

AMERICAN INDIAN ALASKA NATIVE LUTHERAN ASSOCIATION

July 23, 2021

Greetings in the name of our Creator, in the name of Jesus, Savior of all. We speak to you all today on behalf of the Indigenous people throughout North Americas. We come with sad hearts at the news of 215+ children of the Kamloops Residential School whose remains were recently found in a mass grave and of the children of the Rosebud Sioux whose bodies were returned to their homeland this past week. They are being remembered by many by the color orange.

The color orange is symbolic and came from the inspiration of a survivor of that era, Phyllis Webstad, who stated that when she was a 6-year-old girl arriving at a residential boarding school, she was stripped of her clothes which included a new orange t-shirt her grandmother had gifted her and was never given back. The orange shirt/color now symbolizes how the church and the schools they administered took away the Indigenous identity of the children in their care.

In honor and memory of the children of the First Nations people and of our Native children who never made it home, and for those still living the nightmare imposed on them as children of Canada and the United States we humbly ask our brothers and sisters of the church to hang an orange banner in the sanctuaries of your churches for 225 days. In remembrance and lament of each child that was thrown into those graves, and those yet to be discovered we honor each of their lives.

Please grieve with us and remember us as the Indigenous people of this land who are going through a very sad and heartbreaking time in our collective psyche. We invite all our Christian brothers and sisters, in solidarity with us, to honor all our First Nations and our Native children that never made it out of residential schools by hanging an orange banner for 225 days.

We now call on the Church to acknowledge and confess its complicity in all the atrocities committed against the Indigenous peoples of North America and throughout the world where western Christianity colonized Indigenous peoples. Please stand in partnership with us for the children.

The true history of the western church in America has been participation in acts of ethnic cleansing, genocide through warfare including biological and chemical, sterilization, depletion of our main food source, the taking of land and resources for personal gains. We ask you, the ELCA Church and Bishops Church leaders and congregations to support our people in remembering the children.

Many Tribal nations have had church groups offer apologies on behalf of their ancestors, which is well and good, but that only serves to assuage any feelings of guilt or shame for them and does not bring about true repentance. So in light of these past gestures we call upon the churches serving in the United States to advocate the U.S. Government to fully acknowledge all the atrocities it has committed against the indigenous peoples of this land now known as the United States of America and for the future of Christianity in Indian Country.

Wopila

In Christ,

Pr. Joann Conroy, President

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REMEMBERING THE CHILDREN