

## Resolution #4

Submitted by the Bemidji Conference

### Regarding Repudiation of the Doctrine of Discovery and Commitment to Partner with our Ojibwe Neighbors

1 **WHEREAS**, we confess with our Native sisters and brothers that the whole of Creation is God’s  
2 work, that God declares it all as good, and that God’s Spirit dwells within it; and  
3

4 **WHEREAS**, we confess that Jesus Christ became incarnate in human form to show God’s love  
5 and mercy to all humanity, in all its variety, and to every race and people on every continent of  
6 the earth; and  
7

8 **WHEREAS**, we acknowledge with pain and regret the damage done to the indigenous  
9 inhabitants of the Americas by the European conquest and migration to what Europeans called a  
10 “new world,” but which was in reality already the homeland of many peoples; and  
11

12 **WHEREAS**, we recognize that Christian churches were and remain complicit in that conquest,  
13 migration and dispossession: and  
14

15 **WHEREAS**, Christian churches helped develop conceptions of Native peoples that blamed them  
16 for their own ills and that continue to perpetuate prejudice and injustice against them and their  
17 descendants; and  
18

19 **WHEREAS**, we deplore and reject the so-called “doctrine of discovery”: the legal principle,  
20 originating with Pope Alexander VI in 1493 and further entrenched in U.S. federal law in  
21 *Johnson v. McIntosh* (1823), that Native inhabitants have no property or any other rights which  
22 colonizing European nations and their sovereigns are bound to respect. This principle promotes  
23 the myth that the Americas were a largely empty land that European conquerors and migrants  
24 had a right to claim, occupy, and possess simply by virtue of their Christianity and their  
25 European civilization; and  
26

27 **WHEREAS**, we realize that our culpability in the ongoing influence of the Doctrine of  
28 Discovery is a shared reality within geographic boundaries of the Northwestern MN Synod,  
29 which we share with our neighbors; three federally recognized tribes: The Leech Lake Band of  
30 Ojibwe, The Red Lake Band of Chippewa, and The White Earth Nation; and  
31

32 **WHEREAS**, Luke 10:25-37 reminds us that we are to “love the Lord your God with all your  
33 heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind; and your  
34 neighbor as yourself”; therefore be it  
35

36 **RESOLVED**, that the 2017 Northwestern Minnesota Synod in assembly, joining with the  
37 Churchwide expression of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, the Evangelical  
38 Lutheran Church in Canada, The Episcopal Church, The United Church of Christ, The United

39 Methodist Church, and The Moravian Church, explicitly and clearly repudiates the European  
40 Christian-derived “doctrine of discovery;” as fundamentally opposed to the gospel of Jesus  
41 Christ and as a violation of the inherent rights that all individuals and peoples have received from  
42 God, with its continuing impact upon tribal governments and individual tribal members to this  
43 day, and acknowledges and repents of its complicity in the evils of colonialism in the Americas;  
44 and be it further

45

46 **RESOLVED**, that the 2017 Northwestern Minnesota Synod in assembly offers herewith a  
47 statement of repentance and reconciliation to Native nations on its territory for damage done in  
48 the name of Christianity and “civilization,” and supports the ongoing effort to identify an  
49 appropriate ELCA synodical ceremony of repentance and reconciliation with tribal leaders, and  
50 provide resources for similar congregational observances with local tribal leaders, at all such  
51 times and places as are appropriate; and be it further

52

53 **RESOLVED**, that the Northwestern Minnesota Synod in assembly, along with the ELCA, and  
54 with the help of Native communities, also commits itself to the development of resources, in the  
55 next triennium, to help its congregations and people understand and reduce the negative impact  
56 of the “doctrine of discovery” and its consequences for Native people in Northern Minnesota;  
57 and be it further

58

59 **RESOLVED**, that the Northwestern Minnesota Synod in assembly supports a renewed strategy  
60 for ministry and partnership with Native communities within the synod territory, with a  
61 particular commitment to long-term, stable funding of ELCA American Indian and Alaska  
62 Native ministries, reflected in the 2019 Budget of the Northwestern MN Synod and beyond,  
63 increasing partnerships with congregations, and promoting efforts with the Native communities  
64 within which our congregations reside, and

65

66 **RESOLVED**, that the Northwestern Minnesota Synod in assembly, direct the Synod Council to  
67 form a Bridge Building Committee that will meet regularly, reporting to the Synod Council  
68 regularly, and the Synod Assembly annually, regarding the committee’s efforts to build upon the  
69 above commitments to identify intercultural resources, educational opportunities, and strategic  
70 initiatives so that the Northwestern MN Synod might join in the work to bridge cultural divides  
71 between native and nonnative residents in our congregations and communities.