

Memorial 2025
Memorial Supporting Addressing Legacy of Indian Boarding Schools

RESOLVED, that the 2025 Southeast Michigan 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 by broadening and deepening awareness at congregational, synod, and churchwide levels of Christian and Lutheran roles in Indian boarding schools,

RESOLVED, that the 2025 Southeast Michigan Synod Assembly memorialize the 2025 Churchwide Assembly of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America to identify, secure, and maintain funding to support ongoing truth-seeking efforts by the ELCA Truth-Seeking & Truth-Telling Initiative and other initiatives 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 students survivors, their descendants, communities, and Tribal Nations,

RESOLVED, that the 2025 Southeast Michigan Synod Assembly memorialize the 2025 Churchwide Assembly of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America to direct the ELCA to provide on-going support for and encouragement to congregations, synods, and ministries learning truth about Indian Boarding Schools to responsibly create paths to healing and repair, such as by commemorating the National Day of Remembrance for Indian Boarding Schools annually near September 30th.

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Rationale:

Indian Boarding Schools were institutions that forcibly took Native children from their families and communities, prohibited Native language and culture, subjected them to harsh conditions, forced labor, and abuse. They were part of a larger system of physical and cultural genocide.¹

From 1819 to 1969, 520 Indian Boarding Schools operated in the United States, with over 1,000 additional institutions operated as day schools, orphanages, etc.² Almost 19,000 children were forcibly enrolled, and enrollment comprised over 80% of all Native children at one point.³ In Michigan, there were five Indian Boarding Schools and over 30 similar institutions (with one possible Indian Day School being investigated within Synodical boundaries).⁴

Religious communities operated over 50% of these nationally institutions, and eight had Lutheran affiliation. A predecessor denomination of the ELCA (the Norwegian Synod) operated one from 1883 to 1933 as the Bethany Indian Mission Boarding School in Wittenburg, Wisconsin.⁵

Over 9,000 students died at over 50 Indian Boarding Schools, with more deaths still being discovered. Native Children also suffered physical, sexual, emotional, and psychological abuse at these institutions. This abuse traumatized the children, their families, their tribal communities, and subsequent generations.⁶

Previously, the ELCA Churchwide Assembly has committed to truth-seeking, anti-racism, and justice including the “Repudiation of the Doctrine of Discovery” in 2016.⁷ This work continued with the “Declaration to American Indian and Alaska Native People” in 2021 and the launch of the Truth and Healing movement in 2023.⁸

Since 2007, racial reconciliation has been a priority for the Southeast Michigan Synod, such as Synod Council’s “Covenant of Racial Reconciliation.” The Synod further resolved to promote additional anti-racism work in 2017.⁹

This memorial would serve to continue, broaden, and deepen these anti-racism efforts of ELCA Churchwide and the Southeast Michigan Synod.

¹ David Treuer, *The Heartbeat of Wounded Knee: Native America From 1890 to the Present* (New York: Riverhead Books, 2019), 141.

² “Indian Boarding Schools in the United States.” *National Native American Boarding School Healing Coalition*. Accessed March 15, 2025: <https://boardingschoolhealing.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/02/2025-Indian-Boarding-Schools-Map-pdf>

³ United States Department of the Interior, *Bureau of Indian Affairs, Federal Indian Boarding School Initiative Investigative Report Volume II*, July 2024, Accessed March 15, 2025: <https://www.bia.gov/service/federal-indian-boarding-school-initiative>, 15, and “US Indian Boarding School History.” *National Native American Boarding School Healing Coalition*. Accessed March 15, 2025: <https://boardingschoolhealing.org/education/us-indian-boarding-school-history/>

⁴ United States Department of the Interior, *Indian Boarding School Report Vol II. - List of Other Institutions, Bureau of Indian Affairs*, July 2024, Accessed March 15, 2025: <https://www.bia.gov/service/federal-indian-boarding-school-initiative>, 6-7.

⁵ DOI, *Indian Boarding School Vol. II, List of Other Institutions*, 3-4, 12, and 15, and 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.

⁶ DOI, *Indian Boarding School Vol. II*, 5-15.

⁷ “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

⁸ “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 and “ELCA Launches Truth and Healing Movement,” *Living Lutheran*, April 13, 2023, <https://www.livinglutheran.org/2023/04/elca-launches-truth-and-healing-movement/>

⁹ “Congregational Engagement in Anti-Racism Training,” Southeast Michigan Synod, 2017, https://semisynod.com/wp-content/uploads/2022/06/Resolution-2017_1-Updated.pdf