ORANGE BANNER NEWSLETTER ARTICLE Template

When we gather for worship, it is appropriate to remember the people who lived here before us and to acknowledge the uncomfortable reality that many of the things upon which we now depend were taken by our ancestors from theirs. Before White settlers came, the area we know as [TOWN/AREA] was home to the [FIRST NATION] people. The [FIRST NATION] remain our neighbors, and we now share with them a love of this land and a responsibility to care for it.

Beginning [DATE], our congregation will be displaying an orange banner in our sanctuary in response to the request of our Indigenous neighbors. Following the devastating discoveries of children’s remains at the Kamloops and Rosebud boarding schools, the American Indian Alaska Native Lutheran Association asked congregations of our Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) and the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada (ELCIC) to hang orange banners in our worship spaces for 225 days in recognition of the approximately 225 children (that we know of) who died at these schools. We hang this banner as a sign of grieving with our Indigenous siblings and remembering how the Church has been complicit in their suffering, and sometimes even the perpetrators of it.

The orange color symbolizes how the church and the schools they administered tried to take away the Indigenous identity of the children in their care. It was inspired by the story of Phyllis Webstad, a survivor of the residential schools. When she arrived as a 6-year-old, she had all of her clothes taken from her, including a brand new orange t-shirt her grandmother had given her. It was never returned.

The upper symbol is a salmon swimming upstream, and was commissioned as the logo of our Synod’s Native American Work Team. Salmon provides food and is an example of renewal. When salmon reach their “upstream” place of birth, a long and challenging journey; they spawn, are fertilized, then die. This marks both the ending and giving of life. The artist, Toni Jo Gobin, is an enrolled member of the Tulalip Tribes. The lower image is of a pair of child’s empty shoes, symbolic of the children who died at these boarding schools and the hole they have left in their communities and families.

This banner will hang in our sanctuary through all of our major holidays and seasons—including Christmas and Easter—until May 13. During this time, our hearts will be with our Indigenous siblings in their grief, and we will remember them in our prayers as we reflect upon the reality of this loss and the part the Church has played in it, and how we may move forward in love and mutual respect.

To help introduce the banners and their significance, our congregation will be hosting a special forum on [DATE]. At that time, we will have the opportunity to learn more about the residential school system and how it has impacted the lives of our Indigenous siblings. We hope you will participate!

BULLETIN ITEM

A Note on the Orange Banner

The orange banner hanging in the sanctuary is being displayed as a sign of solidarity with our Indigenous neighbors, who are mourning the discovery of mass graves at residential schools in Canada and the US. We grieve with them and acknowledge the part the Church has played in their suffering. The banner will hang for 225 days in memory of the children who died. For more information, check our [MONTH] newsletter [and be sure to attend the forum on [DATE].

*NOTE: Please edit the highlighted items to fit your context, including relevant dates (when the banners will be displayed, the date(s) of the forum(s)) and the tribe(s) which preceded you in your area. If you begin displaying the banner on November 1, 225 days later is May 13.*