

## QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS REGARDING THE EPISCOPAL CHURCH AND INDIAN BOARDING SCHOOLS

### **Q. What are Indian boarding schools?**

**A.** Indian boarding schools, sometimes referred to as residential schools, were established in the United States in the 1870s as a method of assimilating Indigenous children into American culture and Christian denominations. They were operated by both the federal government and churches. There were nearly [380 schools altogether](#), with the majority run by the government but an estimated 149 run in collaboration with churches. The Indian students were raised in these schools, separated from their families, in some cases involuntarily and even forcibly, or out of no other viable alternative due to their circumstances. Some spent nearly their entire childhoods in these schools.

### **Q. Was The Episcopal Church involved?**

**A.** Indigenous Episcopalians report that parts of The Episcopal Church were associated with boarding schools during the 19th and 20th centuries but, like many other denominations and institutions, we are in the process of developing a deeper understanding of this shared past. The details of those schools, including their operational structures and the role of the church, conditions, and far-reaching impact, will be the focus of significant research and a truth and reconciliation process with Indigenous Episcopalians over the course of the coming years.

### **Q. What happened at Indian boarding schools?**

**A.** Not all Indian students had the same type of experience. It depended on the school, the administration, staff, and the government policies at the time. Some students reported having an essentially good experience although it was painful for them to be apart from their families. Others reported severe trauma and abuse. A number of schools had cemeteries on their properties where students who died while enrolled were buried. There have been successful efforts in recent years to expatriate the bodies of these students back to their Tribal lands for burial with their ancestors and family members.

### **Q. What were the results of the boarding schools?**

**A.** The objective of Indian boarding schools was to assimilate Indian children into mainstream American society, language and religion. In 1879 Captain Richard Henry Pratt, superintendent of the Carlisle Indian Industrial School in Pennsylvania, described it as, “Kill the Indian in order to save the man.” As part of Grant’s Peace Policy, also known as the Quaker Peace Policy, the initial motivation was seen as constructive and positive by the

government and churches. Some of the students reported that their experiences helped them to become successful in life in spite of their difficulties. Others reported suffering from the traumatic effects of their experiences for their entire lives.

**Q. What is The Episcopal Church's response to the boarding schools?**

**A.** In July, 2021, Presiding Bishop Michael Curry and House of Deputies President Gay Jennings acknowledged The Episcopal Church's operation of Indian boarding schools and released a statement indicating the following:

“We condemn these practices and we mourn the intergenerational trauma that cascades from them. We have heard with sorrow stories of how this history has harmed the families of many Indigenous Episcopalians.”

“While complete records are unavailable, we know that The Episcopal Church was associated with Indigenous schools during the 19th and 20th centuries. We must come to a full understanding of the legacies of these schools.”

“As chair and vice-chair of Executive Council, and in consultation with our church's Indigenous leaders, we pledge to make right relationships with our Indigenous siblings an important focus of the work of Executive Council and the 80th General Convention.”