



Restoring the Sacred Circle with Indigenous People: Acts of Repentance

The following Act of Repentance was offered during opening worship of the 2016 PNW Annual Conference directed at Restoring the Sacred Circle with Indigenous People. The full service is available on youtube at the link <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=g5Dqw144ScY>

An Act of Repentance: Understanding Privilege

Rev. Ann Adkinson

I didn't learn any of what we just heard this morning in school. But then, history was never my favorite subject.

It is my privilege as a white, middle-class woman and citizen of the U.S. that enables me to make that statement: "History was not my favorite subject."

History, for me, (and for others with privileges like mine) is just that: optional. It's a field of knowledge I can have interest in, or not—an acquired taste, like jazz, or mountain biking. It's a subject I can be good at, or not, and my ignorance doesn't cost me that much.

It seems strange to think of ignorance as a privilege. But since I'm in the dominant group, staying ignorant of history isn't likely to cost me my job or my property. It doesn't cost me my homeland or my language. It doesn't cost me my cultural heritage or my identity.

That is what living in a system that presumes my goodness based on the color of my skin gives to me, unearned: the privilege to stay tuned out of other people's pain.

Jesus, however, does not give me that option.

Jesus calls me to repent from ignorance that disconnects me from my neighbor. In order to love my neighbor, I have to see her. I have to be curious about his life. I have to be willing to turn and face the ways that my ignorance costs other people their rights. And I have to face that this ignorance also costs *me* my wholeness.

I cannot repent on my own power; it's not something I can do on my own. The power to repent is grace from God. I've been given power to repent - to turn, to shift direction.

I can repent by admitting I don't have the accurate story.

I can repent from ignorance and educate myself anew.

I can look at my own history, my own ancestors' and family's history with a different mind and heart and see how it is *not* separate, but bound up together with the history of others.

If we claim we are one people, created by God to love one another as neighbors - as brothers and sisters in Christ - then history is not optional.



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Study Guide: Understanding Privilege by Kristina Gonzalez

The Statement

Use *Lectio Divina* to reflect on the reading. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lectio_Divina

Read the statement on Understanding Privilege three times aloud. After each reading, ask the following question:

- Reading 1: What word, phrase or image stood out for me in this reading?
- Reading 2: What is meant by the term ‘privilege’ in this context?
- Reading 3: What is God asking me to do, be or change through this testimony?

In groups of three to six persons, use Mutual Invitation¹ after each reading to hear reflections from the group members. Mutual Invitation is a method of intercultural communication that allows everyone to be invited to the conversation and to invite. It works this way:

The facilitator or the reader poses the question aloud prior to reading and again in a moment of reflection following the reading. This person offers their reflection to the group, modeling the length of response, then invites another to participate. Avoid the temptation of going around a circle.

Once invited, one can share, and then invite; ‘pass for now,’ meaning ‘please come back to me,’ then invite; or ‘pass,’ meaning ‘I don’t have anything to share on this question,’ then invite. All responses are honored, and each person takes responsibility for their level of involvement. No cross talk or questioning is allowed during the process, though this can happen at the end if there is time.

Mutual Invitation allows for reflection, depth in the study, and mutual learning from the wisdom of the participants. In addition, the invitational aspect honors the many cultures for which an invitation is important to share comfortably.

Reflection: Understanding Privilege

“I didn’t learn any of what we just heard this morning in school.” This sentence begins the reflection of Rev. Ann Adkinson, acknowledging the deeply troubling history of the cultural and literal genocide of American Indian people, and the role of the church in this history. Rev. Adkinson laments that her European ancestry gives her the option to care or not about this history, while this history is still lived experience with impacts today for American Indian people.

The history lesson that Ann refers to was included in the Opening Worship of the 2015 PNW Annual Conference; a link to the service is provided above. Two critical historical references have resonance today. *The Doctrine of Discovery*, a set of edicts issued by Roman Catholic Popes of the 15th Century

¹Kaleidoscope Institute for leadership in a diverse, changing world. <http://www.kscopeinstitute.org/>



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legitimized the taking of land, slavery and execution of indigenous peoples throughout the Americas. These edicts remain the basis for property law in the USA today.

Indian Boarding Schools, mainly operated by Christians, including Methodists, represented forced separation of children at a very young age from their families under the principle of – ‘kill the Indian and save the man.’² The intentional and often brutal attempt to assimilate Indian children into the ‘settler’ society meant that generations of Indian people were forcibly parented by institutions rather than by their families and communities. This resulted in loss of identity and the unraveling of complex Native American societies and cultures.

How much do you know about *The Doctrine of Discovery* and *American Indian Boarding School*? How much do you know about the role of the church with each? If you know little about either, why might that be?

What did you learn about American Indian tribes and culture in school? How nuanced is your understanding of the many cultures that are grouped into one large category commonly known as Native Americans?

Reflect on your interest in gaining a more complex understanding of this history. If you have little interest, reflect again on the full statement offered by Rev. Adkinson, and ask, ‘How is the concept of privilege at work in my ability to say ‘no’ to further study?’

Commitment

What commitment will you and your group make to:

- Group study and discussion?
- Study of the term ‘privilege’ or ‘white privilege’ as a societal phenomenon?
- Study of the history and culture of Indian people in your area, and how the church intersects the history close to home?
- Intentional planning to initiate or enhance relationships with tribes or American Indian people, including protocols for getting started?

Resources

Print

Mann, Henrietta and Phillips, Anita. *On This Spirit Walk, The Voices of Native American and Indigenous Peoples*. Muskogee, OK: Native American Comprehensive Plan, The United Methodist Church.

² Widely attributed to Army Officer Richard Pratt, founder of Carlisle Indian Boarding School.



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Noley, Homer. *First White Frost, Native Americans and United Methodism*. 1991. Nashville: Abington Press.

Roberts, Gary L. *Massacre at Sand Creek: How Methodists Were involved in an American Tragedy*. 2016. Nashville: Abington Press.

Wise, Tim. *White Like Me, Reflections on Race from a Privileged Son*. 2008. Berkeley, CA: Soft Skull Press.

The Book of Resolutions of the United Methodist Church 2012. 2012. Nashville: United Methodist Publishing House. Pgs. 417-438.

Web

YouTube: Doctrine of Discovery, Mennonite Church:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JvM4SJN76Yg>

United Nations study on Doctrine of Discovery: <http://www.un.org/press/en/2010/hr5019.doc.htm>

Recent article on request of Pope Francis to rescind Doctrine of Discovery:

<http://www.aptn.ca/news/2016/06/01/church-considering-request-to-rescind-doctrine-of-discovery/>

Romero Institute, An Interfaith Center for Law and Public Policy education and action on Doctrine of Discovery: <http://www.romeroinstitute.org/projects/doctrine-of-discovery/?gclid=Cj0KEQjw4pO7BRDI9ePazKzr1LYBEiQAHLJdR2uu3ZFV45v8oUg5u85TbMoKawwnZhqrnjSYTN1b3IYaAuVu8P8HAQ>

Educational article from Indigenous Law Institute on Doctrine of Discovery

http://ili.nativeweb.org/sdrm_art.html

Unseen Tears: The Native American Boarding School Experience in Western New York Part 1:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ioAzzgmes8c>

The Wellbriety Journey to Forgiveness, documenting the abuses and effects of Indian Boarding Schools:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vZwF9NnQbWM>

McIntosh, Peggy. *Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack*. PDF file of this article can be found multiple locations on the web, including <http://www.nymbp.org/reference/WhitePrivilege.pdf>

Share other resources as you find them helpful. For questions or assistance, contact:

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