



Presbytery of Long Island

109 Udall Road, West Islip, NY 11795

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May 5, 2025

Supervisor Maria Z. Moore
Councilperson Michael A. Iasilli
Councilperson Rick Martel
Councilperson Cyndi McNamara
Councilperson William Pell IV
Town of Southampton
116 Hampton Road
Southampton, NY 11968

Dear Town Council Members,

The federal government is rapidly erasing significant parts of our shared history in its attacks on diversity, equity, and inclusion. But history is our most important teacher. As a society, we become better by learning from both the proud and the shameful parts of our history.

We are proud, for example, that our denomination, the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)—motivated by the core values and teachings of our faith—has made strong statements and taken meaningful action throughout our history celebrating the diversity of God’s creation, working towards equity and inclusion, and standing against racism.

It is also important that we acknowledge our sins: for example, our denomination’s historical embrace of the Doctrine of Discovery, which provided theological cover for European settlers to displace Indigenous nations and take their land. Presbyterians built our churches on land that had been stewarded by Indigenous Peoples; participated in the erasure of Indigenous culture through **colonizing** initiatives like Indian Boarding Schools; and marginalized Indigenous churches and pastors within our denomination, including here on Long Island. We have a lot of healing and reparative work to do, which begins with confession and with our denomination’s repudiation of the Doctrine of Discovery “as fundamentally opposed to the gospel of Jesus Christ and as a violation of the inherent human rights that all individuals and peoples have received from God” (Executive Committee of the World Council of Churches, 2012).

Although the 15th century Doctrine of Discovery, premised on a shoddy theology of European dominion, has been thoroughly disavowed by many religious denominations, it shockingly continues to unjustly shape and even be cited by a New York State court and the Town of Southampton in current controversies over Shinnecock land right here on Long Island. As the Shinnecock Nation and other tribal communities continue to defend sovereignty over their remaining land, we need to remember our history: like many Indigenous Peoples, the Shinnecock people have been living on Long Island for approximately 13,000 years, and Southampton Town is ancestral Shinnecock land.

It is long past time for all of us to intentionally recognize, acknowledge, confront, and dismantle the persistent fallacies of the Doctrine of Discovery and their insidious impact on the dignity, autonomy, and well-being of all Indigenous Peoples. Instead of operating within the Doctrine of Discovery's assumptions of dominance and control, we urge Southampton Town and other local jurisdictions to repair the doctrine's long history of harm here on Long Island and to celebrate the strength, resilience, and continuing proud story of Indigenous Long Islanders.

Respectfully,

Elder Ellen Gove, Moderator

Rev. Rachel Vione, Vice-Moderator

Rev. Matthew Means, Second Vice-Moderator

Elder Don Adams, Immediate Past Moderator

Rev. Kate Jones Calone, Executive Presbyter and Stated Clerk

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