



**Native American
International
Caucus
of the
United Methodist
Church**

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Dear Ekoo,

Jesus once said, "The truth will set you free." It is this truth, this release from the bondage that has strangled our people and their opportunity to thrive for generations, that we are hoping to achieve with the passage of H.R. 5444: Truth and Healing Commission on Indian Boarding School Policies Act.

By supporting this bill, we are imploring this truth to be revealed so that healing and action can begin. By passing this bill, more awareness will come to the surface as the layers of trauma are peeled away, and the rebirth of a culture long suppressed by prejudice, fear and racism will come to light. With our eyes and ears open, the cavernous wounds that have stifled peace for many need to be treated. But thoughts and prayers are not enough. Taking action, which is long overdue, needs to happen now.

When the bones of hundreds of children found near boarding schools across North America were found, those wounds were uncovered to once again remind us that between 1869 and the 1960s, hundreds of thousands of Native American children were removed from their homes and families and placed in boarding schools operated by churches and the federal government to "Americanize" them, to strip them of their rich culture and in some cases, leave them for dead.

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 boarding schools where abuse and poor medical services were rampant.

How many more lost lives are needed before Native Americans are made visible? As the bones of the 215 children, some as young as three, found in a common grave at the Kamloops Indian Residential School in Canada were collected, and the echoes of historical trauma reverberate throughout Native American communities in North America, the call to address the horror of abuse against Native Americans is once again brought to the forefront.

We need to name and confess the complicity of the aggressors, and we need to locate the sites of church-supported schools, to find and list the names of children who have attended these schools and where applicable, their Tribal affiliations, and to determine the geographical and burial location of our children, and the remaining families of these children.

These concrete acts will begin healing, justice and reconciliation for families and communities to start healing. Indian Boarding Schools forcibly silenced our children. Let us break the silence as our children speak the truth once again by passing the bill now before Congress, H.R. 5444. The lives lost and the families shattered deserve that respect.

From addictions and domestic abuse to suicide and mental illness, insufficient reparations have taken their toll on Native American communities for generations despite efforts from others in the community to emphasize that you are not what happened to you. The pull from the past has proven to be much stronger in far too many cases.

With the passage of H.R. 5444, the bluebird will soar, and a brighter future will dawn for the Native American community, bringing solace to those hurting and bringing communities closer together.

We wish you grace, peace and the courage to change,

The NAIC Board