



Kamloops Residential School: A Time for Mourning and Support

May 31, 2021

This message comes from Indigenous Ministries and Justice at The United Church of Canada.

If you are a residential school or intergenerational survivor and this content is upsetting, please call the National Indian Residential School Crisis Line at 1-866-925-4419.

As news came on May 28, 2021, that the remains of 215 children were found in undocumented and unmarked graves on the grounds of the former Kamloops Residential School, we entered into a time of mourning for these relatives, their families, and their communities.

Gatherings were held around sacred fires across the country. Prayers were sung and spoken. Church bells were rung. Orange ribbons were tied on branches and fences. Shoes were laid out on the steps of churches and government buildings. Candles were lit and flags were lowered as a sign of respect.

Three generations of the Burns family (Russel, Charlene, Russelle, Jacob, and Jenny) travelled into the Rocky Mountains to make a tobacco offering for each and every one of these 215 children. Russelle offered this reflection:

My heart has been heavy since hearing about Kamloops. It was an absolute BLESSING to be with Nikâwiy ewka Nohtâwiy [Mother and Father] this weekend... Nohtâwiy didn't do one offering for the 215 children found; instead he took the time to offer tobacco for every single one of them. My prayers were for the Mosoms, Kokoms, and Chapans [Grandfathers, Grandmothers, and Great-Grandparents] those little souls never got to grow up to be... I know they're happy today, dancing and enjoying all the prayers being sent! Jenny and me PROUDLY wore our orange shirts today.

Indigenous Ministries asks all of the church to continue in this time of mourning and of support for each other as we grieve this loss, and others that we do not yet know about.

You can show this by doing any of the actions named above. You can use one or both of the prayers created by Indigenous Ministries Executive Minister Murray Pruden and Moderator Richard Bott. You can support those organizations in your community, such as Friendship Centres, that support Indigenous people who live with trauma every day.

We understand the desire to do “something” that will make this right. But we ask you, right now, to come together as people of the United Church and take the first step of mourning and remembering.