

# A Call to Truth Telling and Repentance

**October 6, 2021: A Day of Truth and Repentance for Our Children**

**To: The Bishops and the Conferences of The United Methodist Church**

Recently, on the grounds of church-run schools in North America, mass graves have been found that contain the bones of over 1,000 children, some as young as three years old. This blatant disregard for life should cause anyone, especially those who invoke the name of Jesus Christ, to recoil in horror and lead the church to repentance. As the tally of missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls grow (which is already 10 times the national average), the echoes of historical trauma toward our children reverberate throughout Native American communities in North America. Forced removals and other injustices continue on a regular basis to this day, and the call to address the horrors of abuse -- and the consequence of genocidal policies -- is once again at the forefront.

**How many more lives must be lost before Native Americans are seen and their voices heard?**

Between 1869 and the 1960s, hundreds of thousands of Native American children were removed, often violently, from their homes and families and placed in these schools. There were 367 government-funded Native American Indian Boarding Schools, according to the National Native American Boarding School Healing Coalition (NABSHC). Many of these were run by the Church. Children at many of these schools were regularly beaten, had their hair forcibly cut and their traditional expressions of sacred identity stolen and destroyed. They were starved, physically abused, or mutilated for speaking their native languages or for attempting to preserve their

culture. They were emotionally and sexually abused. The schools were typically overcrowded, unsanitary and provided poor education and medical services, resulting in the rapid spread of disease and illness. Children were frequently hired out to local landowners and residents to perform forced labor and then treated like animals, or worse, by their overseers.

This unresolved historical trauma associated with the cultural genocide and years of stripping Native Americans of their culture, land, and language through the church and government-sanctioned boarding schools with the motto “Kill the Indian, Save the Man,” has wreaked havoc on Native American families. From addictions and domestic abuse to suicide and mental illness, insufficient acknowledgment of the harm perpetrated, and the lack of reparations have damaged Native American communities for generations.

A 2016 resolution states, the “General Conference of The United Methodist Church affirms the sacredness of American Indian people, their languages, cultures, and gifts to the church and the world.” The resolution recognized the common experience of Native families that “to assimilate our peoples into mainstream cultures, many of our ancestors as children were forcibly removed to boarding schools, often operated by religious institutions, including historical Methodism. The Doctrine of Discovery facilitated a climate of hostility and genocide. Native peoples were targets by those seeking land and other natural resources.”

## Our Call to Action:

- We call on the Church to commit to discovering the locations and records from the Methodist-run boarding schools, to search the physical properties for individual or mass graves by whatever means necessary, and to make a determined effort to provide surviving family members with the information found. We demand that the Church search out, listen to, and collect the oral stories of those family members whose ancestors were impacted by Methodist boarding schools.
- The Boarding School Healing Project has designated October 6 as

a Day of Remembrance. On that day in 1879, General Richard Pratt took children from First Nations and opened the boarding school in Carlisle, PA. This year, we call on the Church to observe October 6, 2021, as a day of Truth and Repentance for Our Children. These are the concrete acts that will begin a process of healing, justice, and reconciliation for families and communities to heal as the voices of the lost children are heard once again, as they are honored with the respect and love they did not receive from the Methodist Christians of the time.

The Native American International Caucus prays that you will listen to our pleas and hear the cries of the children who were lost, killed, and died from the church's horrific past.

## Members of the Board of the Native American International Caucus

### **Officers:**

**Ragghi Rain**, Chairperson  
**Rev. Charles Brower**, Vice-Chairperson  
**Helen Cheremiah**, Secretary  
**Rev. Alvin Deer**, Treasurer