

The Episcopal Church Truth Telling about Indigenous Boarding Schools

Committees and work focusing on Truth Telling:

- The Episcopal Church A127 commission formed by General Convention in 2022 and the Executive Council committee, MW062 formed in the spring of 2022 are two bodies that were created with related purposes at the national church level.
- The Diocese of Alaska also passed a resolution at the 47th Convention in 2022 supporting the Episcopal Church's truth telling initiative about Indigenous boarding schools and identifying work to be conducted at the Diocesan level.

Background information:

MW062 – the Executive Council of ECUSA, April 2022: Executive Council met in the spring prior to the general convention of 2022 and passed a resolution creating a 'Committee on Native Boarding Schools and Advocacy' to examine the Episcopal Church's role in boarding schools either run by the Episcopal Church or other denominations. This committee named Leora Tadgerson as chair, who is Anishinaabe and Director of Reparations and Justice for the Diocese of Northern Michigan.

- The Executive Council of The Episcopal Church, meeting on April 20-23, 2022, acknowledges and mourns the devastation caused by Indigenous Boarding Schools during the 19th and 20th centuries and commits to investigate and tell whatever is true about The Episcopal Church's involvement with these schools.
- *Resolved* that Executive Council create an Executive Council Committee for Indigenous Boarding Schools and Advocacy as a Committee of Executive Council, charged with guiding and overseeing three initiatives:

(1) the gathering of historical information about Indigenous Boarding Schools that had any relationship to The Episcopal Church, including information revealing the nature and extent of that relationship (the Gathering Initiative),

(2) the curation of the gathered information in a collection, housed in the Archives of The Episcopal Church, that will tell the story of the schools' relationship to the Church and their impacts on Indigenous Episcopalians, even until today (the Story Initiative), taking care to interweave the stories of Episcopal Indigenous boarding schools with the ongoing Native oppression and white supremacy, and

(3) the development and implementation of a plan for gathering information and hearing stories about the varieties of ways that Indigenous and Native peoples are subjected to unequal treatment by the federal government, state governments, and

other authorities, including information provided by the ongoing investigation by the U.S. Department of the Interior, and, in conjunction, the development of proposals for advocacy and other action responding to the issues identified (the Advocacy Initiative). The Advocacy Initiative shall include in its focus, but not be limited to, information and stories about missing and murdered Indigenous women, girls, and two-spirits whose deaths have not been investigated by authorities, as well as the lack of reporting and collecting of statistics on missing and murdered Native and Indigenous women, girls, and two-spirits.

2022-A127- General Convention in July 2022: General Convention passed a resolution authorizing a commission to investigate the Episcopal Church role in boarding schools. Native Alaskan leader, Pearl Chanar is a co-chair of this commission along with Warren Hawk from South Dakota.

The A127 resolution states:

“The dioceses of The Episcopal Church will be strongly encouraged to, before the 81st General Convention, begin to gather information from boarding school survivors and their descendants about the experiences of Indigenous children and families in Episcopal run and/or supported residential boarding schools within the territorial jurisdiction of that diocese.”

- Phase 1 the work is to conduct research of historical records and archives to reveal how many schools were in existence in each Diocese, the role of the Diocese and the roles of people who attended, including those who died at the institutions.
- The Commission hired Dr. Veronica Pasfield as an archival specialist to conduct this research.
- Currently there are 30 identified boarding schools. It was noted that in AK the US government created day schools in tribal locations. The impact of these schools will also be considered by the commission.

Activities called for by the commission/committee include:

- Identify 4 pilot areas to begin the work in obtaining research in conjunction with local historians. Alaska has been identified as one of the pilot areas.
- Develop a strategic plan to narrow the directives to accommodate the budget and time allowed and to develop priorities
- Gathering stories from survivors
- Create healing centers

Resolution 2021-01 and 2022-03: Diocese of Alaska support for the work of the A127 commission

At the 46th and 47th convention of the Diocese of Alaska, resolutions were passed supporting the work of the Episcopal Church and General Convention in telling the truth of the intergenerational and historic trauma extending from the experiences of indigenous people who were forced into boarding and residential schools and the resulting abuse of children.

Resolution 2021-01 (see attached for the full resolution)

Resolved, that the Episcopal Diocese of Alaska recognizes the important work of truth and reconciliation in establishing right relationships, and the important need to “spend time with our Indigenous siblings, listening to their stories and history, and seeking their wisdom about how we can together come to terms with [...our history];” and be it further

Resolved, that the Episcopal Diocese of Alaska supports Bishop Mark Lattime’s pledge to hold our church accountable to this work and, along with our elected Deputies to General Convention and Standing Committee, to ensure that Alaska Native voices, wisdom, and experience will be included in the Episcopal Church’s pursuit of truth and reconciliation with respect to the history of Indigenous schools operated by the Episcopal Church; and be it further

Resolved, that the Episcopal Diocese of Alaska Deputies to the 80th General Convention, along with the bishop, will report on this work to the 47th Convention of the Episcopal Diocese of Alaska (2022).

Resolution 2022-03 (see attached for the full resolution) followed up this charge by directing the Standing Committee of the Diocese to put together a plan and budget to support the work identified in the General Convention A127 commission resolution:

- Be it therefore resolved that the Convention of the Diocese of Alaska direct the Standing Committee to put together a plan and budget to support the work identified in the above resolves here in Alaska to include at a minimum, research into archives of the diocese, the various congregations of this diocese, and the State of Alaska; and
- Be it further resolved that this plan be reported in time for the 2023 Convention of the Episcopal Diocese of Alaska; and
- Be it further resolved that the funding identified in this plan be included in the budget to be presented to the 2023 Convention of the Episcopal Diocese of Alaska; and
- Be it further resolved, that congregations are strongly urged to assist deaneries and other diocesan bodies in inviting and recognizing self-identifying boarding school survivors and their descendants in Alaska whether or not they are members of any congregation and gently encouraging them to share their stories; and that organizers

make provisions for a wide range of accessible and culturally competent mental health and trauma-informed supports during this process, in order to provide safety for all, and

- Be it further resolved that the congregations of this diocese are urged to include a prayer for survivors and their descendants during their intercessory prayers on the Sunday closest to Indigenous Peoples' Day, which is October 9th this year.

To fulfill this responsibility, the Diocese has two people working to gather initial research information and to assist the A127 commission. Adam Lees and Jake Lambers have volunteered to assist in this role. Bishop Lattime, who is also an A127 Commission member has coordinated activities with Dr. Veronica Pasfield along with Pearl Chanar and the commission to ensure Alaska is participating fully with the efforts.

Next Steps:

The Standing Committee is forming a Diocesan Truth Telling Commission

Truth Telling Commission will be appointed by and report to the Standing Committee.

Commission's work:

Assist in carrying out and implementing the Diocesan Resolutions.

Components:

- ✓ A listening component
- ✓ A truth telling component
- ✓ A healing component

Commission make-up

- Must be an episcopalian
- Nine-person Commission
 - 6 Alaska Native/Indigenous Members
 - 3 Non-Indigenous Members
- At least one person from each deanery, if possible
- Initial terms 1, 3 or 5 year, with possible renewal of terms
- Alaska Native/Indigenous Led

There will be many opportunities to be a part of this important work, beyond being on the commission. Information will need to be gathered broadly from all parts of Alaska.

Spending time with our Alaska Native siblings and seeking their wisdom and recommendations on how we can come to terms with the history of Episcopal boarding school is vital. The Truth Telling Commission will be leading and guiding us and the listening, truth telling, healing and reconciliation needs all of us.

Application process will open June 11, 2025, and close October 11, 2025. Applications will be available online. The Standing Committee will review the applications and make appointments at their November in-person meeting. The goal is to have the first gathering of the Commission in early 2026.