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OFFICE OF THE ARCHBISHOP

July 26, 2023

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

In the parable of the Good Samaritan from Luke's Gospel, we read that the Samaritan was moved with compassion to do what he could for the victim in the story. Likewise, in my episcopal service to the Archdiocese of Santa Fe, I am also moved with compassion for the historical trauma inflicted on my Native American brothers and sisters. This trauma is centered around the forced removal of Native children from their parents and sent to boarding schools, some of them Catholic, where they were subject to the removal of their ancient culture and where they were subject to abuse.

Like in Jesus's parable in the Gospel, it is not enough just to have compassion, but to courageously seek out ways to be Christ's healing power in the world. We closely follow our faith when we can offer forgiveness for past abuses, learn from our history and take what we learn to be better stewards of our mission and ministry to Catholic Natives. Last year's letter to the bishops of the United States from Archbishop Coakley and Bishop Wall laid out the path forward for the Catholic Church to engage in dialogue with Native communities. Their letter seeks ways that we can help the Native communities to heal from Native boarding schools. Among the steps suggested are archival research on Catholic Native boarding schools, the improvement of relationships with Tribes, work on developing listening sessions concerning Native boarding schools and full cooperation with government investigations.

All of this takes work and dedication. I am proud to recommend to you the organization Catholics for Indigenous Boarding School Healing and Accountability (AHP). This organization was founded by women and men religious and by Native and Non-Native lay people who, after hearing the stories of boarding schools, were moved with compassion like the Good Samaritan. For the last three years, this organization has been working with Native communities and professional Catholic archivists to find information concerning boarding schools and to make that information public. They are also involved in educating about the tragedies of Native boarding schools and the historical trauma that they have caused.

Catholic history is the story of people trying to do the will of Christ. Unfortunately, our history is also the history of sin and evil that people have committed in the name of the Church. These sins have entered our Church narrative. It is this evil that has caused so many Natives to suffer for generations. However, it is also the mandate of Christ that evil is confronted by all Catholics with compassion, a compassion that leads to specific action to promote healing and reconciliation.

Wishing you the peace of Christ, and with a prayer for our Native American brothers and sisters, I remain

Your Servant in Christ,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "John C. Wester".

Mos Reverend John C. Wester
Archbishop of Santa Fe
Episcopal Moderator, AHP