

Catholic dioceses launch Oklahoma Catholic Native Schools Project

Project will study the history, experiences of Catholic Indian boarding schools in Oklahoma

The Archdiocese of Oklahoma City, the Diocese of Tulsa and St. Gregory's Abbey launched a new project to better understand the history and experiences of Native students in Oklahoma Catholic boarding schools from 1880 to 1965.

The Oklahoma Catholic Native Schools Project seeks to understand the history of Catholic Indian boarding schools in Oklahoma by gathering oral histories from former students and their descendants, studying documentation on Catholic Indian boarding schools from parishes, religious orders, tribes, the U.S. Department of the Interior and other reputable sources.

The information collected through documents and oral histories will be compiled into a report.

“It is important we learn and understand the experiences of American Indian children and their families at Catholic boarding schools in Oklahoma so we can make better and more informed decisions moving forward,” Archbishop Coakley said. “We will continue to build a culture of inclusion, healing and understanding related to Native American Catholics in our state.”

The dioceses are working with Marquette University in Milwaukee, Wisc., which holds the archives for the Bureau of Catholic Indian Missions, with specific collaboration with Marquette professor Bryan Rindfleisch, who specializes in American Indian history and studies. Oral histories and research will be coordinated locally by independent oral history contractors.

“It is by understanding the past that we are able to improve and build on good ideas in the present and, where necessary, make amends for failures in the past,” said Bishop David A. Konderla, Bishop of Tulsa.

Fourteen Catholic Indian boarding schools existed in Oklahoma between 1880 and 1965. The first one opened in Konawa in 1880 and closed in 1926. The last Catholic Indian boarding school, Saint Patrick's in Anadarko, closed in 1965. They were all overseen by various religious orders.

To learn more about the project, go online to archokc.org/oknativeschoolsproject. To participate in the project or to share an experience from a Catholic Indian boarding school in Oklahoma, e-mail info@oknativeschoolsproject.org.