

Indigenous Boarding Schools Talking

By Ruth Johnson



During the 81st General Convention, the Office of Native American/Indigenous Ministries of The Episcopal Church hosted an Indigenous Boarding Schools Talking Circle event. Various elders around The Episcopal Church told a piece of their stories at General Convention—the hard truth of real-life experiences at Boarding Schools. This talking circle aims to provide testimony to assist with the passage of Resolution A127 at the 80th General Convention to form an Episcopal Boarding School Commission and bring awareness to the historical trauma caused by Boarding Schools. We thank the talking circle participants for their courage to speak about their experiences and witness. Healing is the goal to prevent the impact

of trauma on future generations. Navajolands lay leader Ruth Johnson told her story in Kentucky and shares a few of her experiences below.

“I am a survivor of the boarding school abuse. My boarding school days began at St. Christopher’s Mission in Bluff, Utah. It’s here that I contracted impetigo. My hair was completely shaved off. The staff would scrub the sores daily with horrible-smelling and often painful “green soap.” I had to get shots every day for about ten days. I went kicking and screaming. Our teacher also had a wooden ruler, which she used frequently. I was then sent to Shiprock, New Mexico, a boarding school where the abuse was worse. I was left there from Sep-

tember to May. My family lived too far away for my parents to pick me up for the holidays. While at the mission, I was quite traumatized. In Shiprock, it was physical abuse as well as emotional and verbal.

I don’t think many of the people who were in attendance at the Kentucky Talking Circle truly heard first-hand experiences of the boarding school abuse until that night. Many of the questions and comments we received were sympathetic to our experiences, and many had encouraging words and thanked us for having the courage to speak up. Having to tell my story hasn’t been easy. It isn’t easy to talk about, even as old as I am. This is just a tiny snippet of my story that I can tell. I am just one of the many survivors.”