



*In Mission
for Others*

Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada

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August 14, 2015

The Right Honourable Stephen Harper
Prime Minister of Canada
Office of the Prime Minister
80 Wellington Street
Ottawa, ON K1A 0A2
pm@pm.gc.ca

Dear Prime Minister:

On behalf of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada (ELCIC), I am writing to share with you that our church has repudiated and renounced the Doctrine of Discovery, and to encourage the Government of Canada to take similar action.

July 8-12, 2015 the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada (ELCIC) gathered in Edmonton, Alberta, for our biennial National Convention. The theme for our time together was “Liberated by God’s Grace.” One action of the convention was to adopt a “Resolution on the Doctrine of Discovery.” This action can be understood as one expression of a long-term commitment to walk with Indigenous peoples.

“The ELCIC confesses that this doctrine encourages patterns of domination and oppression that continue to afflict Indigenous peoples today. The ways of life, identities, well-being and very existence of Indigenous people are threatened by the continuing effects of colonization and national policies, regulations and laws that attempt to force Indigenous peoples to assimilate into the cultures of dominant societies.

“We confess that this doctrine encourages patterns of domination and oppression of land and environment which continue today. These patterns discourage healthy and holistic relationships with God’s whole creation. The doctrine continues to inform national policies, regulations and laws thereby becoming a detriment to addressing urgent environmental challenges such as climate justice, responsible resource extraction and establishing sustainable lifestyles.”

The ELCIC takes this action with humility. We are aware that a variety of faith communities have previously taken action to repudiate the Doctrine of Discovery. We are also aware that the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (TRC) has called “upon all religious denominations and faith

groups who have not already done so to repudiate concepts used to justify European sovereignty over Indigenous lands and peoples, such as the Doctrine of Discovery and *terra nullius*.” I am pleased that the timing of convention allowed us to respond to this Call to Action a few weeks after the TRC’s Closing Event.

We are aware that the TRC also called “upon federal, provincial, territorial, and municipal governments to repudiate concepts used to justify European sovereignty over Indigenous peoples and lands, such as the Doctrine of Discovery and *terra nullius*, and to reform those laws, government policies, and litigation strategies that continue to rely on such concepts.” The TRC has also called on governments to “Adopt and implement the *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples* as the framework for reconciliation.”

In order to empower and enable Indigenous peoples to identify their own aspirations and issues of concern, the ELCIC encourages you to follow up on these Calls to Action as a way of expressing commitment to the reconciliation process.

As a church, the ELCIC prays for wisdom, humility, courage and God’s guidance towards action that is truthful about the racist history of cultural genocide and hopeful for a future marked by reconciliation and respect for the rights of all peoples.

Governments play a vital role in encouraging respectful action and in transforming legal structures and policies. We include leaders in our prayers as you carry out your duties and as all who call Canada home seek reconciliation together.

Yours in Christ,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Susan C. Johnson", with a small cross symbol to the left.

The Rev. Susan C. Johnson
National Bishop, Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada

c.c. The Honourable Thomas Mulcair, The Leader of the Official Opposition
Justin Trudeau, MP, Leader of the Liberal Party of Canada
Elizabeth May, MP, Leader of the Green Party of Canada
Gilles Duceppe, Leader of the Bloc Québécois
The Honourable Bernard Valcourt, Minister of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development
ELCIC National Church Council