



NAIC Native American International Caucus of The United Methodist Church

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How many more lost lives are necessary before Native Americans are visible and their voices are heard?

As the bones of the [215 children](#), some as young as three years old, found in a mass grave at the Kamloops Indian Residential School in Canada are collected; as the tally of missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls, which is already 10 times the national average, grows; and as the echoes of historical trauma reverberate throughout Native American communities in North America, the call to address the horror of abuse and the consequence of genocidal policies is once again brought to the forefront...but for how long? Is this the time when we, the United Methodist Church, will act or will we once again lament, offer prayers and return to our daily routines while the voices of the lost children cry out from their graves?

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 acknowledgement of the harm perpetuated, and the lack of reparations have damaged Native American communities for generations.

We know that there were some 367 government-funded, and often church-run Native American Indian Boarding Schools, possibly more, according to the National Native American Boarding School Healing Coalition (NABSHC). This group was created in 2012 to develop and implement a national strategy that increases public awareness and cultivates healing for the profound trauma experienced by individuals, families, and communities of American Indian and Alaska Native people.

Children at many of these schools were regularly beaten, had their hair forcibly cut, had traditional expressions of their sacred identity stolen and destroyed, were starved and physically abused or mutilated for speaking their native languages or attempting to preserve their culture, and 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.

Between 1869 and the 1960s, it has been estimated that hundreds of thousands of Native American children were removed, often violently, from their homes and families and placed in these schools. In 1893, Congress allowed the Bureau of Indian Affairs to withhold food rations and supplies from parents or guardians who refused to enroll and keep their children in the schools. Some families hid their children to avoid capture, and some children ran away from the schools. It is believed that an estimated 12-17 of these schools were Methodist funded and run, primarily in the Pacific Northwest region.

The 2012 General Conference of the United Methodist Church called the Church to a journey of repentance, condemning the acts of violence, seizure of land and abuse of the human rights of Indigenous peoples. More info [here](#).

In 2016 the Resolution, 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.” This resolution recognizes 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.” More info can be found [here](#).

Now, it is past time for the United Methodist Church to take action. Now it is time for the church to listen to the voices of American Indian and Native Alaskan children who were lost to their families and communities as they cry out for justice these many years later.

- Will the Bishops of the United Methodist Church lead the way by taking action to uncover the truth about our denomination’s role and responsibility in this reprehensible history? Will the church leadership commit to discovering the locations and records from the Methodist run boarding schools? Will the church seek out the names of the students at those schools and their tribal heritage?
- Will the denomination commit funding to search the physical properties for individual or mass graves by whatever means necessary, to comb through whatever records may be found, to make a determined effort to provide surviving family members with the information found, and to vigorously search out, listen to and collect the oral stories of those family members whose ancestors were impacted by a Methodist boarding school?
- And then, will the United Methodist Church commit time and resources and money to join with other efforts throughout North America to remedy the historical trauma they helped create? These are the concrete acts that will begin to allow 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. These are the actions that will indicate the church’s commitment to true reconciliation.

The Boarding School Healing Project <https://boardingschoolhealing.org/> has designated October 6 as a Day of Remembrance since that day in 1879, was the day that General Richard Pratt took children from so many First Nations and opened the boarding school in Carlisle, PA. This year, October 6, 2021, could be the day that we United Methodists move from remembering to taking action to live further into our commitment of repentance and reconciliation.

We, the members of the Native American International Caucus pray 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. We will wait, as we have waited for so long, for the Church to respond to this, our call to action.

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

Cc: Northern Jurisdiction Committees on Native American Ministries (CoNAM)