

National Day of Remembrance for Indian Boarding Schools

WHEREAS, from 1819 to 1969, countless Indian day schools and over 520 Indian boarding schools operated in the United States, with 417 receiving federal support [1], where Native children were forcibly taken from their families and communities, prohibited all expression of Native language and culture, and required to perform manual labor [2], with a goal to “Kill the Indian in him, and save the man” [3]; and

WHEREAS, religious organizations collaborated with the federal government in operating more than half of these federally-funded schools; and predecessor denominations of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) operated Bethany Indian Mission Boarding School in Wittenburg, Wisconsin [4], and other non-federally funded boarding schools, day schools, and related institutions [5]; and

WHEREAS, these schools were part of a larger strategy of physical and cultural genocide that included forcing Indigenous people and Tribal Nations off of their original homelands and onto reservations so that settlers and governments could claim the stolen land for themselves, undermining sovereignty [6], and perpetrating extermination in multiple other ways; and

WHEREAS, boarding school students, which at one point included over 83% of all Native children [7], often suffered physical, sexual, emotional, and psychological abuse that caused deep trauma for the children, their families, their tribal communities, and subsequent generations [8]; and an untold number of children died while at boarding schools (nearly 1,000 identified to date) [9]; and

WHEREAS, the ELCA has committed to work against injustices and toward healing as stated in “The Repudiation of the Doctrine of Discovery” (2016) [10] and the “Declaration to American Indian and Alaska Native People” (2021) [11], therefore be it

RESOLVED, that the Northwest Synod of Wisconsin Synod Assembly memorialize the 2025 Churchwide Assembly of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America to address the legacies of our church’s role in Indian Boarding Schools through the following actions:

1. Actively invite and equip all congregations, synods, and affiliate ministries to commemorate the National Day of Remembrance for Indian Boarding Schools annually on or near September 30th;
2. Broaden and deepen awareness at congregation, synod, and churchwide levels of Christian and Lutheran roles in Indian boarding schools, through creation of adult and children/youth educational programs and materials and through consistent publishing of articles in all of the church’s publications;
3. Provide on-going recognition of and support for the growing network of lay people and clergy volunteering their time in the work of the ELCA Truth-Seeking & Truth-Telling Initiative on Indian Boarding Schools (see www.elca.org/IndianBoardingSchools) to

- locate all known records related to the ELCA's predecessor bodies' involvement with Indian boarding and day schools and to educate others about Indian boarding schools;
4. Encourage ELCA affiliate ministries to commit to learning the truth of their involvement with Indian boarding schools, in partnership with the ELCA Truth-Seeking & Truth-Telling Initiative; and to responsibly create paths to healing and repair;
 5. Organize and care for all information in the ELCA's possession that was recorded about Indian boarding and day schools and the students who attended them, forcibly or otherwise; carry out this work in partnership with the ELCA Truth-Seeking & Truth-Telling Initiative and the ELCA Archives; recognize that this information belongs to and is a source of healing for student survivors, their descendants, communities, and Tribal Nations; and ensure that the records and research are made accessible to Indian boarding school survivors and their families in a responsible manner; and
 6. Identify sources of funding to sufficiently support research and organizing efforts; and to sufficiently support digitization and labeling of all ELCA Indian boarding school archival records.

Author: Elizabeth M. Andress, Co-lead (lay volunteer), [ELCA Truth-Seeking & Truth-Telling Initiative on Indian Boarding Schools](https://boardingschoolhealing.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/02/2025-Indian-Boarding-Schools-Map-.pdf); liz@solbrack.com, 651-983-8105 (m)

NOTES

1. "Indian Boarding Schools in the United States." National Native American Boarding School Healing Coalition. January 2025: <https://boardingschoolhealing.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/02/2025-Indian-Boarding-Schools-Map-.pdf>
2. David Treuer, *The Heartbeat of Wounded Knee: Native America From 1890 to the Present* (New York: Riverhead Books, 2019): 141.
3. "'Kill the Indian in him, and save the man': R.H. Pratt on the Education of Native Americans." Carlisle Indian School Digital Resource Center. Accessed February 15, 2025. <https://carlisleindian.dickinson.edu/teach/kill-indian-him-and-save-man-r-h-pratt-education-native-americans>
4. Anna M. Peterson, "Norwegian Americans and the Bethany Indian Mission," *Currents: The Newsletter of the Norwegian-American Historical Society* (Volume 189, Fall 2023): 6-9.
5. United States Department of the Interior, Bureau of Indian Affairs, *Federal Indian Boarding School Initiative Investigative Report Volume II - List of Other Institutions* (Appendix F), July 2024, <https://www.bia.gov/service/federal-indian-boarding-school-initiative>
6. Ned Blackhawk, *The Rediscovery of America: Native Peoples and the Unmaking of U.S. History* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2023): 333-337.
7. "US Indian Boarding School History." National Native American Boarding School Healing Coalition. Accessed February 15, 2025. <https://boardingschoolhealing.org/education/us-indian-boarding-school-history/>

8. United States Department of the Interior, Bureau of Indian Affairs, *Federal Indian Boarding School Initiative Investigative Report Volume II*, July 2024, 15, <https://www.bia.gov/service/federal-indian-boarding-school-initiative>
9. Matthew Brown. "Survivors Say Trauma from Abusive Native American Boarding Schools Stretch Across the Generations." *AP*. Updated November 5, 2023. <https://apnews.com/article/native-american-boarding-schools-victims-3f927e5054b6790cef1c6012d8616ad6>
10. "ELCA Repudiation of the Doctrine of Discovery," Evangelical Lutheran Church of America, 2016, https://resources.elca.org/wp-content/uploads/Repudiation_Doctrine_of_DiscoverySPR16.pdf
11. "A Declaration of the ELCA to American Indian and Alaska Native People," Evangelical Lutheran Church of America, 2021, https://resources.elca.org/wp-content/uploads/Declaration_to_American_Indian_Alaska_Native.pdf

Submitted by Rev. Laurie Kenyon Woods, Rev. Rachel Sieja, Rev. Diane House, Rev. Connie Monson, Rev. MaryAnn Bowman, Luke Pederson, Deacon Lidix Montoya, Rev. Justin Arnold, Deacon Kari Allen, and Laurel Boyer of the Northwest Synod of Wisconsin.