

Memorial Supporting Addressing the Legacy of Indian Boarding Schools in the United States

WHEREAS, From 1819 to 1969, countless Indian Day Schools and over 520 Indian Boarding Schools operated in the United States, where Native American children were forcibly taken from their families and communities, prohibited from using their Native languages and expressing their cultures, and were subjected to manual labor and other disciplinary measures that forced their compliance and assimilation into the dominant White culture; and

WHEREAS, Religious organizations and denominations, including predecessor bodies of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA), operated over half of these schools and contributed to a system that caused: sexual, emotional and psychological abuse; the death of many children through suicide or physical abuse; and subsequent multi-generational trauma in their tribal communities during and after the boarding school period; and

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

RESOLVED, That the Greater Milwaukee Synod Assembly memorialize the 2025 Churchwide Assembly of the ELCA to:

1. Request that it address the legacies of our Church’s participation in Indian Boarding Schools by broadening and deepening our awareness at the congregational, synodical and churchwide levels, and explore our role as Lutheran Christians in this injustice; and
2. Identify, secure, and maintain funding to support the ongoing truth-seeking efforts by the ELCA Truth-Seeking & Truth-Telling Initiative and affiliate ministries that foster healing and reconciliation with Native communities – including, but not limited to: the location, preservation, and digitization of archival records; the organization of, care of, and access to all information about Indian Boarding Schools and Day Schools by survivors, their descendants, communities, and Tribal Nations; and
3. Provide on-going recognition of and support for the growing network of lay people and clergy volunteering their time in the work of truth-seeking and truth-telling about Indian Boarding Schools to responsibly creating paths to healing and repair, such as commemorating the National Day of Remembrance for Indian Boarding Schools annually near September 30th.

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