



Society of the Sacred Heart™
United States – Canada

Statement of Solidarity on Orange Shirt Day
From the Office of Justice, Peace, and Integrity of Creation (JPIC)
at The Stuart Center for Mission
Friday, September 30, 2022

As Religious of the Sacred Heart (RSCJ) in the United States – Canada Province, we are called by our [2016 Chapter Calls](#) to stand in solidarity with “those who have been wounded, displaced, and excluded,” and “to defend justice, peace, and the integrity of creation in response to all of those who are searching for meaning in their lives.” (General Chapter 2016)

This call to solidarity holds particular poignance for us as we confront the haunted histories of colonialism, settler violence, and cultural genocide that are part of the Society’s presence in North America since the 19th century.

Beginning in the 1860s and continuing for most of the twentieth century, hundreds of thousands of Indigenous children were removed from their families and forcibly enrolled in Church-run residential schools in the United States and Canada. Today, September 30th, is recognized in Canada as National Day for Truth and Reconciliation, when Canadians honour the Métis, Inuit, and First Nations children who died in Canadian residential schools and recognize those who survived. On this day, Canadians also acknowledge the serious and lasting harm done to Indigenous communities by these schools, and commit to learning about (and not repeating) the history of harm experienced by these children.

One such child was Phyllis Webstad, whose book [Phyllis’ Orange Shirt](#) tells the story of herself at age 6, proud to go to school in the shiny new orange shirt her grandmother had bought for her. The orange shirt was taken away from her upon her arrival at the school and never returned. Canadians (and all who stand in solidarity with First Nations people in Canada and beyond) are encouraged to wear an orange shirt on this day, in recognition of the fact that Phyllis Webstad’s childhood experience of dehumanization, humiliation and loss was one shared by thousands of First Nations children. We encourage all those across the Sacred Heart family to join us in wearing orange shirts today in solidarity with this movement, and as an assertion that **Every Child Matters**.

When he visited Canada this past summer, Pope Francis brought home two pairs of children’s moccasins, which had been made as a reminder of the children who suffered in Canada’s residential schools. The moccasins had been loaned to him by representatives of First Nations people who had come to meet with him in Rome in the spring. [Upon his arrival in Canada this summer](#), he returned the moccasins, saying,

“The memory of those children is indeed painful; it urges us to work to ensure that every child is treated with love, honour and respect. At the same time, those moccasins also speak to us of a path to follow, a journey that we desire to make together. We want to walk together, to pray together and to work together, so that the sufferings of the past can lead to a future of justice, healing and reconciliation ... I ask forgiveness, in particular, for the ways in which many members of the Church and of religious communities cooperated, not least through their indifference, in projects of cultural destruction and forced assimilation promoted by the governments of that time, which culminated in the system of residential schools ... In the face of this deplorable evil, the Church kneels before God and implores his forgiveness for the sins of her children.”

The General Assembly of the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops (CCCB) this week held its first in-person meeting since 2019, a meeting focused primarily on discussing and discerning the next steps forward in the path of healing and reconciliation with Indigenous peoples. One such step, [announced recently](#), is the announcement that the CCCB is working closely with Vatican officials in Rome on wording for a new statement from Pope Francis that is expected to reject the Doctrine of Discovery.

The Doctrine of Discovery is a series of papal bulls that was used to legitimize the European seizure of land and domination of Indigenous peoples during colonial times. This Doctrine serves as the basis of property law in the United States and has been cited in dozens of court decisions in Canada and elsewhere. The National Congress of American Indians (NCAI) and representatives of Canada's First Nations have [appealed directly to the Vatican](#) to rescind this doctrine, which "for centuries served as a political platform and legal rationale for seizure of our lands, territories, and resources as well as dehumanizing Indigenous Peoples, and provided for the justification for the establishment of federal Indian boarding schools throughout North America to purportedly 'civilize' Indigenous People."

While many Catholic religious orders played a role in the residential school system in Canada, there is no evidence in the records from the Society's Canadian archives that the RSCJ were involved in any residential schools there. In the United States, the picture is more complicated. The Society operated St. Mary Mission and School in Kansas for many years, serving children of the Potawatomi Nation and other Native communities. The school received U.S. federal funds for many years as part of the Bureau of Indian Affairs' boarding-school program, which the Bureau describes today as a deliberate "pursuit of a policy of cultural assimilation that coincided with Indian territorial dispossession" ([May 2022 Federal Indian Boarding School Initiative Investigative Report](#)). The Society's investigation into this part of our history is ongoing.

Resources for Further Study:

What Indigenous land are you on?

Click here to look up your location: <https://native-land.ca/>.

Learn more about the Sacred Heart story and Indigenous justice:

Last spring, a group of RSCJ and Associates hosted a series of webinars exploring our commitment to Indigenous justice and our history with the Potawatomi Nation and others through our schools in the United States. Resources and recordings are available here: <https://stuartcenter.org/grave-on-the-prairie>.

Learn more about Orange Shirt Day:

"The annual Orange Shirt Day on September 30th opens the door to global conversation on all aspects of Residential Schools. It is an opportunity to create meaningful discussion about the effects of Residential Schools and the legacy they have left behind. A discussion all Canadians can tune into and create bridges with each other for reconciliation. A day for survivors to be reaffirmed that they matter, and so do those that have been affected." Resources, curriculum guides, and more available at <https://www.orangeshirtday.org/>.

Share your Orange Shirt selfie with the Sacred Heart family:

Join the Society of the Sacred Heart, our Associates, staff, students, alumnae/alumni, and friends across the United States – Canada Province in wearing orange shirts this Friday in solidarity with residential school survivors and their communities. Post your photo to social media using the hashtag **#JusticeInTheHeart** to share your selfies with the Sacred Heart family. In your photo or its caption, tell us why you are wearing an orange shirt: "I wear orange today for _____."

Join the conversation.

To learn more about topics of Indigenous justice and other Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation initiatives of the Society of the Sacred Heart, fill out the form at this link to sign up to receive JPIC emails: <https://stuartcenter.org/contact>