. Please contact Paula Palmer, Clerk, Indigenous Peoples Concerns Committee, Boulder Meeting, paularpalmer@gmail.com. Information is also posted at http://www.boulderfriendsmeeting.org/ipc-right-relationship/

Image: This painting by John Gast, 1872, depicts "Manifest Destiny," a religious belief stemming from the Doctrine of Discovery, that white Americans should carry their civilization from the Atlantic to the Pacific, in the name of God.

The "This Land Was Your Land" workshop is being offered at these Friends’ gatherings:

*Inter-Mountain Yearly Meeting: Ghost Ranch NM*
- Wednesday morning Seminar, June 12
- Thursday afternoon Interest Group, June 13

*QEW Steering Committee meeting, Boulder CO*
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Saturday evening, June 29

Friends General Conference Gathering, Greeley CO

- Tuesday afternoon, July 2, at QEW Earth Center
- Thursday afternoon, July 4 with Dr. Vincent Harding and Dr. George Tinker

Welcome to QEW’s Earthcare Center! [1]
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