

Sermon "Orange Shirt Day"

Kirk of St James

Sunday September 26, 2026

Rev. Amanda Henderson-Bolton

We are going to begin this morning a little differently than usual. A few years ago, Vivian Ketchum, originating from Wauzhushk Onigum Nation of Northern Ontario, and a current member of Place of Hope Presbyterian Church in Winnipeg, Man., talks about why she wears an orange shirt, and why it is important for members of the church to mark September 30. This is a six-minute video where she shares some of her thoughts with us.

We have been talking about doing a service on Healing and Reconciliation for quite some time here at the Kirk, and I admit I was paralyzed trying to figure out how to best approach something like this. My deepest fear was of doing something that came across as harmful or insensitive. When you have the type of trauma that people experienced at the hands of the residential school system, and the racism that First Nations People have to face even today you want to make sure that whatever you do does not cause more problems or pain. It is one of the reasons I wanted you to hear from Vivian first today because these things are both living memory, and ongoing experience. In fact, Vivian was recently featured (September 11th, 2026) on the CBC Now or Never Podcast. Here is a description of the work she is currently doing:

"When Vivian Ketchum and Ron D'Errico first met, they were adversaries, but today they're colleagues and working together to make big changes.

Ron is the CEO of Impact Security. When one of his employees had a violent confrontation with a First Nations alleged shoplifter, Vivian went to protest outside the downtown Winnipeg Dollarama store.

Ron knew he had a problem with racial profiling in the store, despite required training. So even though Vivian was his "greatest adversary" he asked her if she would work with him as an ambassador in the store and help diffuse situations between shoppers and security.

Vivian was hesitant at first but took the job. Now Ron says incidents has been reduced by 80 percent since Vivian joined the team."

This piece of healing and reconciliation is incredibly important, but where do we start? One of things I undertook while considering this question was contacting Justice Ministries which is a branch of the Presbyterian Church in Canada ministries. While speaking with them several things came out. This type of work is something we always want to do with a spirit of humility, we need to listen, it is complex, and perhaps most importantly (and also the thing that helped move me out of paralysis) is that it is ongoing work. There is no service no matter how perfectly planned that hits all the right notes and then it is done. Healing and Reconciliation is ongoing in nature. So, this morning is us beginning a chapter together, and we will see how it unfolds, and the things we subsequently feel led to do.

One of things I will do this morning then is talk a little bit about what the Presbyterian Church in Canada has been doing around Healing and Reconciliation, the ministries we support, and the resources available.

To our shame, the Presbyterian Church in Canada ran twelve residential schools. In the early 1990's our first confession for the harm that was caused was written. **“1994: General Assembly adopted “Our Confession to Aboriginal Peoples” and mandated the Life and Mission Agency to explore ways to bring the Confession to Aboriginal peoples, to provide study materials for use in the church to enable church courts to better understand the issues leading to this Confession and encourage congregations to enter into the process of reconciliation. Assembly Council was mandated to “commit resources to a concerted engagement in the healing/reconciliation processes presently in progress.” (A&P 1994, pp. 365-377, 29, 69, 71)** The Confession was presented to Phil Fontaine, then Grand Chief of the Manitoba Chiefs on October 8, 1994, in Winnipeg.

This became a turning point in some ways for the church. From there funding, ministries, designating a Healing and Reconciliation Sunday, a staffed healing and reconciliation position, among other things were developed and established. We repudiated the Doctrine of Discovery in 2019, which had been used to justify European sovereignty over indigenous land and peoples. Then in 2024 the “General Assembly adopted an apology to Indigenous people and communities harmed by The Presbyterian Church in Canada’s complicity in colonization and the residential school system.” The 1994 apology was seen as inadequate, and not being comprehensive enough, thus the new one was written and adopted. There is more work that has happened, I just hit on some of the major milestones that have led to where we currently are. There is a complete timeline on the Indigenous Justice page found on the Presbyterian Church in Canada webpage if you would like to see more, and I would encourage you to take some time to look over the information.

The PCC supports eight indigenous ministries, and a National Indigenous Ministry Council. The ministries include Anamiewigummig Fellowship Centre, Winnipeg Inner City Mission, Saskatoon Native Ministry Circle, Mistawasis Memorial Presbyterian Church, Place of Hope Indigenous Presbyterian Church, Edmonton Urban Native Ministry, Hummingbird Ministries, and Cedar Tree Ministries. You can read about what they do on the PCC page, and I will be doing a bulletin spotlight on each of these ministries for the next eight weeks.

This is a little bit of the history of how we got here, and what we believe, now I just want to take a moment and talk about some of resources available and ways we might want to engage in Healing and Reconciliation. There are study guides available if churches want to study our PCC Confession, the Apology, or there is also a Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls Call for Justice study guide. There are also pieces on the Doctrine of Discovery, Systemic

Racism among others. The National church have staff available to do workshops either in person or on-line including an updated one called Complicity and Colonization. We are welcome to reach out to the National office if we are interested in arranging something either for our church or our presbytery. There are exercises like the KAIROS Canada Indigenous Rights Blanket Exercise that can be arranged. Then there is also looking around us in our own context to see how we might reach out. Part of this is us as churches figuring out how to engage in this important work.

When I was completing my M.A in Theology at Acadia our Theology and Ethics professor heard about a conference he really wanted one of his students to attend, and I had a credit that I needed to fill so I agreed to go. It was about healing and reconciliation. As part of the itinerary, we travelled to Six Nations of the Grand River, where we spent time among other things listening to the accounts of residential school survivors, and visiting the grounds of a former residential school. It was one of the most harrowing experiences of my life. The trauma, the injustice and the pain was almost impossible to hear. Then they hosted us for supper. When I think of that moment its excruciating, we cannot go back and change it. We cannot make it that their pain and their trauma did not happen. The best we can do, sometimes as small as it feels is to do our best in humility to listen and to walk the road of reconciliation. Our church was complicit on a National Level, we own that, and now we try to do better. So today really is about starting in some ways, figuring out where we are called within this work, and how we might best do it, and we do so because we love just as Jesus first loved us.