

LORETTO COMMUNITY

Sisters of Loretto - Co-members of Loretto

Office of the President

November 18, 2013

His Holiness Pope Francis
Apostolic Palace
00120 Vatican City
ROME

Your Holiness,

We send you greetings and all good wishes from the Loretto Community, which consists of the Sisters of Loretto and Loretto Co-members. The Sisters of Loretto is an American congregation of religious women founded in 1812 in Kentucky. Together, with our co-members, we make up the Loretto Community at this present time. The congregation's constitution, *I Am The Way*, embraces our mission—one of humility, dignity, and justice—as we stand with Mary at the foot of the cross. We work for justice and act for peace because the gospel urges us.

With this in mind and as part of our work for justice and peace, we, while gathered in Assembly in July 2012, felt it important to join our voices with those of our indigenous sisters and brothers as they request of the papacy that the Papal Bulls of 1452 and 1493 (referred to as the Doctrine of Discovery) be rescinded. Our resolution reads as follows:

The Loretto Community stands with indigenous peoples throughout the world and we call upon the Pope to formally and publicly repudiate and rescind the *Dum Diversas* Bull of 1452, and other related bulls, which grant 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." We also call upon the Pope to repudiate and rescind the *Inter Caetera* Bull of 1493 that granted authority to Spain and Portugal to "take all lands and possessions" so long as no other Christian ruler had previously claimed them. These bulls instilled the Doctrine of Discovery, the papal sanctioning of Christian enslavement and power over non-Christians.

Those bulls, suffice it to say, were written in a very different time. However, the patterns of dominance and dehumanization they promulgated have remained the foundation for many unjust religious and civil actions, as well as political and legal systems, over the past 500 years. In the United States (as recently as 2005), cases relying on the patterns found in the papal bulls and on the claimed Right of Discovery have been issued by the U.S. Supreme Court.

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His Holiness Pope Francis
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Page 2

In recent years, the papacy has been active in addressing Indigenous Peoples issues. Your predecessor Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI, for example, supported the United Nation's Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. Certainly Pope John Paul II's asking of forgiveness for the misdeeds 'of the sons and daughters of the Church' in 2000 and his words to Indigenous people in 2001 were very important steps.

Just as your outreach and gestures of friendship toward ecumenical communities of faith can unite Christians, they can also bring both Christians and non-Christians together as we seek justice through an end to dominance against indigenous peoples. We recently read a message from the Philadelphia Yearly Meeting of Religious Friends (Quakers) that states: *"You (as Pope) have the power and responsibility to do more, by issuing a new papal bull that formally, directly, unequivocally rescinds and revokes the Doctrine of Discovery and the horrible, cruel, un-Christian language in those bulls that denigrates entire peoples with no justification. As you well know, these people continue to suffer terrible injustice as a direct result of the beliefs, laws, and policies given official voice and approval by these papal bulls. You have a unique and indispensable role in helping the human community to change that."*

Believing as we do that such power does reside in your office as Pope and knowing that you personally have witnessed the plight of the indigenous peoples of Latin America, we ask you to issue a compassionate public proclamation rescinding the Doctrine of Discovery and the aforementioned bulls of the 15th century. By this action, all will know that today's world is different from that of the 15th Century as we move away from patterns of dominance and dehumanization. Whatever reasoning led to the language of dominance and subordination found in those original bulls, we must now be guided by ethical norms more in harmony with the gospel. This would in effect be a new doctrine for 2013 and beyond.

We remain united with you, asking God's blessing on your work of justice.

In peace,



Sister Pearl McGivney SL
President
Loretto Community

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