



March 4, 2024

U.S. Senator Tammy Baldwin
210 7th Street South, Suite 3
La Crosse, WI 54601

U.S. Representative Derrick Van Orden
210 7th Street South, Suite 204
La Crosse, WI 54601

Cc: U.S. Representative Sharice Davids
Overland Park District Office
9200 Indian Creek Parkway, Suite 562
Overland Park, KS 66210

Cc: U.S. Representative Tom Cole
Ada District Office
100 East 13th Street, Suite 213
Ada, OK 74820

Dear Senator Baldwin and Congressman Van Orden,

Starting in October 2021, we've been writing to support legislation to establish the Truth and Healing Commission on Indian Boarding School Policy in the United States. We're writing again to reiterate our support and offer you an update on our truth and healing work.

As a religious congregation with a history of administering a Native American boarding school in Odanah, Wisconsin, from 1883 to 1969, during the era of assimilating Indigenous children into our Euro-American culture, the Franciscan Sisters of Perpetual Adoration acknowledge our own history and complicity with the policies of this era. We fully support S. 1723; H.R. 7227, reintroduced by Representatives Sharice Davids and Tom Cole, the fourth iteration of the bill.

As Wisconsin representatives, we encourage you to attend a showing of *Bad River*, the new documentary set to release March 15 in select cities, including Ashland and Madison in Wisconsin and Washington D.C. The film spotlights the Bad River Tribe of Lake Superior Chippewa and their work as water protectors. While producing the film, the director heard story after story about boarding school trauma. FSPA was invited to be interviewed for the film. While we have yet to see the film, we understand that Sister Eileen McKenzie, then FSPA president, is one of four non-natives speaking in the film. According to a review in "Isthmus," *"Extraordinarily, only four non-Natives have a voice here. Most dramatically, Sister Eileen McKenzie, president of the Franciscan Sisters of Perpetual Adoration, based in La Crosse, acknowledges complicity in 'cultural genocide' in their treatment of Bad River school children. 'Our congregation as well as other congregations were involved in a system of white supremacy,' she admits. 'It was racist.'"*

Visit badriverfilm.com for dates and times. In La Crosse, we're working with the local theater to host a showing after the first run.

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The FSPA Truth and Healing Team continues its work forwarding FSPA's direction statement to celebrate authentic unity in diversity by challenging our white privilege and working toward equity and inclusion of all. This team formed in August 2020 and exists to discern and respond to the call to healing around our administration of St. Mary's Indian Boarding School in Odanah, Wisconsin. Our focus thus far has been on learning about the historical trauma and cultural genocide that resulted from forced assimilation through the boarding school era, raising awareness, and cultivating healing relationships.

Focus Areas Highlights

- Archives: work with the Bad River Tribe to identify a process to determine how we continue repatriating cultural items and create a process for sharing tribal information. Also, continue collaborating with the Native American Boarding School Healing Coalition on this work.
- Education: in February and March of this year, FSPA has designated and invested in three full days of racial justice training, hosted by YWCA and led by co-facilitator Henry Greengrass, Ho-Chunk. Close to 50 attendees, including staff and sisters, will complete the training and be held accountable to apply what they've learned in their areas and circles of influence. Also in February, sisters, staff, affiliates and guests participated in a workshop hosted by Juanita Sims Doty Foundation titled "Dehumanization and Racism." FSPA's Anti-Racism Team is charged with continuing this conversation.
- Support & Relationships: FSPA encourages all sisters and staff (regularly considered paid time) to go out and engage in activities to increase their learning and understanding of FSPA's commitment to becoming an anti-racist organization. This includes promotion of the Ho-Chunk Powwow (La Crosse, March 30), Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women walk (La Crosse, May 5) and Juneteenth (La Crosse), to name a few.
- Land: FSPA is a Focus Community member of Land Justice Futures, a community of practice for women religious building land justice into property plans. FSPA also affirmed a land resource position paper that guides the congregation when making land resource decisions.

Please pledge your support for the Truth and Healing Commission on Indian Board School Policies Act of 2024. It is time to start the healing process.

Sincerely,

Sister Georgia Christensen
Vice President, Franciscan Sisters of Perpetual Adoration
Leadership Liaison to the FSPA Truth and Healing Team