



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

**Washington Catholic Bishops Share Native American Research Study on
Catholic Boarding Schools and Cemeteries with Tribes**

January 9, 2025 SEATTLE, WA – The [Washington State Catholic Conference](#) (WSCC), comprised of the five Catholic Bishops of Washington state, commissioned a study of all diocesan archival records available in the Archdiocese of Seattle, Diocese of Yakima and Diocese of Spokane documenting Catholic boarding schools serving primarily Native American children, and their related cemeteries. The researcher also reviewed materials provided by the Jesuit Archives and Research Center (JARC), and the archives of the Sisters of Providence, the Sisters of St. Francis of Philadelphia and Marquette University. In all, the researcher reviewed records of the six schools and related cemeteries in the state, as well as available records from religious orders who taught at these schools.

“The study is a first step toward a more complete understanding of the Catholic Church in Washington state’s relationship with local Tribes related to boarding schools,” said Jean Hill, Executive Director of the Washington State Catholic Conference.

The study was conducted by an independent senior researcher at Statistical Research Inc. (SRI), who could read original documents in French and had an understanding of our shared history based on prior research projects at the Archdiocese of Seattle and work with Washington state Tribes. SRI spent over six months reading through approximately 20,000 documents dating back to the early 1850s. The research report revealed the following:

- Most of the Catholic Native American boarding schools in Washington State began with a small number of students, but all gradually grew until most served more than 100 students at peak enrollment.
- No specific examples of direct physical or sexual abuse were documented within the records of the dioceses or religious orders who served in the Native American schools. Abuse may have occurred, but specific instances were not documented in the records reviewed.
- Disease, lack of medical care in rural settings, insufficient food and manual labor were noted causes of death among students, faculty and staff. The records contain limited information regarding specific gravesites.
- The students at Native American Catholic boarding schools in Washington were subject to disparaging stereotypes perpetuated by the Church and society of the times.

The WSCC will not share the full research report publicly, but instead has given it directly to the Tribal Council Chairs who expressed an interest in receiving it because archival records showed that children

from their Tribes once attended Catholic-run boarding schools in Washington state. The Tribal Council Chairs of the following Tribes received the WSCC's report with student names redacted for privacy in September and agreed to have their Tribes' names listed in this press release: Confederated Tribes of the Chehalis Reservation, Cowlitz Indian Tribe, Jamestown S'Klallam Tribe, Port Gamble S'Klallam Tribe, Quileute Tribe, Squaxin Island Tribe, Suquamish Tribe, Swinomish Indian Tribal Community, Tulalip Tribes, and the Yakama Nation. General information about the study is available [here](#).

"As we continue the journey to the truth, the WSCC recognizes the sacredness of Tribal history. We understand that the stories in the research belong to the ancestors and families of Tribal members," said Hill. "Therefore, the WSCC will not publicly release the study in recognition of the right of the Tribes whose students attended Catholic-run boarding schools in WA state to determine if, when, and with whom this information is shared."

At this time, the bishops will continue to seek opportunities to walk with Tribes in WA state on the journey to truth and healing.

About the Washington State Catholic Conference

The Washington State Catholic Conference (WSCC) is the public policy voice of the five bishops of Washington state. The WSCC is comprised of Archbishop Paul D. Etienne of the Archdiocese of Seattle, Bishop Joseph J. Tyson of the Diocese of Yakima, Bishop Thomas A. Daly of the Diocese of Spokane, and Bishop Eusebio L. Elizondo and Bishop Frank R. Schuster, auxiliary bishops of the Archdiocese of Seattle. For more information about the WSCC, please visit wacatholics.org.

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