

## ***Doctrine of Discovery***

(November 2025 - January 2026) Led by Fr. Tom Stradwick

### ***Doctrine of Discovery: Stolen Lands, Strong Hearts***

This documentary film, produced by the Anglican Church of Canada, begins an exploration of the historical origins and ongoing legacy of the 'Doctrine of Discovery' on Indigenous Peoples. The documentary was created in response to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's Calls to Action to provide education on the racist foundations of laws and policies still in existence today.

For an additional introduction to this topic, the *Canadian Museum for Human Rights, webpage, 2026, Doctrine of Discovery*, provides this explanation and guiding questions:

"The Doctrine of Discovery was set out in a series of declarations by popes in the 15th century. These declarations (known as "papal bulls") provided religious authority for Christian empires to invade and subjugate non-Christian lands, peoples and sovereign nations, impose Christianity on these populations, and claim their resources. These papal bulls were written at a time when European empires were embarking on widescale colonial expansion." [Canadian Museum for Human Rights webpage 2026 Doctrine of Discovery.](#)

#### **Ask yourself:**

- How might rescinding the Doctrine affect the government's relationship with Indigenous peoples?
- What old colonial ideas and racist stereotypes continue to influence us in Canada today?
- Where and how did you learn about the history of colonization in Canada?

#### **Documentary Overview and Themes:**

**Historical Origins:** The film traces the doctrine back to 15th-century papal bulls (decrees) that authorized European monarchs to seize lands not inhabited by Christians. These decrees declared such lands terra nullius ("empty land") and characterized Indigenous peoples as "non-human" or "heathens".

**Legal and Systemic Impact:** It details how these religious decrees were transformed into legal precedents—most notably in the 1823 U.S. Supreme Court case *Johnson v. M'Intosh*—which continue to underpin property laws and government policies in Canada and the United States today.

**Legacy of Colonialism:** The documentary explores the link between the doctrine and the Canadian Indian residential school system, institutional racism, and the ongoing displacement of Indigenous peoples. **Indigenous Resilience:** Beyond its critique of colonial systems, the film highlights the "Strong Hearts" of Indigenous peoples. It features stories of resilience, leadership, and the ongoing struggle to reclaim languages, cultures, and land rights.

**Call to Action:** In response to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's Call to Action 47, the film serves as a tool for education and rejection of the doctrine by religious and governmental institutions.

**Call to Justice:** The film invites viewers to engage in truth-telling, seek justice, and work towards renewed relationships based on respect and equity.

#### **Resources**

**Watch:** The full documentary is available on the [Anglican Church of Canada website](#) and [YouTube](#).

**Study Guide:** A comprehensive [Study Guide](#) is available to facilitate group discussions on reconciliation and justice.