

#7 Lutherans Come to North America

Lutherans did not come to the Americas until some 150 years after Columbus. And, we weren't a significant presence until another 100 years after that.

Lutherans did not come to settle a "New World." We did not come under the flag of the *Doctrine of Discovery* to conquer primitive peoples, take away their land, or mine the earth's resources.

Lutherans came to the Americas to escape hardship, war and poverty. We simply came to be free and live honorable, independent lives. This history puts us in a unique position for vital Reformation work today!

Our American Lutheran, "inner monk" is a refugee. American Lutherans know what it means to flee persecution, turmoil and pain. Many of us have in our families stories of coming to a strange land, and being received - or not - by new neighbors. We've valued our native languages, our traditions and our family practices. German Lutherans lived under suspicion during the years between our two world wars. Some of us were put in U.S. concentration camps like our Japanese sisters and brothers.



*Holy Trinity Lutheran in
Wilmington, DE. Dedicated July
4, 1699 and thought to be the
oldest Lutheran Church in the
United States.*

Will Lutherans allow this to happen to Muslim, Arab or Latino refugees today? Of course not. Faith compels us to stand with those in need.

What about those here in America before we came? The *Doctrine of Discovery* originated from Papal Bulls of the 15th century and gave explorers the right to claim lands they discovered for European, Christian Monarchs. If "pagan" inhabitants of such lands could be converted, they might be spared. If not, they could be enslaved or killed.

The Discovery Doctrine found its way into U.S. law in 1823 when Chief Justice John Marshall recognized colonial powers' claims to newly discovered lands. In its U.S. incarnation, the doctrine has been used primarily to support decisions invalidating or ignoring Native American possession of ancestral lands. This Doctrine continues to have legal sway in U.S. courts.

I would not claim that Lutherans are innocent of our country's system oppression of Native Americans. However, the *Doctrine of Discovery* is not at the root of Lutheran immigration to the U.S. Last August the Churchwide Assembly of the ELCA officially refuted the *Doctrine of Discovery* and affirmed the rights and values of all people, including Native Americans. We care.

What does your immigrant, inner monk, see in our world today? The way in which God brought us to this country is unique. Lutherans carry a sensitivity to oppression, a history of difference and a gratitude for this country's acceptance of our presence. Ours is a legacy we are called to share with others! (More at www.oregonsynod.org/500)

With you on the journey,
Bp. Dave Brauer-Rieke