

A Statement from the Interfaith Network for Indigenous Communities regarding Indigenous Boarding Schools, September 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 we pray for the continual transformation and healing of all.

Originated by Interfaith Network for Indigenous Communities (FANWA.org/INIC), and signed by:

This list represents multi-faith leaders and faith community members who endorse this statement. Please note that some Christian denominations restrict statements on their behalf to those endorsed by their general legislative assemblies. A lack of representation in the organizational category should not connote lack of support for this important work. Faith leaders identified by their denomination or community are for identification purposes only.

Organizational signers:

Between the Ridges, Yakima
Dai Bai Zan Cho Bo Zen Ji Temple, Seattle
Ethnic Ministries Circles of Color, Episcopal Diocese of Olympia
Faith Action Network
First AME Church, Seattle
Great Spirit United Methodist Church, Portland OR
Greater Northwest Area of the United Methodist Church Circle of Indigenous Ministries
Holy Spirit Lutheran Church, Kirkland
Holy Trinity Lutheran Church, Port Angeles
Interfaith Works, Olympia
JUJustice Washington, a Unitarian Universalist Action Network
Learning Right Relations
Liberation United Church of Christ
Northlake Lutheran Church
Northwest Intermountain Synod, ELCA
Northwest United Protestant Church, Richland
Ocean Park Lutheran Church
Pacific Northwest Conference of The United Church of Christ
Parallax Perspectives
Queen Anne Baptist Church
Saint Mark's Episcopal Church, Seattle
Seattle Mennonite Church
Shepherd of the Hills Lutheran Church
Sravasti Abbey, Newport
Stepping Stones to Re-Entry
Unidos of Snohomish County
Westminster Congregational United Church of Christ, Spokane

Faith Leader signers:

Rev. Carey Anderson, First AME Church, Seattle
Rev. Liv Larson Andrews, Salem Lutheran Church, Spokane
The Rev. Kristin-Luana Baumann, Holy Trinity Lutheran Church, Port Angeles
Rev. Paul Benz, Co-Director, Faith Action Network
Bishop Shelley Bryan Wee, Northwest Washington Synod, ELCA
Rev. Dr. Allen Buck, Great Spirit United Methodist Church, Portland OR
Pastor Louise Buckles, Ocean Park Lutheran Church
Rev. Lauren Cannon, Keystone United Church of Christ, Seattle
Abbess Bhiksuni Chodron, Sravasti Abbey, Newport
Rev. Jessie Connor, Orchards United Methodist Church, Vancouver
Rev. Gail Crouch, United Church of Christ
Deborah J. Cruz, JUJustice Washington, a Unitarian Universalist Action Network
Rev. Michelle de Beauchamp, Saron Lutheran Church and First Presbyterian Church, Hoquim

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Rev. Darla DeFrance, Columbia City Church of Hope
Elise DeGooyer, Co-Director, Faith Action Network
Rev. Mike Denton, Conference Minister, The Pacific Northwest Conference of The United Church of Christ
Thomas Ewell, Quaker
Rev. Miriam Gentle, Northwest United Protestant Church, Richland
Ms. Kristina Gonzalez, Director of Leadership Development for an Inclusive Church, Pacific NW
Conference of the United Methodist Church
Rev. Jan Griffin, Regional Developer for the Southwest Region, Episcopal Diocese of Spokane
Rev. Richard Grinstad, Port Angeles
Rev. David Hacker, St. Michael's Episcopal Church, Yakima
Pastor Anne Hall, Evangelical Lutheran Church in America
Rev. Holly Hallman, Presbyterian Church (USA)
Fr. Blaine Hammond, St. Luke's Episcopal Church, Seattle
Rev. Anja Helmon, Northlake Lutheran Church, Kenmore
Bishop Rick Jaech, Southwestern Washington Synod, ELCA
Pastor Rod Kastle, Retired, Evangelical Lutheran Church in America
Bishop Katherine Keough, Ecumenical Catholic Communion Diocese of the Pacific Northwest
Rev. Erik Kindem, Peace Lutheran Church, Seattle
Stacy D. Kitahata, co-Executive Director, Holden Village, Chelan
Bishop Kristen Kuempel, Northwest Intermountain Synod, ELCA
Rev. Katy Lloyd, Welcome Table Christian Church, Seattle
The Rev. Nathaniel Mahlberg, First Congregational United Church of Christ, Walla Walla
Abbot Genjo Marinello, Dai Bai Zan Cho Bo Zen Ji Temple, Seattle
Rev. Kara Markell, Lake Washington Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)
Rev. Richard Matters, Episcopal Diocese of Spokane
Rev. Wakil David Matthews, Retired Interfaith Minister
Rev. Kathleen McCallum Sachse, Holy Spirit Lutheran Church, Kirkland
Rev. Sandy Messick, Northern Lights Region of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)
Rev. Cynthia Meyer, United Christian Church of Renton
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Rev. Cindy Muse, St. Andrew Lutheran Church, Vancouver
Jonathan Neufeld, Seattle Mennonite Church
Rev. Corey Passons, Community for Interfaith Celebration, Olympia
The Rev. Dr. Marcia Patton, New Beginnings Christian Fellowship, Kent
Juan Peralez, President of Unidos of Snohomish County
Chaplain Mir Plemmons, Ecumenical Catholic Communion Diocese of the Pacific Northwest
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Rev. John Rosenberg, Retired, Southwest WA Synod, ELCA
Pastor Pamela Russell, Prince of Peace Lutheran Church, Shoreline
The Rev. Sonja Selboe, Retired, Evangelical Lutheran Church in America
Rev. Karen Selig, Evangelical Lutheran Church in America
Rev. Mary Shaima, Shepherd of the Hills Lutheran Church, Stevenson
Rev. Patricia Simpson, Retired, United Methodist Church
Rev. Linda Smith, Retired ELCA, Olympia
Bishop Elaine JW Stanovsky, Pacific Northwest Conference of the United Methodist Church
Rev. John Stroeh, Peace Lutheran Church, Tacoma
Rev. Nigel Taber-Hamilton, Retired, Episcopal Church
Rev. Rachel Taber-Hamilton, Trinity Episcopal Church, Everett

Rev. James L. Thibodeaux, St. Christopher's Community Church, Olympia
 The Rev. Steven L. Thomason, Saint Mark's Episcopal Cathedral, Seattle
 Rev. Mindi Welton-Mitchell, Queen Anne Baptist Church, Seattle
 Pastor Jermell Witherspoon, Liberation United Church of Christ and Everett United Church of Christ
 Rev. Andrew Yee, Assistant to the Bishop, Northwest Washington Synod, ELCA
 The Rev. & Mrs. Phil and Kathe Yokers – Retired, Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

Individual signers:

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