

# Orange Banner Introduction Forum Template

## Southwestern Washington Synod

As part of displaying the Orange Banner in your sanctuary for 225 days in solidarity with the Indigenous communities of our country, it may be helpful to introduce your congregation to the concept of why this is happening. Particularly of interest is familiarizing people with the Residential (Boarding) School system and the ways that the government (and, often, the Church) were complicit in or even actively working towards erasing the Native American culture and experience.

This has the potential to be a sensitive topic, touching on areas of racism and privilege, poverty, and other issues. In order to facilitate the discussion and help people get the most out of it, we suggest a forum based on the following outline:

1. Introduction (5-10 minutes)
  - a. Explain that we will be talking about the US Residential School system for Native American children. It was the discovery of mass graves at two residential schools--Kamloops in British Columbia, and Rosebud in South Dakota--that prompted us to display the Orange Banner. We are displaying the banner because we've been asked to do so by the Indigenous communities in solidarity as they grieve the deaths of their children, and in commitment to tell the truth about the school system.
  - b. Lead the group through the Respectful Communications Guidelines (below)
  - c. You may also wish to introduce people to the Mutual Invitation process to having discussion. (below)
2. Show one or more of the suggested videos (10-20 minutes)
3. Time for small group discussion (20 minutes)
  - a. Using the included questions (or others of your choosing), ask people to reflect on the video in small groups of 3-5
4. Time for large group sharing (10-15 minutes)
  - a. Allow groups to share insights from small group discussion with the whole group.

We hope that this is a helpful resource for your congregation to help you process and reflect upon this important topic together. Based on the questions or comments that arise, you may wish to plan further forums to continue the discussion or explore other related topics.

### Respectful Communications Guidelines

Communication is one of the most important elements in building a more inclusive community. People of different backgrounds bring with them different communication styles. Sometimes these differences can cause conflicts among members of a community—often in an unconscious way.

Guidelines for communication are like the traffic rules that one has to understand and observe before getting a license to drive a car. We are required to pass a test proving that we know and will follow the rules in order to lessen the possibility of traffic accidents. With interpersonal communication, we do not require people to pass a test but we do need to remind people about how to interact respectfully. Conditioned by our society, we may react to others who are different with negative attitudes, put-downs, judgments and dismissal. If we are to express the essence of God's inclusiveness, we need to agree to behave differently when we are attempting to build a more inclusive community. The

Respectful Communication Guidelines provide a foundation to uphold the well-being of the community.

- **R** – take **Responsibility** for what you say and feel without blaming others
- **E** – use **Empathetic** listening
- **S** – be **Sensitive** to differences in communication/cultural styles
- **P** – **Ponder** what you hear and feel before you speak
- **E** – **Examine** your own assumptions and perceptions
- **C** – keep **Confidentiality**
- **T** – **Tolerate** ambiguity because we are not here to debate. There are no “winners” or “losers.”

## Mutual Invitation

Mutual invitation is an exercise we borrowed from Eric Law’s book *The Wolf Shall Dwell with the Lamb*. This is especially effective in multicultural communities because it helps reveal how often the white majority members perceive greater personal power within the community than do many minority members. It allows all community members to see their own tendencies within the group discussion. While it can be awkward at first, stick with it and try it for a few gatherings.

Similarly, if someone “passes” and chooses not to speak, do not pressure them into doing so. If a person speaks very briefly or passes and then does not remember to invite the next person to speak, do not invite for him or her. Simply point out that this person has the privilege to invite the next person to speak. By ensuring that this person still has the privilege to invite, you affirm and value that person independent of that person’s verbal ability.

The discussion process is as follows:

*“The leader or a designated person will share first. After that person has spoken, he or she then invites another to share. Whom you invite does not need to be the person next to you, and it is better if you do not. After the next person has spoken, that person is given the privilege to invite another to share. If you don’t want to say anything, simply say ‘pass’ and proceed to invite another to share. We will do this until everyone has been invited.”*

(from *The Wolf Shall Dwell with the Lamb* by Eric Law)

## Suggested Videos:

1. How the US stole thousands of Native American children (13:41)

<https://youtu.be/UGqWRyBCHhw>

Questions:

- a. What was the purpose of the boarding school system?
- b. From the White perspective, what was the benefit to the Native American community?
- c. How do the Indigenous people interviewed characterize the experiences of their people in the schools? What do you think is the legacy of the schools in the Indigenous community?
- d. How did White Americans understand the purpose of the adoption program?

- e. What does Terri Yellowhammer mean by saying “Whiteness [was] the standard for success?” Is this still true today?
  - f. What are some of the lasting legacies of Native family separation policies?
  
2. Schools tried to forcibly assimilate Indigenous kids. Can the U.S. make amends? (8:13)  
<https://youtu.be/gRNcCCgnau>  
Questions:
  - a. Why is it important to “repatriate” these photographs and stories?
  - b. How are the Benedictine sisters working for healing? What can we learn from their example?
  
3. Carlisle Indian School (excerpt from “Into the West” ministries) (9:57)  
<https://youtu.be/yfRHqWCz3Zw>  
Questions:
  - a. Why do you think the Whites believe they have brought the children to the school?
  - b. What do you notice is taken away from the children in the course of the video?
  - c. What is the reason for taking these things?
  - d. What prompts the young man to finally cut his hair?
  - e. How does it feel to watch this scene? Why?
  
4. Native American Boarding Schools 101 (7:18)  
<https://youtu.be/YIG2-7yl3mc>  
Questions:
  - a. What was the purpose of the boarding school system?
  - b. What were the reasons that Native families (willingly or not) sent their children to residential schools?
  - c. What did the students learn at the schools? How have those lessons affected their lifestyles?
  - d. What is the goal of Indian Schools now?
  
5. Home From School [Documentary] (57:00)  
<https://calderaproductions.com/home-from-school/>  
You’ll need to purchase the DVD from the website. Click “Host a Screening” and fill out information to request a study guide and other materials.