



# Frequently Asked Questions

## **Where can the list of Catholic-Operated U.S. Native Boarding Schools, pre-1978 be found?**

The list, and accompanying information, can be found at the website:  
<http://ctah.archivistsacwr.org>

## **Why was this list created?**

A collaborative group of archivists, historians, concerned Catholics, and tribal members compiled the resource as a tool to help facilitate access to information about Catholic-operated Native boarding schools for survivors of the schools, their descendants, and Tribal Nations.

## **Who created the list of Catholic-Operated U.S. Native Boarding Schools?**

Many people's work has contributed to the publication of this list, including:

- Jaime Arsenault, Tribal Historic Preservation Officer, White Earth Nation
- Maka Black Elk, Executive Director of Truth and Healing, Red Cloud Indian School
- Veronica Buchanan, MA, Executive Secretary, Archivists for Congregations of Women Religious
- Brenna Cussen Anglada, co-founder, Catholics for Boarding School Accountability
- Kate Feighery, MA, CA, CRM, Executive Director of Archives and Records Management, Archdiocese of New York
- Patrick Hayes, PhD, Archivist, Redemptorist Archives for the Baltimore Province
- Stephanie Jacobe, PhD, Director of Archives, Archdiocese of Washington
- Michele Levandoski, MLIS, Director of the School Sisters of Notre Dame North American Archives
- Allison Spies, MLIS, Archives Program Manager, Archdioceses of Saint Paul and Minneapolis

## **How many schools are on the list?**

This list is currently comprised of 87 schools, which operated across 22 states. It is likely that more schools will be added as further research is done.

## **How many religious congregations who operated Native boarding schools and dioceses are named on this list?**

79 religious orders are named in total (individual provinces are each counted separately). This includes 26 communities of men religious and 53 communities of women religious. 49 current Roman Catholic dioceses are named; 48 in the U.S. and one in Canada.

## **What definition was used for “Catholic-Operated Native Boarding School”?**

To be included on this list, a school had to meet each of the following criteria:

- The school was operated by a Catholic entity, such as a diocese, a parish, or a congregation of men or women religious (priests, brothers, or sisters);
- The school provided on-site housing or overnight lodging at some point in its existence (many schools started as boarding schools, but later transitioned into day schools);
- The school provided formal academic or vocational training or instruction, that is, it had an educational purpose;
- The school was established before 1978 (when the Indian Child Welfare Act was passed, which gave Indigenous parents the right to refuse their children’s placement in off-reservation schools)
- The school was established specifically for the education of Indigenous children or received federal funding to bring Indigenous children from reservations.

Schools that fit the above criteria were included on this list regardless of whether they received federal funding.

A school was *not* included in the list if:

- The school was located in an area with a large Indigenous population but was a parish school open to all Catholic members of the parish, regardless of race or ethnicity;
- The school provided only religious education (catechism classes);
- The school was established before the boarding school period (1819).

Generally, schools that were established before the first publication of U.S. Catholic directories (in 1834) were not included on this list. Additional schools operating during this period will be added once further research can be done.

Because of the need to define the scope of the research for this list, at this time, the group did not include the many other Catholic-operated institutions that provided education and/or boarding for Indigenous children in the U.S., such as day schools, orphanages, and asylums, or boarding schools overseen by other religious denominations or the U.S. government.

## **What information is included about each school on the list?**

The list includes the name(s) of each school (schools often had more than one name throughout their history); the school's location; the dates of operation; whether the school was located on a reservation; the current and previous Catholic diocese(s) in which the school operated; the Tribal Nations impacted by each school as they are listed in historical documents; and the religious order(s) that ran and/or staffed each school.

## **How might the publication of this list contribute to truth and healing?**

As Jaime Arsenault, Tribal Heritage Preservation Officer for the White Earth Band of the Minnesota Chippewa Tribe, reflected,

“When discussions around the legacy of Native American boarding schools arise, the conversation understandably centers around truth-telling, healing, and reconciliation. However, before there can be truth-telling, there must be *truth-finding*... Basic information, such as how many Catholic-run Native American boarding schools operated in the United States and where they were located is critical information that must be known in order for the truth-telling and the reconciliatory process to take place.”

Maka Black Elk, Executive Director of Truth and Healing at Red Cloud Indian School added,

“This list advances the same work that is being done at the Federal level. Before now, no comprehensive list of Catholic operated Indian boarding schools existed. Access to these records, knowledge of where they are located, and relationship building with tribes and tribal individuals whose ancestors were students at these boarding schools is foundational to the work of truth, reconciliation, and healing. This represents another compelling step in a full journey toward healing which begins with truth, access to the truth, and the opportunity for tribes to gain sovereignty over their records.”

### **What is the Catholic Church’s relationship to this list?**

This list has been officially endorsed by the Leadership Conference of Women Religious (LCWR), which represents 66 percent of the 39,000 women religious in the United States. The list also has the endorsement of the Association of Catholic Diocesan Archivists (ACDA) and the Archivists for Congregations of Women Religious (ACWR).

### **How is this list different from the one published by the Department of Interior (DOI) in 2022?**

This list expands on the DOI’s information about Catholic-operated Native boarding schools by identifying which religious orders and diocese(s) were involved in the operation of each boarding school, to point to where archival material for each school could be located.

### **What sources were used to create this list?**

A first draft of this list began in November 2021 by first comparing the list created by the National Native American Boarding School Healing Coalition with information found on Marquette University’s Online Guide to Catholic Records about Native Americans in the United States, and the Annual Reports of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs.

From there, the list draft was compared with historic Catholic directories, records from the Bureau of Catholic Indian Missions located at Marquette University, and other online sources. Once that review was complete, the information was shared with religious communities and dioceses who appear on the list to verify that the information was as accurate as possible.

## How accurate/comprehensive is this list?

At present, this is the most comprehensive and accurate list of Catholic-operated Native boarding schools in existence. Still, **it is important to note that this list is a work in progress**. Although the working group made efforts to verify the information listed with the religious communities and dioceses named, not all information could be corroborated with the sources available to us. The group also acknowledges the likely existence of schools that are not yet named on this list, especially those that operated between 1819–1834. Those schools will be named once more information comes to light.

We acknowledge the following shortcomings of this list, and especially welcome submissions to rectify them:

- “Tribal Communities Impacted”: As the researchers relied almost exclusively on publicly available Catholic sources for this list, we recognize that the information we have listed about “tribal communities impacted” is inadequate, incomplete, and often inaccurate. **We would gratefully welcome any information that identifies the accurate names of tribal nations, that expands the names of tribal nations impacted by each school, and that identifies whether African American children and/or children from the U.S. territories (i.e., Puerto Rico) also attended these schools.**
- “On Reservation”: Because the location of the schools is often identified quite loosely in historical documents, and because of the shifting boundaries of reservations over time, it is difficult to determine whether a school was located on a reservation.

## How and when might updates be made?

The list will be updated on at least an annual basis, and likely more frequently within the first year after release, as more accurate information becomes available.

Our website, [ctah.archivistsacwr.org](http://ctah.archivistsacwr.org), includes a form where corrections and updates may be submitted.

## If a religious institution/diocese holds archival records pertaining to Native boarding schools, what steps should they take?

We recommend reading through this [Resource Guide](#) created by the Archivists for Congregations of Women Religious (ACWR).

The guide recommends that, as early as possible, communities should “reach out to the tribal nation(s) impacted by the school(s) with which your community was involved in order to build relationships and to determine proper protocols for archival records” and to “work with the Native community to determine what records can and should be shared, the manner by which they are shared, what records are sensitive and should be restricted, and what cultural protocols should be kept in mind.”

In their response to the Vatican’s formal repudiation of the Doctrine of Discovery on March 30, the U.S. Bishops wrote of the Church’s relationship with tribal nations, “We support the ongoing efforts of various Catholic communities to make archival and historical records more easily accessible.”

## Does this list make any archival records public?

No.

This list is merely a tool that points to the Catholic religious orders and dioceses that were involved at each school and offers guidance on how to locate the archival records for each school. While the list creators encourage Catholic institutions to facilitate access to information for survivors of Native boarding schools, their descendants, and Tribal Nations, there is no guarantee that the records are actually located with the institutions named, or that the institution will share access to the records with those who request them.