

A Statement from the Interfaith Network for Indigenous Communities regarding Indigenous Boarding Schools, July 2021

While we know that any response to the horrible news of unmarked mass graves at Residential Schools in Canada is inadequate, we also know that our lament must lead to action. We recognize that, though these atrocities are making headlines and receiving the attention of the world now, tribal communities have been testifying for years to the truth of forced removal, assimilation, abuse, and death perpetrated through boarding schools. We also know that within the developmental history of the United States, several Christian-based denominations were complicit in the cultural genocide of indigenous people in the United States and that the full story and truth has not yet been told in our country.

Tribal communities have been calling upon complicit Christian-based denominations and state and federal governments to respond to these atrocities for many years. We also know that the trauma of this history lives on in the lives of people and communities, and all of us are affected. Telling the truth is a critical step to healing. So, our first commitment as the Interfaith Network for Indigenous Communities (INIC) is to listen to our indigenous siblings, to hear the truth they have been telling, to do what they have been asking, and to do all we can to advocate for this truth to be heard.

We call upon our member faith communities here in the Northwest and throughout the country to tell the truth about their own association with Indian Boarding Schools in the United States. We pledge to advocate and work within each of our jurisdictions to identify boarding schools sponsored by or in any way associated with our faith communities. Though in many cases records of these schools have been lost or intentionally destroyed, another sign of the devaluing of indigenous lives, we call upon our various faith bodies to do all they can to conduct research in order to reconstruct this data, make the history of indigenous boarding schools public, and take this important step towards acknowledging accountability.

We pledge to work closely with the National Native American Boarding School Healing Coalition in their efforts to document these truths and advocate for a National Truth and Healing Commission. We support and pledge to work with Interior Secretary Deb Haaland as she establishes a Federal Indian Boarding School Initiative. We call upon all our member faith communities to establish their own boarding school truth and healing initiatives to proactively work with, provide information to, and complement the work of Secretary Haaland's initiative.

INIC also pledges to make available on its website (fanwa.org/INIC) a list of boarding schools by faith community, as an aid in our efforts to advocate and raise awareness and work toward healing. We also will gather resources for liturgies of lament and make these available as communities continue to do the hard work of telling the truth, moving through pain, trauma, and sorrow toward healing.

Finally, we know that a radical shift must occur in our own theologies as we seek to repudiate the Doctrine of Discovery and the way Christianity has been used to justify colonialism, domination, slavery, and genocide of indigenous people. We will make available the growing list of faith communities who wholly reject the premise of the Doctrine of Discovery as we collectively take steps to listen and speak the truth to heal the legacy of boarding schools that are a direct result of this racist theology of domination.

We pledge ourselves to discovering anew the Spirit that unites us all, in whom we live and move and have our being, and pray for the continual transformation and healing of all.