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"Let us love, not in speech or talk,  
but in truth and action." - 1 John 3:18

To: Chairman Lengkeek of the Crow Creek Sioux Tribe, Its Council Members, Elders  
Council, Citizens and Descendents

From: The Rt. Rev. Dr. Jonathan H. Folts

Date: August 15, 2025

Re: *An Apology to Native Communities: A recognition of the Church's complicity in the boarding school system and pledging to work from brokenness towards justice, healing, and restored relationships*

In the *Episcopal Book of Common Prayer*, one of our prayers of confession involves acknowledging our sins, known and unknown. Today, in your presence and in the presence of God, I desire to confess and apologize for the sins that we, the Church, have committed against you and your Tribal relatives in this Territory.

I wish to confess and formally apologize for the Christian Church's past complicity in causing harm to the most vulnerable in your community – your children – through the direct and indirect actions of our members. We, as members of the Christian Church, oftentimes in collusion with the government, separated children from their families and tribal homes and forced them to be assimilated into the white man's culture at boarding schools, miles and miles away from their lands. We stripped them of their native garments and made them dress like us. We took their language away from them and required them to speak like us. We robbed them of their traditional beliefs and forced them to worship and believe like us. We physically and spiritually abused your children for not conforming to our ways. And most regrettably of all, when some of your children died while attending these boarding schools, we, the Church, denied their bodies safe passage home to the lands from which they were stolen.

Our actions have alienated and separated us from you, our Native siblings. Instead of showing ourselves as imitators of Jesus Christ, as our Scriptures call us to be, we instead have acted as divine enforcers of a misguided notion of entitlement and betterment. Our actions harmed your children, their parents, their elders, and their entire tribal communities. Our actions betrayed a desire to wipe out your unique culture. Our actions caused God's heart to grieve.

Episcopal Diocese of South Dakota, 408 North Jefferson Avenue, Pierre, SD 57501

I also wish to confess and formally apologize for the Church's ongoing complicity in this trauma in the present moment. We have been slow to accept responsibility for the harm we have caused and even slower to offer amends. We have been slow to realize the generational harm caused by this trauma and have failed to see how this trauma is being manifested by Native and Indigenous people worldwide. We have been slow to advocate to our local, state, and national leaders in our governments on your behalf. We have chosen to be willingly blind to the truth in front of us, and as a result, have missed the opportunity for the truth to "set us free" from our sins as Jesus promised (John 8:32).

Finally, I wish to confess and formally apologize for the "unknown sins" we have committed against you and your people. These unknown sins are those things that we, the Christian Church, are guilty of and have yet to uncover and learn about. The work we have begun undertaking is a search for truth. But our work in discovering the truth is incomplete, and there is still much to be done. There is much we have to learn regarding the extent of damage caused to your children in the name of God, following the false dictates of the Doctrine of Discovery, all while acting under the pretense of being faithful colonizers. These are the unknown sins of which I speak, and I am grateful today for the opportunity Chairman Lengkeek has given us to move forward in our search for truth so that we may offer and confess an accounting that is as complete as possible.

During my time here, I have learned that mistrust is the most significant problem that the Church has when relating to the Native American populace, and for good reason. Native Americans do not trust the Church because of what we have done. People form their beliefs based on what they see and experience. And so, in order to change people's beliefs about the Church, the Church needs to change how it acts and give people a new experience.

The Episcopal Diocese of South Dakota aims to be the Church that many people don't expect us to be. We desire to change what people see and experience in a relationship with us. So, should you invite us on a shared walk toward reconciliation, our leaders will listen first and speak last. We will commit to learning from your generational wisdom and sharing what we have learned. We will commit, with humility, to shed the false narratives of historical good intentions and embrace the truth, acknowledge our hurtful actions, and make amends.

Thank you for giving me this opportunity and the honor of addressing you. And thank you especially for your willingness to consider aiding us in our desire to journey away from a land marred by brokenness towards a land filled with justice, healing, and restored relationships.