

Religious Groups Ask Pope Francis to Stand with Indigenous People

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Thirteen Catholic Groups in Solidarity with Indigenous People Join Their Request to Ask Pope Francis to Rescind Papal Bulls from 15th Century



Photo credit: Barbara Donachy

Thirteen Catholic groups today announced their request to Pope Francis to issue a formal rescission of the 15th century papal bulls that provide the basis for the Doctrine of Discovery.* Joining together to make the request are the Loretto Community, together with the elected leadership of the Sisters of Mercy of the Americas, the 19 member congregations of Dominican Sisters Conference, the Sisters of St Francis (Rochester, Minn.), Sisters of St. Joseph (Concordia, Kan.), Sisters of St. Joseph (Philadelphia), Sisters of Charity of Leavenworth (Kan.), the Congregation of Sisters of St. Agnes (Fond du Lac, Wis.), Institute of the Blessed Virgin Mary (Casa Loreto, Rome), Sisters of St. Joseph and Associates of Buffalo New York; Pax Christi International; as well as the 8th Day Center for Justice which is funded by 34 congregations of religious men and women; and the Franciscan-founded Nevada Desert Experience in collaboration with Chief Johnnie L. Bobb of the Western Shoshone National Council. The membership of the 13 groups includes women and men religious and laypeople. The groups' request stands in solidarity with indigenous

peoples' persistent requests to every pope since 1984 to do the same.

Columbus' arrival in the Western Hemisphere began an era of horrific violence based on religious intolerance. The Doctrine of Discovery justified this violence in addition to the seizure of any land not owned by Christians. The 13 groups cited above call upon Pope Francis to start a new era of justice with a public declaration that formally rescinds Dum Diversis Bull of 1492, which granted the pope's blessing "to capture, vanquish and subdue the Saracens, pagans and other enemies of Christ and put them into perpetual slavery and to take all their possessions and their property," and Inter Caetera Bull of 1493, which granted authority to Spain and Portugal to "take all lands and possessions" so long as no other Christian ruler had previously claimed them. The 13 groups cited above also ask Pope Francis to create a new papal bull that promotes ethical norms in harmony with Gospel values.

Other Catholics have raised their voices in solidarity with this worldwide indigenous peoples' request, notably Pax Christi International in a prior communication to the World Council of Churches, and the Religious at the United Nations signing a letter to Pope Francis originated by the Passionists International. It is likely that other Catholics have similarly stood as allies, and more are expected to experience the call to do so. **All voices in solidarity are welcome.**

The requested actions would be a moral victory for indigenous people, and one long overdue. Recent popes have made gestures of reconciliation, moving the Catholic Church and the world at large forward to this important moment. Indigenous groups stand firm in their requests for rescission and repudiation of the official bulls, seeking the same formality with which they were issued. The 13 groups previously cited stand in solidarity with these requests of indigenous neighbors, far and near.

These groups draw inspiration from their Catholic heritage and Gospel values of peace and justice. Many members of these communities were shocked to learn of the doctrine, saddened at the delay experienced by indigenous peoples and eager to show solidarity with the justice-based effort. The past year for many communities has been one of slowly coming to terms with something that indigenous peoples have experienced for centuries.

The 13 Catholic groups making this request join with other denominations that have made similar announcements, including the World Council of Churches, the Episcopal House of Bishops, the Philadelphia, New York and Canadian Yearly Meetings of the Religious Society of Friends and the Boulder Friends Meeting (Quakers), the United Methodist Church, Unitarian Universalists and many others.

To join in this effort, please contact Loretto Papal Bull Rescission Committee members Libby Comeaux (libby.comeaux[at]gmail.com) or Mary Helen Sandoval (mary.sandoval.ms[at]gmail.com).

Papal Bull Press Release – PDF^[1]

Loretto Community Letter to Pope Francis^[2]

**Today's relationships between governments and indigenous people in the Americas, Africa and Oceania have as their foundation the "Doctrine of Discovery." It is a principle of international law with roots dating back to 15th century papal bulls. These decrees largely were used to justify Western Europe's dominion over lands occupied for thousands of years by indigenous peoples. They made possible the European age of "discovery," sanctioning and promoting the conquest, colonization and exploitation of non-Christian lands and peoples.*

Links

1. <http://www.lorettocommunity.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/11/Papal-Bull-Press-Release-11-25-2013.pdf>
2. <http://www.lorettocommunity.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/11/Papal-Bull-Letter.pdf>