



Resolutions To Action

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Native American Boarding Schools

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The recent discovery of the remains of 215 Indigenous children at the former Kamloops Indian Residential School in Canada shocked the conscience. Administered by Catholic religious, the school was one of hundreds across Canada and the United States designed by these nations' governments to forcibly assimilate Native Americans into dominant society. On June 22, Secretary of the Interior Deb Haaland announced a Federal Indian Boarding School Initiative, a comprehensive review of the troubled legacy of federal boarding school policies. The [National Native American Boarding School Healing Coalition](#) (NABS) now asks for our truth-telling, repentance, apology, amends, and advocacy for a US Truth and Healing Commission.

EXPERIENCE

LCWR's 2014 assembly resolution pledged solidarity with Indigenous Peoples' request that Pope Francis repudiate the 15th century papal bulls that made up the Doctrine of Discovery, clarify their continuing harmful impact, and urge governments to revise

current law to undo the damage. The bulls promulgated a paradigm of religious conversion by force and violence; among other atrocities, they led to more than a century of family separation in order to "kill the Indian" inside each child and indoctrinate them into US culture. In [NABS' words](#),

The churches may have taken on this mission with the best of intentions, given their shared beliefs at the time. But in fact, the schools carried out a deliberate policy of ethnocide and cultural genocide. Children were punished for speaking their native languages, banned from conducting traditional or cultural practices, shorn of traditional clothing and identity of their native culture. Many were sent far from their homelands and cut off from their family. Most were taught that their culture and traditions were evil and sinful, and taught that they should be ashamed of being Native American. Countless children were neglected and even abused physically, sexually, and psychologically.

Some children died as a result of despair, abuse, or illness. Those who returned home brought with them emotional scars, contributing to alcoholism, domestic abuse, and suicide.

The US government arranged for many boarding schools to be run by churches or religious congregations. Hoping to do good work, some of our congregations ran some of these schools. Of the 367 known boarding schools run in the US between 1869 and the 1960s, about 80 were run by Catholics. NABS asks that we

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learn our own histories, reflect, and discern actions appropriate to what we learn.

In fall 2020, then-Rep. Deb Haaland and Sen. Elizabeth Warren introduced HR 8420/S 4752 to establish a Truth and Healing Commission on the Indian Boarding School Policy. Legislators intend to introduce an improved version of the bill this year. In June, Haaland announced a Federal Indian Boarding School Initiative to identify boarding school facilities and sites; the location of known and possible student burial sites; and the identities and Tribal affiliations of children interred at such locations. It is time for us to begin to learn our own history in this regard.

SOCIAL ANALYSIS/ REFLECTION

Over the last decade, owing largely to the Black Lives Matter movement, the conversation around reparations as a path toward racial healing has become commonplace in public discourse. Some Catholic institutions have contributed to the discussion: Georgetown University, for example, began working toward reparations for the living descendants of the 272 Black women, children, and men it had enslaved and sold in 1838. Jesuits have since established a [Slavery, History, Memory and Reconciliation Project](#) that, in conversation with the descendants of people held in bondage, acknowledges historical harms, seeks to repair relationships, and works to address racial inequities today.

Women's religious communities in the United States and Canada have begun similar initiatives. One notable example is the Society of the Sacred Heart, which has

established a [Committee on Slavery, Accountability and Reconciliation](#) that seeks to "acknowledge our history with enslavement, build relationships with the descendants of our enslaved persons, and work with the descendants towards racial equity..."

Such efforts offer a transformative process that, while painful, can provide a meaningful opportunity for repentance and bring us more closely into right relationship with our sisters and brothers of Color, both within our own communities and in the wider society.

It is time for other religious communities to begin similarly difficult, yet fruitful, work regarding our relationship with Native communities; in particular, we need to become accountable for our involvement in and operation of Native American Boarding Schools. While individual schools and teachers may have done some positive things, the overall effect of the US Indian Boarding School Policy was one of cultural genocide; we have a moral obligation to take an honest look at our cooperation with it.

From 2007-2015, Canada underwent a seven-year-long process, led by a Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC), to grapple with its history of Indian Residential Schools. We in the United States have the opportunity to move forward a similar process here by supporting upcoming legislation that calls on the federal government to establish a Truth and Healing Commission to bring to light the truth about the historic and ongoing impacts of boarding schools on Native families, and recommend actions that support healing. Religious can begin the necessary work of understanding the truth about our own relationship with boarding schools, start an internal process of repentance and

healing, and work toward making amends.

ACTION

Compelled by our faith, reading of the signs of the times, and in the spirit of our call as religious, may we consider actions to work toward right relationship with Indigenous communities.

1. Join the National Native American Boarding School Healing Coalition at www.boardingschoolhealing.org as allies. This organization will keep us connected to learning opportunities and action steps we can take.
2. Learn about the history of colonization on this continent by participating in workshops such as "[The Blanket Exercise](#)," "[Roots of Injustice, Seeds of Change](#)," and others that connect colonization with the Indian Boarding School Policy.
3. Actively learn about the US Indian Boarding School Policy and its ongoing impacts through webinars and other resources offered by [NABS](#).
4. In a spirit of prayerful consideration, conduct research on your congregation's involvement with Indian boarding schools. In processes of reflection and repentance, develop and adopt official statements of acknowledgement and apology and, in consultation with NABS and the affected Native communities, take appropriate actions to make amends.
5. Assist NABS in their research and healing process by letting them know if your congregation has archives that relate to your boarding school history.
6. Call on our legislators to pass a bill that will establish a Truth and Healing Commission on the Indian Boarding School Policy.