

## National Day of Truth and Reconciliation Congregational Recognition

### Introduction

The National Day of Truth and Reconciliation began as Orange Shirt Day. As told by Phyllis Webstad in her autobiographical books and on youtube videos, the story of Orange Shirt Day began with six-year-old Phyllis in September 1973 at the St. Joseph Mission Indian Residential School, near Williams Lake, British Columbia.

That was the year she lived at the St Joseph Mission while attending school. As a six-year-old, Phyllis was excited to start school. To mark the special occasion her grandmother took her shopping and let her pick out a new shirt ... she chose a bright orange one.

When she arrived at The Mission for her first day of school, little Phyllis, along with all the other arrivals, was taken by the nuns to a shower room and told to remove her clothes. When the shower was finished she was given a uniform by the nuns. She asked for her special shirt back, but was refused because she now had to wear the clothing provided. She never saw the shirt her grandmother bought for her.

In 2013 when the Truth and Reconciliation Commission came to her area of British Columbia, Phyllis told the story of her lost orange shirt. That day, people began wearing orange to remember the children that were taken away from their parents, family and community in order to attend residential schools.

Phyllis explains that September was chosen as the month to wear Orange Shirts because that is the month during which she began school when her shirt was taken away.

Residential schools were intended to take young children away from the influence of their family and culture in order to gradually assimilate Indigenous people into Canadian society. John A. MacDonald, the first Canadian Prime Minister, said in parliament on May 5, 1880, *“All we can hope for is to wean them by slow degrees, from their nomadic habits, which have almost become an instinct, and by slow degrees absorb them or settle them on the land. Meantime they must be fairly protected.”*

In practice, “weaning them of their habits”, was accomplished by interrupting and attempting to destroy their culture. The residential schools were a core strategy in that enterprise. The plan was only partly successful. It did deep harm to individuals, family systems and communities. But it could not totally destroy cultures and completely assimilate the peoples. Today we lament the harm that was done. We lament the indignities perpetrated by the residential school system. We yearn for healed people and healed relationships based on truth and respect.

## Suggested Worship Activities

1. Display an orange shirt with the “Every Child Matters” message on it near the entrance to the worship area. Post an explanation beside the shirt. For example,

### **National Day for Truth and Reconciliation**

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Each year, September 30 marks the National Day for Truth and Reconciliation. The day honours the children who never returned home and Survivors of residential schools, as well as their families and communities. Public commemoration of the tragic and painful history and ongoing impacts of residential schools is a vital component of the reconciliation process.

Both the National Day for Truth and Reconciliation and Orange Shirt Day take place on September 30.

### **Wearing an Orange Shirt**

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Orange Shirt Day is an Indigenous-led grassroots commemorative day intended to raise awareness of the individual, family and community inter-generational impacts of residential schools, and to promote the concept of “Every Child Matters”. The orange shirt is a symbol of the stripping away of culture, freedom and self-esteem experienced by Indigenous children over generations.

By wearing an orange shirt on September 30<sup>th</sup>, you commit to the enduring truth that EVERY CHILD MATTERS, every day and everywhere.

### **Origin of Orange Shirt Day: Phyllis Webstad’s Story**

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I went to the Mission for one school year in 1973/1974. I had just turned 6 years old. I lived with my grandmother on the Dog Creek reserve. We never had very much money, but somehow my granny managed to buy me a new outfit to go to the Mission school. I remember going to Robinson’s store and picking out a shiny orange shirt. It had string laced up in front, and was so bright and exciting – just like I felt to be going to school!

When I got to the Mission, they stripped me, and took away my clothes, including the orange shirt! I never wore it again. I didn’t understand why they wouldn’t give it back to me, it was mine! The color orange has always reminded me of that and how my feelings didn’t matter, how no one cared and how I felt like I was worth nothing. All of us little children were crying and no one cared.

*Information taken from <https://orangeshirtday.org/orange-shirt-day/> and <https://www.canada.ca/en/canadian-heritage/campaigns/national-day-truth-reconciliation.html>*

2. Tell a Children's Story about Residential Schools, books by Phyllis Webstad based on her experience that led to the origins of Orange Shirt Day

*Phyllis's Orange Shirt* - adapted for younger children

<https://www.amazon.ca/Phylliss-Orange-Shirt-Phyllis-Webstad/dp/1989122248>

*The Orange Shirt Story* – fairly detailed about Phyllis's experiences –available at

<https://www.commonword.ca/ResourceView/82/21908>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EuW4WbekhY> - 7 minutes by Phyllis Webstad

-chose Sept for orange shirt day because that is when kids start school each year

<https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=423006542521916> – young child-friendly reading of *Phyllis's Orange Shirt* – 4.5 minutes

Other resources about Orange Shirt Day / National Day of Truth Reconciliation

*The Train* by Jodie Callaghan <https://www.commonword.ca/ResourceView/82/24899>

*Spirit of the Grassroots People: Seeking Justice for Indigenous Survivors of Canada's Colonial Education System* by Raymond Mason

<https://www.commonword.ca/ResourceView/82/24387>

3. Read a litany of lament during worship, use the one below, adapt it, or create your own specific prayer.
4. Create or borrow something that is a better fit for your congregation.
5. Pull together a working group to plan marking the National Day of Truth and Reconciliation in a way that is made-for-your-congregation.
6. Seek out an Orange Shirt Day commemoration event by an Indigenous group local to your area and join them in solidarity.

**A Christian Prayer of Lament on the National Day of Truth and Reconciliation**  
(inspired by words of Psalm 5)

One: Listen to our lament,  
loving God, Creator of the universe  
hear our cry!

**All: Listen to our lament! Hear our cry!**

One: You are the God who delights in truth,  
who delights in relationships of loving respect  
that honour your intentions and hope for the world.

**All: Listen to our lament! Hear our cry!**

One: You reach out to us through Jesus  
to lead forth in reconciliation  
where our relationship with you is broken.

**All: Lord have mercy.  
Christ have mercy.**

One: Today we lament with all the nations of this land.  
We lament the dark, bitter truth of Indigenous hosts  
betrayed by their guests on this land.  
Treaty promises and relationships broken.

**All: Listen to our lament! Hear our cry!**

One: At this Orange Shirt Day we lament  
children forcibly taken from family and home,  
for indoctrination intended to “kill the Indian in the child”.

**All: Listen to our lament! Hear our cry!**

**All: We lament what has been done.  
We lament the broken treaties and broken trust.  
We lament the harm and the loss.**

One: We acknowledge we have no appropriate words, so we stand in silence:  
for the families and communities who mourn,  
mourn their children who did not come home from residential schools,  
mourn the disruption of family and way of life,  
mourn the exploitation and desecration of their homeland.

**All: We stand in silent mourning (or, we stand in silent respect)**

**SILENCE**

One: We lament relationships that remain broken.  
We lament systems of ongoing harm and injustice.

**All: We step forward in repentance,  
turning away from traditions of superiority,  
turning away from habits of hiding the truth,  
turning toward relationships of respect and justice that  
honour the Creator's intentions and hopes for the world.**

One: We acknowledge and celebrate the resilience and  
resurgence of Indigenous peoples.

**All: We give thanks for the gift of life we have from God.  
We commit to being part of the healing on this land  
so that all people can enjoy the good gifts intended by our Creator God.  
Amen.**