Moderator's Orange Shirt Day Message 2024

Transcript of video message

Greetings. I'm the Right Rev. Dr. Carmen Lansdowne, Moderator of The United Church of Canada.

September 30th we observe the National Day for Truth and Reconciliation. We witness and honour the healing journey of survivors and families of the residential school experience, and we remember those who didn't make it home.

Phyllis Webstad, founder and ambassador of Orange Shirt Day, is a residential school survivor and community leader who continues to raise awareness of Every Child Matters by sharing stories of the individual, family, and community intergenerational impacts of the residential school experience.

Orange Shirt Day is not to be celebrated as a holiday. It is a day to reflect, to learn, and to pray about the continued impact of colonial policies and governance in what we now call Canada.

Whether you attended one of the schools, whether you're an intergenerationally affected relative—like me—a granddaughter of a survivor, whether you're a parent left behind, or a non-Indigenous person in Canada who was fed a false history, Orange Shirt Day means Every Child Matters.

Indian residential schools operated in Canada between the 1870s and the 1990s. The last Indian residential school closed in 1996. Between 1925 and 1969, The United Church of Canada operated a total of 15 institutions within the Indian Act system as part of the federal government's policy of assimilating Indigenous peoples.

The Heiltsuk joint leadership of hereditary chiefs and elected chief and councillors have called not for reconciliation, but for a concept in our language called *Haíłcístut*—or, to turn around and make things right. It is not about reconciling two parties who have harmed each other, but non-Indigenous accountability for harms done to Indigenous people in the name of the church, in the name of the Crown, and as a society that has normalized Euro-Christian whiteness.

As members of a church that operated residential institutions, every member of The United Church of Canada is accountable for learning about the tragic and painful legacy of the institutions and how it continues to impact the lives of Indigenous Peoples across the country.

Children in those institutions suffered physical, sexual, emotional, spiritual, and cultural abuse. This resulted in the Indian Residential Schools Settlement Agreement, which included the creation of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada. Its Final Report and Calls to Action make clear that there is still a very long journey ahead of us as we seek to make things right. Racist or colonial policies continue to harm Indigenous children and their families. They manifest in inequitable funding for education, and injustices are perpetuated under the Indigenous Child Welfare Act.

On September 30th and every day, we must remember that every child matters. One way we can be proactive in showing Indigenous young people they matter is by investing in the Waase-Aabin program [Endowment Fund for Indigenous Post-Secondary Education]. This program awards annual scholarships for post-secondary education to Indigenous students ages 18–29 who demonstrate financial need and academic excellence.

I hope you will join me, with millions of other Canadians, Indigenous and non-Indigenous alike, and spend time in reflection, prayer, and action on this National Day for Truth and Reconciliation. *Walis Gayasixa*. Every Child Matters.