Faith and (De)colonization: Church Education Strategies in Response to Call to Action 59 of Canada's Truth and Reconciliation Commission

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1. Acknowledgements

1.1 Land Acknowledgement

I would like to acknowledge the lands where this research took place. Thunder Bay is located on the traditional lands of the Fort William First Nation, signatory to the Robinson Superior Treaty of 1850. I am grateful for the opportunity to live, play, and work on this land and for the Indigenous Peoples who have made this possible through their stewardship. Sudbury, Guelph, Brantford, and Kingston were also research sites for this project. Greater Sudbury rests on the traditional lands of the Atikameksheng Anishnawbek, signatory to the Robinson Huron Treaty of 1850, along with the territorial lands of the Wahnapitae First Nation and the Sagamok Anishnawbek. Guelph has served as traditional lands and a place of refuge for many peoples over time, but more specifically the Attiwonderonk, and the Haudenosaunee. This land is held as the treaty lands and territory with the Mississaugas of the Credit First Nation. Guelph lies directly adjacent to the Haldimand Tract and is part of a long-established traditional hunting ground for the Six Nations of the Grand River. Brantford is situated on the traditional lands of the Anishnawbe, Haudenosaunee, and Attawandaron. The city of Kingston is located on the traditional territory of the Anishinabek, Haudenosaunee, and the Huron-Wendat Peoples, and is included in the Dish With One Spoon Wampum Belt Covenant, an agreement between the Iroquois Confederacy and the Confederacy of the Ojibwe and Allied Nations to peaceably share and care for the resources around the Great Lakes. I would also like to acknowledge all Métis and Inuit people who have cared for and called these lands home.

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2. Abstract

The purpose of this research study was to explore whether local implementation of nationally developed congregational education strategies was occurring within Anglican, Catholic, Presbyterian, and United churches in response to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada's (TRC) Call to Action 59. Having operated Residential Schools, these churches are jointly responsible with Canada's federal government for the schools' assimilative contribution to Canada's policies of Indigenous cultural genocide. Given Call to Action 59, this study aimed to answer the following research questions: (1) How are the educational strategies developed by the national church parties to the Settlement Agreement being implemented in local congregations? And (2) what is the perceived effectiveness of these strategies at ensuring that their respective congregations learn about a) their church's role in colonization and b) the history and legacy of Residential Schools? To answer these questions, 18 semi-structured qualitative interviews were completed with current clergy and lay leaders from Anglican, Catholic, Presbyterian, and United churches in Ontario. Quota, purposive, and snowball sampling methods were used to recruit these participants. Qualitative interview data was analyzed using thematic analysis. Participants identified a lack of nationally developed education strategies across all denominations, in part due to organizational dynamics within the churches. However, participants also indicated independent measures taken within their churches to engage congregants in the topic of Residential Schools or colonization along with barriers to effective education. The findings of this research pose potential implications for evaluating the completion of Call to Action 59, for policy considerations in truth commissions, for social work as a discipline, and for Settlement Agreement church leaders and communities.

3. Introduction

Cultural genocide, as defined by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (2015a), refers to the eradication of the political and social institutions which preserve a group's collective identity and continuity. With eventual partnership from the federal government, Anglican, Catholic, Presbyterian, and United churches devised and operated Indian Residential Schools (IRS), an integral assimilative mechanism in Canada's policies of Indigenous cultural genocide (Blackstock, 2011; Palmater, 2014; Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples [RCAP], 1996a; Trocmé et al., 2004; Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada [TRC], 2015a). Made mandatory by an *Indian Act* amendment in 1920, attendance at these schools subjected Indigenous children to systemic neglect and horrific physical, psychological, sexual, and emotional abuse (Milloy, 1999; RCAP, 1996a; TRC, 2015a). Despite significant resilience, Indigenous communities have endured longstanding consequences from IRS, including loss of spiritualities, languages, and cultures due to forced Christianization (Bombay et al., 2014; Brave Heart, 2003; Chrisjohn & Young, 1994).

For their involvement with the schools, the Anglican, Presbyterian, United, and Catholic churches of Canada issued formal apologies to survivors between 1986 and 1998, becoming signatories to the Indian Residential Schools Settlement Agreement (IRSSA) in 2006 (Government of Canada, 2021b; Green, 2012). The Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) (2015a) later outlined further reconciliatory responsibilities for these churches within Calls to Action 48, 59, 60, and 61. Specifically, Call to Action 59 stipulates the development of ongoing educational strategies to ensure congregational learning about the history and legacy of IRS and the roles these churches played in colonialism (TRC, 2015a).

A comprehensive literature review reveals that the completion status of Call to Action 59 remains unknown, with little publicly available information about the four churches' national educational strategies or their implementation to ensure congregational learning. Yet understanding the progress of Call to Action 59 is critical for maintaining accountability in the IRSSA churches' movement toward reconciliation and gaining clarity on potential strengths and weaknesses for Call implementation broadly. This research seeks to address this gap through answering the following two research questions: (1) How are the educational strategies developed by the national church parties to the Settlement Agreement being implemented in local congregations? And (2) what is the perceived effectiveness of these strategies at ensuring that their respective congregations learn about a) their church's role in colonization and b) the history and legacy of Residential Schools?

To further elucidate the context of this topic, the subsequent literature review will discuss the following relevant areas: (1) Christianity in Canada; (2) The church and colonial ideologies; (3) Church participation in the IRS system; (4) The responses of Settlement Agreement churches in the wake of IRS; and (5) Call to Action 59 and Settlement Agreement church party responses to the Call.

4. Literature Review

4.1. Christianity in Canada

Religiosity can be described using the following four main dimensions: a) behavioural, referring to religious practices whether private or public; b) affective, encompassing religious motivations, identity, and importance; c) cognitive, involving religious beliefs and knowledge; and d) categorical, covering varying degrees of group identification (Hardy et al., 2019; Hardy & Taylor, 2024). For Christians, the categorical dimension typically includes identification in part

or full with several progressively narrowing categories. The first broad group identity is religious or spiritual, the next is Christian as opposed to other religions, and the final categories commonly involve affiliations with a particular denomination and congregation (Hardy et al., 2019). As such, 53.3% of Canadians and 52.1% of Ontarians identify as Christian, making this the largest religious group in the country and province (Statistics Canada, 2022c; 2023). Additionally, 37.0% of the Canadian Christian population affiliates with Anglican, Catholic, Presbyterian, or United denominations, which are the focus of this study (Statistics Canada, 2022a).

However, the national number of Christians has been steadily decreasing from 77.1% in 2001 to 67.3% in 2011 (Statistics Canada, 2022c). Correspondingly, the number of Canadians reporting no religious affiliation has increased significantly from 16.5% in 2001 to 34.6% in 2021 (Statistics Canada, 2022c). This trend away from religiosity is most notable among male, unmarried, or university-educated individuals, along with those of younger generations (Pew Research Centre, 2013; Wilkins-Laflamme, 2022). Even among church attendees, generational replacement has diminished, with younger generations showing less frequent attendance than older generations (Pew Research Centre, 2013). Scholars attribute the overall decline to a secular transition where subsequent generations are not raised within the church, a movement toward more personal over institutional forms of spirituality, and a lack of innovation in churches to meet the needs or desires of attendees (Bibby, 2017; Wilkins-Laflamme, 2022). Despite decreasing numbers, Christianity remains a significant religion in Canada. This is especially true among Indigenous people, 47.0% of whom identify as Christian with 35.5% belonging to the Anglican, Catholic, Presbyterian, or United denominations (Statistics Canada, 2022a).

The scope of this thesis specifically focuses on Anglican, Catholic, Presbyterian and United churches as these denominations had heightened involvement with Residential Schools,

were signatories to the Indian Residential School Settlement Agreement (IRSSA), and therefore were particularly addressed in the TRC's Call to Action 59. The subsequent sections discuss each of these denominations in more detail.

4.1.1. The Catholic Church in Canada

4.1.1.1. General Information on the Catholic Church in Canada

Over 10.8 million Canadians or 29.9% of the population identify as Catholic, making Catholicism the largest national religious affiliation after Christianity broadly (Statistics Canada, 2023). In Ontario, 3.6 million Catholics comprise 26.0% of the provincial population (Statistics Canada, 2023). Held by the Pope, the office of the Bishop of Rome is one of the longest continuously held offices in the world, believed by Catholics to follow in linear succession from the Apostle Peter (Cunningham, 2009). Transcending national lines, the Pope is the highest spiritual leader of Catholicism globally, in union with all other Bishops of the Church around the world (Cunningham, 2009; Pope Paul VI, 1965). Led by the Pope, the Holy See or Vatican forms the central governing body of the Catholic Church on all matters of faith and morality, with Cardinals residing both in Vatican City and worldwide (Choquette, 2004). In Canada, the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops (CCCB) forms a permanent national assembly of bishops from both the Latin and Eastern Catholic Churches whose ordinances must be approved by the Holy See (CCCB, 2025a). Their collective purpose is regulating pastoral issues, transmitting and adapting the Church's teachings to their national context, and organizing role succession and charity initiatives (CCCB, 2025a). In the Latin Catholic churches, dioceses are led by a bishop and are comprised of local churches within a specific geographic region, sometimes forming a larger archdiocese (CCCB, 2025e). The Eastern Catholic churches follow a parallel structure with eparchies and archeparchies as their equivalents (CCCB, 2025e). The

work of bishops is supported at the congregational level by priests, deacons, and pastoral workers (CCCB, 2025b).

4.1.1.2. A Brief History on the Catholic Church in Canada

According to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (TRC) (2015a), the French colonial vision historically aligns with a mission of Christianization founded in Catholicism. Namely, when French King Francis I began commissioning expeditions to North America, he mandated the "[building of] towns and fortresses, temples and churches, in order to impart our Holy Catholic Faith and Catholic Doctrine…so that…[the Aboriginal Peoples] may live by reason and civility (TRC, 2015a p39)." Pursuant to this mandate, Catholic clergy first arrived in Canada on July 7, 1534, when a French priest accompanying Jacques Cartier's initial expedition celebrated Catholic mass (CCCB, 2025f). During this expedition, more than 12 Indigenous people were kidnapped by Cartier, who then forcibly transported several of these individuals to France where all but one died (Heidenreich, 2005). The founding of Quebec City in 1608 by Samuel de Champlain and Montreal in 1642 by Sier Paul de Chomedey de Maisonneuve marked the beginning of permanent European settlement in New France (CCCB, 2025f). As part of this colonial endeavour at this time, many French Catholic religious groups dispatched missionaries to or founded Orders in Canada, including the Récollect Franciscans, the Jesuits, the Sulpician Fathers, the Ursulines, the Oblates of Mary Immaculate, the Sisters of the Congregation of Notre Dame, and the Grey Nuns (CCCB, 2025f; TRC, 2015a). These organizations all would have varying degrees of involvement with Residential Schools, beginning with the Récollect who opened a short-lived boarding school for Indigenous children in 1620 (TRC, 2015a). Despite the British defeat of French forces in the eighteenth century, the

Catholic Church in Canada developed widely with a pointed focus on the evangelisation and education of Indigenous Peoples (CCCB, 2025f; Choquette, 2004). This continued independently until government partnership in the Residential School system was established after confederation (Choquette, 2004; TRC, 2015a).

Beginning in the 1900s, North America underwent a shifting societal focus toward belief in progress, evolution, and modernity (Choquette, 2004). As with many Protestants, the Catholic Church in Canada responded adversely by embracing more conservative expressions of faith (Choquette, 2004). This led to an increasing divide between society and the church, as society moved toward greater secularization (Choquette, 2004). However, reform and renewal found the Catholic Church through the election of Pope John XXIII in 1958 and the ensuing Vatican II movement, which sought to revitalize the Catholic Church through an emphasis on universal human rights and dignity (Choquette, 2004). Despite this, Canadian individuals and institutions increasingly severed ties with Catholicism into the twenty-first century (Choquette, 2004). Regardless, the denomination remains the largest in the country, with some estimating over $4.1 billion in net assets, including investments, property, and donations (Grant & Cardoso, 2021). In the past several years, the wealth of the Catholic Church has raised criticism over their contributions to Residential School reparations (Grant & Cardoso, 2021; Warick, 2022).

4.1.2. The Anglican Church of Canada

4.1.2.1. General Information on the Anglican Church of Canada

Nationally, the Anglican Church of Canada is the third largest denomination overall and the second largest Protestant denomination after the United Church (Statistics Canada, 2023). Its self-identified members account for 3.1% and 3.7% of the Canadian and Ontarian populations respectively, although these numbers are notably higher than those reported by the Anglican

parish rolls (Elliot, 2024; Statistics Canada, 2023). The Anglican Church of Canada is a self-governing member of the global Anglican Communion (Anglican Church, 2025a). This organizational body consists of 44 other Churches worldwide, encompassing tens of millions of Christians who make up the Anglican Episcopal family (Anglican Church, 2025a; Anglican Communion 2025).

In Canada, the Anglican Church has multiple levels of governance, including parishes, deaneries, dioceses, and the General Synod (Anglican Church, 2025c; 2025d; Hayes, 2013). At the lowest level of organization, parishes are composed of one or several congregations which can independently sustain a priest's salary and the financial needs associated with running a church community (Anglican Church, 2025c; 2025d). As of 2022, there were 1,498 parishes with 1,978 congregations across Canada (Elliot, 2024). While not all parishes belong to deaneries, a deanery consists of several parishes within a diocese, which regularly convene to address common issues (Anglican Church, 2025c; 2025d). At the next organizational level, each of 30 dioceses across the country is led by a bishop, encompassing any parishes within its specified geographical area (Anglican Church, 2025c; 2025d). The highest governing body of the Anglican Church of Canada is called the General Synod and is led by the Primate (Anglican Church, 2025c; 2025d).

4.1.2.2. A Brief History on the Anglican Church of Canada

Originally rooted in the Church of England, the history, theology, and practices of its predecessor have significantly shaped the Anglican Church of Canada (Chapman, 2013). The Church of England's history is closely intertwined with the history of the area that today is called "England" (Chapman, 2013). This is seen perhaps most notably in 1530 when increasing conflict over Rome's jurisdiction in national affairs culminated in a departure from the larger Catholic

church by Henry VIII, who opted to assert his own authority over the Church of England rather than rely on the papal dispensation of a marriage annulment (Chapman, 2013). Under the influence of the Protestant Reformation, the church then facilitated a move from Latin-based services to English through the introduction of the Book of Common Prayer, a version of which is still in use today (Anglican Church, 2025a).

Anglicanism arrived in what is now known as Canada as part of British colonialism (Anglican Church, 2025a; TRC, 2015a). This was first noted in 1578, when the Anglican Eucharist was practiced in Nunavut on an expedition led by Martin Frobisher (Hayes, 2013; Anglican Church, 2025a). Over the next two centuries, Anglicanism slowly grew as British immigrants settled in the new colony, with the Anglican Missionary Society sending out missionaries to minister to their needs alongside evangelizing Indigenous Peoples (Anglican Church, 2025a; TRC, 2015a). As an English institution, the church endeavoured to assimilate Indigenous people into the economic, political, cultural, and social fabric of the British empire (Anglican Church, 2025b). To this end, the church desired the ordination of Indigenous ministers with self-supporting Indigenous congregations to release European missionaries for work elsewhere (TRC, 2015a). Between the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the Canadian church began to develop a unique identity, marked by ordination of the first Bishop, the creation of dioceses, and the formation of the General Synod (Anglican Church, 2025a). Given that Canada was only years away from confederation, the Canadian Anglican identity solidified in 1863 when the English government declared that England would no longer hold jurisdiction over church issues in its self-governing colonies (Hayes 2004; Hayes, 2013). As a result, the church changed its name to “the Church of England in the Dominion of Canada” and continued to grow alongside confederation (Anglican Church, 2025a; Hayes, 2013). However, donations from

English church members continued to finance church projects, for instance the construction of St. John's Residential School in Chapleau, Ontario (TRC, 2015a). In 1955, the church created further distance from its predecessor with another name change to "the Anglican Church of Canada" (Anglican Church, 2025a). Membership in the church peaked in 1965, with over 1.36 million people registered on parish rolls (Hayes, 2013). However, membership began to rapidly decline in the 60s, prompting the church to commission a secular churchwide review by Pierre Burton called *The Comfortable Pew* (Beninger, 2011). Although not the focus, the review briefly evaluated and concluded that the Anglican relationship with Indigenous people was steeped in paternalism (Beninger, 2011). This prompted the denomination's commissioning of the *Hendry Report* in 1969, a review of the Canadian church's relationship with Indigenous people that highlighted the harmful practices of Residential Schools (Beninger, 2011).

From the 60s onward, Anglican membership continued to decline. By 2012 parish roll membership had decreased to 500,000 members despite a significant increase in the Canadian population (Hayes, 2013). In 2022, these numbers had diminished further to 294,931 members (Elliot, 2024). Although parish roll membership is significantly lower than self-identified membership through census data, the trend of declining church membership is a critical reality facing the Anglican Church of Canada today.

4.1.3. The Presbyterian Church in Canada

4.1.3.1. General Information on the Presbyterian Church in Canada

Presbyterians are the smallest of the church parties to the Settlement Agreement, totaling 301,400 or 0.8% of the Canadian population (Statistics Canada, 2023). More than 67% of this denomination resides in Ontario, making up 1.4% of the total provincial population (Statistics Canada, 2023). The Presbyterian Church in Canada's governance revolves around four levels or

"courts" of elders who form the decision-making bodies of the church (Presbyterian Church of Canada, n.d.). At the congregational level, the session contains ministers and congregationally elected elders who provide pastoral care, worship leadership, and education (Presbyterian Church of Canada, n.d.). Correspondingly, some ministers and elders from each congregation in a geographical area compose a presbytery (Presbyterian Church of Canada, n.d.). The 45 presbyteries in Canada give oversight and support to their ministers and congregations, commonly meeting several times a year (Presbyterian Church of Canada, n.d.). At the next level, synods consist of several presbyteries, with an equal number of ministers and elders in membership (Presbyterian Church of Canada, n.d.). Across the country, eight synods meet annually to provide training and supervision (Presbyterian Church of Canada, n.d.). Finally, the General Assembly is the highest governing body in the church, meeting annually to vote on theological and governance issues that affect the whole denomination (Presbyterian Church of Canada, n.d.). The General Assembly also elects a moderator to preside over meetings and give formal statements on behalf of the denomination (Presbyterian Church of Canada, n.d.).

4.1.3.2. A Brief History on the Presbyterian Church in Canada

Despite pre-existing Indigenous claim to the land, French and English imperial designs over Acadia led to sustained conflict and British concerns about French Acadian insurrection in the mid-eighteenth century (Gregg, 1892; TRC, 2015a). To solidify their possession, settlers from English colonies were encouraged to migrate to Nova Scotia (Gregg, 1892). Presbyterians, a denomination descended from the Church of Scotland and the ideology of John Knox, joined this venture and recruited a minister for the area (Gregg, 1885; Gregg, 1892). Like other Protestant denominations, early Presbyterians held attitudes of superiority over Indigenous people, exemplified by a Presbyterian missionary in Africa who declared that the Indigenous

population's capacity for "improvement [was] fewer and feebler than any other portion of mankind (TRC, 2015a)."

The Presbyterian population grew alongside the settler population, spreading to other parts of the country like the Red River Settlement and uniting multiple Presbyterian branches under one General Assembly (Gregg, 1885; 1892). Discussions about church union in Canada dominated the late nineteenth century, with 70% of Presbyterians joining the formation of the United Church of Canada in 1925 (United Church, 2025c). The remaining congregations of the Presbyterian Church in Canada saw slow growth throughout the Depression and war years but peaked in the 1940s due to increased post-war resources (Bush, 2012). The denomination began to experience an overall decline from the 1960s to the present, following the general trend of Protestant churches (Clarke & Macdonald, 2011).

4.1.4. The United Church of Canada

4.1.4.1. General Information on the United Church of Canada

As the largest Protestant denomination in Canada and the second-largest Christian denomination after Catholicism, the United Church ministers to over 1.2 million people or 3.3% of the Canadian population (Statistics Canada, 2023; United Church of Canada, 2025c). In Ontario this proportion is slightly higher, with United Church membership constituting 4.1% of the provincial population (Statistics Canada, 2023). The United Church governance structure consists of three main organizational levels: communities of faith, the regional council, and the General Council (United Church of Canada, 2025a; 2025f). A community of faith is a broad descriptor referring to any community within the Church that gathers to worship, serve, and explore faith, including congregations, outreach ministries, and chaplaincies (United Church of Canada, 2025a; 2025f). One or more communities of faith form a pastoral charge and are led by

a minister, with 1,976 pastoral charges composed of 2,451 congregations nationally (United Church of Canada, 2023a; 2025b). Sixteen regional councils exist within the national church, led by a combination of laypeople and ministers and form an administrative grouping in a specific geographical area (United Church of Canada, 2023a; 2025b). The General Council is the highest governing body in the Church (United Church of Canada, 2025a). The Council meets in full once every three years, with members elected by the regional councils (United Church of Canada, 2025a). However, the 18 voting members of the General Council Executive provide leadership between these larger meetings (United Church of Canada, 2025a). In 2023, the United Church reported over 3,600 clergy members across the country and received over $415 million dollars in donations (United Church, 2023b).

4.1.4.2. A Brief History on the United Church of Canada

The United Church of Canada was created on June 10, 1925, through the union of four separate denominations: the General Council of Union Churches, a small collection of churches in Western Canada; seventy percent of the Presbyterian Church in Canada at the time; the Methodist Church, Canada; and the Congregational Union of Canada (United Church, 2025c). As such, its relationship with Indigenous Peoples and history in Canada follow these four denominations and predate its official formation. Methodism began with John Wesley's relocation to North America in 1735 as part of the evangelical reform movement in the Church of England (TRC, 2015a). Wesley and his companions' intent was to "further their spiritual Progress by going amongst the Indians" and he contributed to a theology which emphasized personal conversion, prayer, and evangelism (TRC, 2015a). John Mclean, a Methodist, further clarified the missionary's role in the colonial project as one to "Christianize" and "civilize" Indigenous people (Maclean, 1889; TRC, 2015a). As a denomination, Congregationalism was

modelled on the governance structure of Confederate America wherein each church was a separate, self-governing body within the larger whole (Hamilton, 1887). After the American War of Independence ended in 1783, Loyalist settlers, including Congregationalist missionaries, migrated to Canada (TRC, 2015a).

By 1885, the Church of England (Anglican) initiated a conversation about church union in Canada, which precipitated formal union discussions between Congregationalist, Methodist, and Presbyterian churches (United Church of Canada, 2025b). These talks culminated in the previously mentioned creation of the United Church of Canada in 1925. After the World Wars, Canada saw a resurgence in religious activity which significantly grew the United Church's membership (Flatt, 2013; Schweitzer, 2011). During this time, the United Church retained its enthusiasm for evangelicalism, with an eye toward education and moral reform (Flatt, 2013). However, by the 1960s, the church was moving away from evangelism and conservatism toward a modernist, liberal view of scripture and doctrine (Flatt, 2013). This movement was further precipitated by Berton's (1965) secular critique of the neighbouring Anglican church's growing irrelevance to society and the cultural revolution of the sixties wherein society embraced increasingly liberal perspectives on issues related to gender, sexuality, and abortion (Flatt, 2013; Schweitzer, 2011). However, in the intervening years church membership and participation declined, in part due to the renegotiation of core values and principles (Flatt, 2013; Schweitzer, 2011). Despite this, the denomination maintains its place as the largest Protestant denomination, with a reputation across Canada for social progressiveness (Zwissler, 2019).

4.2. Paving the Way for Residential Schools: The Church and Colonial Ideologies

4.2.1. Papal Bulls, Terra Nullius, and the Doctrine of Discovery

The papacy holds a longstanding history of providing guidance and encouragement for global colonial endeavours (Choquette, 2004; Pagden, 1995; TRC 2015a). In the mid-fifteenth century, the Roman Catholic Church desired to lead a universal world order and issued a series of papal bulls, known as "the Bulls of Donation" (Blackstock et al., 2020; Pagden, 1995; TRC, 2015a). These decrees bestowed ownership and spiritual authority over various lands around the world upon some European nations, despite having never occupied nor visited them (Blackstock et al., 2020; Pagden, 1995; TRC, 2015a). Based on the belief that the Christian God sanctioned colonization provided that the Indigenous inhabitants of the land were successfully converted to Christianity, the bulls endorsed the ensuing imperial conquest across the world (Choquette, 2004; TRC, 2015a). As such, the Church conceived of colonization as beneficial to Indigenous Peoples, bringing salvation for their good in this life and the next (TRC, 2015a). However, England and France disagreed with the Pope's unrestricted jurisdiction over 'undiscovered' lands and so amended the bulls to first necessitate discovery and possession through purchase or conquest (TRC, 2015a). Furthermore, because Indigenous Peoples did not exercise the agricultural practices which would legitimize land possession in European eyes, the ideology of *terra nullius*, or land belonging to no one, further supported the right to conquest (Samson, 2008; TRC, 2015a). These ideas shaped what would become the Catholic Doctrine of Discovery, which legally and politically sanctioned the colonization of North America on the international stage during the 1800s and justified the violation of Indigenous rights around the world (Blackstock, 2020; Reid, 2010; Roussel, 2020; TRC, 2015a). Based on this doctrine, Indigenous people occupied rather than owned the land (Reid, 2010; Roussel, 2020; TRC, 2015a). Therefore,

seizure of Indigenous land was an honourable act that would increase its productivity and profitability (TRC, 2015a). Although originating within the Catholic Church, these foundational religious colonial ideologies formed before the Protestant Reformation. Therefore, they would prove foundational for both the Protestant and Catholic understandings of Indigenous rights and spirituality which led to Residential Schools.

4.2.2. Missionary Pursuits and Colonial Ideology

Since time immemorial, diverse Indigenous people groups with complex economies, governance structures, languages, spiritualities, and cultures have lived in what came to be known as Canada (RCAP, 1996a). However, building on the above ideology, pre-confederation missionary endeavours partnered with European colonial goals and laid the foundation for the creation of Residential Schools in Canada (TRC, 2015a). The Great Commission, a Biblical imperative to make Christian disciples of all the world, typically cited from the book of Matthew, is an enduring primary tenet of the Christian faith (Gokani & Caragata, 2020; TRC, 2015a). As such, Catholic and Protestant missionaries travelled throughout Canada between the seventeenth and nineteenth centuries intending to convert Indigenous people and further the universal church (Grant, 1984; TRC, 2015a). Firmly rooted in the belief of European cultural superiority, missionaries considered Indigenous cultures an impediment to spiritual salvation (Chocquette, 1995; TRC, 2015a). However, because they disagreed with certain aspects of the colonial project, missionaries also sought the survival of Indigenous Peoples amid imperial expansion (TRC, 2015a). As a result, in addition to advocating on behalf of Indigenous communities to traders, settlers, and government officials, these missionaries encouraged wholesale change to Indigenous religious and social practices, including ceremonial dances, sweat lodges, childrearing practices, marriage traditions, and death rituals (Perry, 2005; TRC,

2015a). They also translated religious documents into Indigenous languages where possible and promoted agrarian over nomadic lifestyles to facilitate the support of churches and schools (Perry, 2005; TRC, 2015a). Overall, the ideology and role of mission work resulted in significant social disruption for Indigenous communities (TRC, 2015a).

4.3. Residential Schools: Church Participation in Cultural Genocide

4.3.1. Pre-Confederation Residential Schools

The missionaries proved successful as over 70,000 out of 100,000 First Nations individuals identified as Christian in an 1899 Indian Affairs census (Grant, 1984; TRC, 2015a). However, Indigenous responses to the missionary movements were mixed, with some integrating Christian concepts into their own worldviews while others strongly resisted missionary beliefs (TRC, 2015a). Thus, missionaries found their strategies ineffective to fully "Christianize" and "civilize" Indigenous cultures and spiritualities (Milloy, 1999; TRC, 2015a). Given this, missionaries determined that education would be an effective strategy to separate children from the perceived corruption of their communities and cultures while simultaneously instilling European values and beliefs (Milloy, 1999; RCAP, 1996a; TRC, 2015a). With limited or no government involvement, churches therefore began to build and operate schools to truncate the inter-generational transmission of Indigenous cultures (Milloy, 1999; RCAP, 1996a; TRC, 2015a). During this time, Catholic, Anglican, and Methodist missionary societies and churches built schools for Indigenous children throughout pre-confederation Canada, including Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, Quebec, Ontario, Manitoba, Alberta, British Columbia, and the northern territories (TRC, 2015a). The schools had few or no qualified teachers, instead relying on missionaries and clergy as staff (TRC, 2015a). Some boarding schools initially encouraged parental visitation of students but quickly found this to be counterproductive for their

inculturation and limited contact (TRC, 2015a). Overall, the schools were largely unsuccessful as Indigenous people resisted their efforts (TRC, 2015a). Indigenous parents and communities engaged in long-standing, culturally rooted practices of child-rearing which lovingly saw to children's needs and formed close familial relationships (Blackstock, 2007; Thwaites, 1869; TRC, 2015a). As such, neither parents nor children saw the value of a European education and only yielded their children to boarding schools at the insistence of missionaries and for political cooperation (Axelrod, 1997; TRC, 2015a).

4.3.2. The Canadian Residential School System

Although early Residential Schools saw limited success with enrollment and attendance, the newly formed, post-confederation government desired the elimination of Indigenous identities to solidify colonial occupation of Canada (TRC, 2015a). Residential Schools became a key assimilationist mechanism for Indigenous "emancipation from tribal government, and for their final absorption into the general community (Canada, 1885; TRC, 2015a)." Therefore, the government partnered with the churches a year after confederation and assumed some funding responsibilities for over 57 schools, of which only Mount Elgin and the Mohawk Institute were Residential Schools (Milloy, 1999; TRC, 2015a). At the time, these funds consisted of small grants to institutions in Ontario and Northwest Canada, which were principally run by missionary organizations (TRC, 2015a). As such, the churches were instrumental pioneers of the Residential School system, using missionary funds to erect buildings in remote parts of the country and soliciting funds for maintenance from the Department of Indian Affairs (Milloy, 1999). For this reason, the number of schools continued to grow through missionary efforts with limited government involvement, including the addition of Ontario's Shingwauk and Wikwemikong Residential Schools in 1879 (Milloy, 1999; TRC, 2015a). In 1910, the

government and churches reached a five-year funding agreement in response to consistent church lobbying for subsidies (Milloy, 1999; TRC, 2015a). Under Duncan Campbell Scott, the superintendent of Indian Education at the time, the government contract also instituted a management system for the schools with incentives to increase their quality (Milloy, 1999; TRC, 2015a). However, even with the funding increases guaranteed through the agreement, the schools were chronically underfunded with both the government and churches blaming one another for the heavy deficits (TRC, 2015a). Few inspections occurred federally or provincially, and any inspectors lacked power to effect meaningful change (TRC, 2015a). Similarly, policies regarding teacher qualifications remained absent (TRC, 2015a). When the contract's term finished, neither government nor churches negotiated a new agreement but used the previous arrangement as an ongoing blueprint for new school operations (TRC, 2015a).

In the 1920s, the government began obtaining the church-run schools to cover capital costs while releasing the churches to focus spending on instruction and student provisions (TRC, 2015a). However, due to the widespread disrepair and poor conditions, most schools were deemed to have negligible economic value (TRC, 2015a). Regardless, the system continued to grow, spurred onward by a 1920 amendment to the *Indian Act* which mandated Residential or Industrial School attendance for Indigenous children between the ages of 6 and 15 years (TRC, 2015a). This amendment occurred in response to church pressure for compulsory attendance (TRC, 2015a). At the height of Residential Schools in the 1930s, 9,027 students were enrolled across 79 Residential Schools (TRC 2015a). Together with 288 Day Schools, government spending totaled $1,547,252 and $404,821 on Residential and Day Schools, respectively (TRC 2015a).

Overall, the government struggled to adequately exert authority over the churches' use of funds, disciplinary actions, and adherence to requirements (TRC, 2015b). In response, it sought increasing jurisdiction and management over the schools (TRC, 2015b). By 1969, Residential Schools came under the full administration of the federal government, encompassing 56 Residential Schools, 8,000 students, and 1,600 employees in southern Canada (Department of Indian Affairs, 1970; TRC, 2015b). The number of Residential Schools continued to decrease, from 16 in 1980 to 11 in 1990 (TRC, 2015b). Gordon's Indian Residential School in Punnichy, Saskatchewan was the last Residential School in operation, closing its doors in 1996 (Blackstock, 2007; TRC, 2015b). Overall, of the 139 Residential Schools recognized in the Indian Residential Schools Settlement Agreement, denominational involvement was as follows: the Catholic Church operated 64 schools; the Anglican Church operated 35 schools; the United Church operated 16 schools; and the Presbyterian Church, containing those churches which did not join the United Church merger after 1925, operated three (Government of Canada, 2015). In the above figures, one school changed ownership between United and Catholic churches, leaving a remaining 22 schools which were run non-denominationally or by other church affiliations (Government of Canada, 2015).

4.3.3. Conditions and Consequences

Through the creation and operation of Residential Schools, over 150,000 First Nations, Métis, and Inuit children were removed from their homes and communities as a key mechanism in the cultural genocide of Indigenous people (Barkan, 2003; Bombay et al., 2014; TRC, 2015a; 2015c; 2015d). After the *Indian Act* amendment of 1920, school-aged children, often as young as 4 years old, were forcibly placed in institutions which subjected them to horrific conditions (Palmater, 2014; 148 TRC, 2015b; 180 Nagy & Sedhev). Within the first 30 years of operation,

over 50% of children died from maltreatment or diseases like tuberculosis (Hay et al., 2020; Milloy, 1999). In combination with chronic underfunding, organizational mismanagement, and subpar staffing, facilities suffered from poor ventilation, disrepair, heating issues, and fire hazards (Hay et al., 2020; Chrisjohn & Young, 1994; Milloy, 1999; RCAP, 1996a; TRC, 2015b). Widespread reports from survivors and inspectors alike revealed that meals were inconsistent and insufficient, frequently containing rotten or vermin-infested foods (TRC, 2015b; 2015c; 2015d). Furthermore, some schools actively experimented with children's diets to develop national guidelines on nutrition (TRC, 2015b). The schools prohibited Indigenous languages and cultural practices, disrupted family ties, and forced students to use Christianized names (Milloy, 1999; RCAP, 1996a; TRC, 2015b; 2015c; 2015d). Many staff in the schools employed harsh discipline that egregiously violated the dignity of children, including widespread physical and verbal abuse (Chrisjohn & Young; RCAP, 1996a; TRC, 2015b; 2015c; 2015d). Furthermore, a lack of appropriate oversight failed to protect children from devastating sexual abuse at the hands of various staff members (Blackstock, 2009; Bombay et al., 2014; Milloy, 1999; RCAP, 1996a; 148 TRC, 2015b) As a result, children who attended the schools were disconnected from their cultures, grappled with significant trauma, and struggled to readapt once reunited with their communities (Nagy & Sedhev; TRC, 2015f).

The devastating legacy of Residential Schools continues far beyond the lifespan of the institutions themselves, imparting ongoing and historic detrimental impacts to Indigenous people. For many survivors, the individual and collective trauma incurred at the schools have been passed to future generations through a myriad of mechanisms such as the truncated transmission of healthy parental behaviours and resultant mental health challenges (Bombay et al., 2014; Brave Hart, 2003; Kirmayer et al., 2000; Menzies, 2007, Nutton & Fast, 2015; Wesley-

Esquimaux & Smolewski, 2004). Leading to wide-spread economic, educational, and health disparities between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people in Canada, long-term impacts for many communities include an increased rate of addictions, intimate partner violence, missing and murdered Indigenous people, premature death, and over-representation in the carceral and child welfare systems (Barker et al., 2019; Cull, 2006; Hoffart & Jones, 2018; Kwan, 2015; Trocmé et al., 2004).

4.4. The Response of Canadian Churches in the Aftermath

4.4.1. Anglican, Catholic, Presbyterian and United Church Apologies

For their part in Residential Schools, the Anglican, Presbyterian, United, and Roman Catholic Churches began to issue formal apologies to survivors between 1986 and 1998 (TRC, 2015g). In 1990, relationships between Indigenous and non-Indigenous members of the Anglican church turned toward reconciliation broadly (Bush, 2015). By 1991, the Church's executive body, the Council of the General Synod, received testimonies from former students and decided that Indigenous people should determine the scope of the church's response to Residential Schools (Bush, 2015). However, critics within the church noted that Indigenous people should not "clean up a mess they had no part in making," prompting the creation of a 12-member committee with equal Indigenous and non-Indigenous representation (Anglican Church of Canada, 1992; Bush, 2015). After two years of work, the committee requested that the Anglican Primate apologize on behalf of the church for their involvement in the schools (Anglican Church of Canada, 1993). The apology was officially issued in 1993 (Anglican Church of Canada, 1993).

The Presbyterian Church appointed a Committee of Reconciliation with Aboriginal People to develop a confession or apology in 1991 (Bush, 2019). Consisting of six members, the

committee desired the adoption of the apology by the General Assembly, which required a vote for approval (Bush, 2019). At the first attempt for approval in 1992, the Assembly largely was unprepared for the vote, with most members unaware of the operation of the Church's three Residential Schools (Bush, 2019). Consequently, the Assembly returned the confession to the committee with revisions for a more balanced approach (Bush, 2019). Religious and secular discussions about the schools increased over the following two years and the committee resubmitted an apology to the Assembly, along with an evidentiary historical document in the hopes of decreasing opposition (Bush, 2019). The General Assembly adopted the confession in 1994 and presented it to Indigenous communities four months later (Bush, 2019; TRC, 2015g).

In the United Church, Indigenous leaders made recommendations to the General Council to issue an apology for the suppression of Native spirituality in 1985 (Bush, 2015). However, the ensuing 1986 apology did not address Residential Schools directly (Miller, 2010; 192 United Church of Canada, 2025g). Precipitated by litigation against the United Church and Government by past students of Alberni Indian Residential School in 1996, the United congregation in St. Alberni drafted their own apology and formally petitioned the General Council to respond in kind (Kasmer, 2007). However, the Council rejected this request and instead opted to issue a statement about the church's journey of repentance (Kasmer, 2007). In 1997 when courts found both government and Church liable, the United Church appealed the decision, which was met with considerable backlash at the congregational level (Bush, 2015). As a result, the United moderator Right Rev. Bill Phipps, issued an apology for Residential Schools on October 27, 1998 (United Church of Canada, 2025g).

Unlike the other denominations, while the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops speaks for the dioceses under its leadership, non-affiliated dioceses and Catholic Orders only

answer to the Pope (TRC, 2015g). Furthermore, the Pope is the representative of the Catholic Church, not the CCCB (TRC, 2015g). Accordingly, many Catholic dioceses, organizations, bishops, and archbishops offered individual apologies throughout the 1990s and 2000s (Kieser, 2023; Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate, 1991). This included a formal statement of apology from the CCCB in 1991 (CCCB, 1991; Kieser, 2023). In 2022, the organization also sent a delegation of survivors, Elders, and youth to meet with Pope Francis to further pursue a papal apology (Bolen, 2023; CCCB, 2021). In response, on April 1, 2022, Pope Francis offered an apology to this delegation, which he later reiterated on July 25, 2022, during a papal visit to Canada for the purpose of apology (Bergen, 2023).

4.4.2. The Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples

From 1987 to 1991, Indigenous individuals, groups, and communities launched public outcries about the rights and position of Indigenous people in Canada, most notably through the failed Meech Lake Accord, the Oka Crisis, and the Grand Chief of the Assembly of Manitoba Chiefs' statement on Residential School abuse (Baskatawang, 2023; Hughes, 2012). In response, the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples (RCAP) was established in 1991 with a mandate to investigate the historic and ongoing relationship between Indigenous Peoples, the government, and Canadian society at large (Macdonald & Garcia-Moores, 2024; RCAP, 1996a). Through public hearings with Indigenous communities over the course of five years, the RCAP investigation produced a 4,000-page final report in 1996 (Baskatawang, 2023; RCAP, 1996a). The findings concluded that the Canadian government had engaged in longstanding policies to remove Indigenous people from their ancestral lands, supress Indigenous forms of governance, and eliminate Indigenous cultures (RCAP, 1996a; 1996b). It outlined how these polices had induced devastating conditions across all areas of Indigenous life, from poor health and

educational outcomes to underemployment and incarceration (RCAP, 1996c). The report specifically acknowledged the partnership between the churches and government in running Residential Schools, their role in policies of Indigenous erasure, and the subsequent detrimental effects on Indigenous communities (RCAP, 1996a). The RCAP also developed over 400 recommendations across legislative, social, economic, and institutional sectors, given a 20-year implementation timeline (RCAP, 1996d). Recommendations to churches recognized them as institutions with significant capacity to foster deeper understanding between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people, despite their complicit history in the oppression of Indigenous communities (RCAP, 1996d). With an educational focus, recommendations to churches advised the dissemination of accurate information about Indigenous Peoples and advocacy for reconciliation (RCAP, 1996d). Regardless of the report, the government largely ignored the recommendations to improve its relationship with Indigenous people until costly lawsuits from Residential School survivors emerged (Baskatawang, 2023).

4.4.3. The Indian Residential School Settlement Agreement

In response to the extensive litigation initiated by individual survivors during the 1980s and 1990s, the federal government announced a National Resolution Framework in 2002 (Green, 2012; Nagy, 2013). The framework introduced an alternative dispute-resolution (ADR) mechanism as a legal strategy to offset the expensive litigation processes, offering negligible compensation for the widespread abuse in the schools and failing to acknowledge the larger loss of language and culture (Green, 2012; Nagy, 2013). Thus, the ADR framework received censure for its antagonism toward survivors and re-traumatization of many applicants, with the Assembly of First Nations (AFN) and Canadian Bar Association releasing condemnatory reports on the process (Green, 2012; Nagy, 2014). To address the AFN report recommendations, the IRSSA

was fashioned as an approved class action settlement for ongoing litigation (Green, 2012; Nagy, 2014).

The federal government, four main church denominations, Assembly of First Nations, Inuit Tapriit Kanatami, independent legal counsel, and Residential School survivors all signed the agreement on May 8, 2006 (Government of Canada, 2021b; Nagy, 2013). For the Anglican, Presbyterian, United, and Catholic churches, signing the IRSSA absolved them of any further independent legal liability within the class-action for their involvement with Residential Schools (Government of Canada, 2021b). However, it also required pledging financial and in-kind support to the following areas: a Common Experience Payment, where all former students received lump sums based on the number of years spent in the schools; an Individual Assessment Process, which provided financial compensation for sexual and "serious" physical abuse; funds dedicated to commemoration, mental health, and survivor resource awareness projects; and the formation of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (Green, 2012; Government of Canada, 2021b; Nagy, 2013). As signatories to the IRSSA, the churches collectively committed a minimum of $74.2 million over the course of several years in proportion to their Residential School involvement: $54 million from Catholic, $12.9 million from Anglican, $6.4 million from United, and $1.3 million from Presbyterian (IRSSA, 2006).

4.5. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada

The IRSSA intended the establishment of the TRC to facilitate reconciliation between former students, their families and communities, and all Canadians (Government of Canada, 2021b; TRC, 2015h). Like other truth commissions around the world, the TRC was designed to be a formal, non-permanent, extra-judicial, investigative body assembled to examine protracted human rights abuses (Stanton, 2011). The commission was given a five-year term to investigate

the IRS system, additionally tasked with the creation of a historical record and recommendations for reconciliation (Stanton, 2011). However, dissimilar to other truth commissions like that in South Africa or Guatemala, the Canadian TRC was the first to emerge as a legal remedy to litigation (Stanton, 2011; Stanton, 2017). Beginning in June 2009 after one previously failed attempt, Marie Wilson and Wilton Littlechild joined as commissioners, with Murray Sinclair appointed as chair (Macdonald, 2020). A committee of survivors worked in tandem with the commission, in accordance with the IRSSA's recommendations (Macdonald, 2020). Core principles of the TRC included accessibility, victim-centeredness, confidentiality as necessary, accountability, transparency, and respect (TRC, 2015h).

Between 2007 and 2015, the commission travelled across Canada to hear testimonies from witnesses and survivors and to educate the Canadian public about the history and legacy of Residential Schools (Miller, 2019; TRC, 2015h). In 2015, the commission completed its process by presenting a multi-volume final report, executive summary, and 94 Calls to Action (TRC, 2015h). The report and summary detailed a comprehensive historical record of Residential Schools, the considerable role of churches in the system, the experiences of over 6,000 survivors, and a determination that the IRS system constituted Indigenous cultural genocide (TRC, 2015h). Based on these accounts, the Calls to Action provided recommendations for change across a spectrum of sectors, such as child welfare, education, health, justice, language, and culture (TRC, 2015g; 2015i). For the IRSSA signatory churches, Calls to Action 48, 58, 59, 60 and 61 outlined further reconciliatory responsibilities for their involvement in IRS (TRC, 2015g; 2015i). Call to Action 48 recommended the formal adoption of the *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples* by the church parties to the Settlement Agreement and other faith groups (TRC, 2015i). Call to Action 58 advised that the Pope tender an official apology to survivors on

behalf of the Catholic Church, while education of church congregants about the history and legacy of Residential Schools constituted Call to Action 59 (TRC, 2015i). Call to Action 60 addressed the development of curriculum for student clergy at religious training centers (TRC, 2015i). Permanent funding for various reconciliation-related projects in Indigenous communities comprised the content of Call to Action 61(TRC, 2015i). In response to the release of the Final Report, the church parties to the Settlement Agreement released a statement acknowledging and welcoming the Calls to Action (Anglican Church of Canada, 2015).

The status of Call to Action completion remains contentious. Indigenous Watchdog, an independent not-for-profit that analyzes and discusses critical issues related to reconciliation, reports that only 11 recommendations have been completed as of 2023 (Indigenous Watchdog, 2023). The Yellowhead Institute, Toronto Metropolitan University's Indigenous-led research centre, maintains that 13 Calls have been completed, while the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (CBC) claims 15 have been fully implemented (Yellowhead Institute, 2023; 72 CBC, 2022). In contrast, the federal government only tracks those recommendations for which it is responsible, reporting that 85% of those 76 Calls to Action are complete or underway (Government of Canada, 2024). However, government reports from 2021 indicated that only 17 Calls to Action had been completed to-date (Government of Canada, 2021a). Given that ten years have passed since the submission of the TRC's Final Report, the meagre completion of Calls to Action demonstrates that implementation of the TRC has stalled.

4.6. Call to Action 59 and the Response of the Settlement Agreement Churches

Addressing the signatory churches to the Settlement Agreement, the TRC developed Call to Action 59 which states the following:

> We call upon church parties to the Settlement Agreement to develop ongoing education strategies to ensure that their respective congregations learn about their church's role in colonization, the history and legacy of Residential Schools, and why apologies to former Residential School students, their families, and communities were necessary (TRC, 2015i p102).

This Call arose from survivors' stated responses throughout the commission to the church apologies wherein survivors desired to hold the churches accountable to transform their words into authentic actions (TRC, 2015g). Accordingly, ongoing education of congregations about the history and legacy of IRS and colonization is seen as a commitment to action that can build trust and improve interactions between churches and Indigenous communities in daily life (TRC, 2015g).

Reflective of the evaluation of the Calls to Action broadly, reports differ over the completion of Call to Action 59 by third-party organizations. Both the CBC and Indigenous Watchdog consider the Call complete, while the Yellowhead Institute labels it unfinished (CBC, 2022; Indigenous Watchdog, 2023; Yellowhead Institute, 2023). To draw their conclusions, the CBC cites the churches' membership in Kairos Canada, an ecumenical organization working toward ecological justice and human rights, along with the churches' provision of online resources. Indigenous Watchdog generally refers to church education activities as the central factor in their evaluation of completion (Indigenous Watchdog, 2023). However, the Yellowhead Institute outlines its methodology as only considering a Call to be implemented once all steps of the Call have been taken by all parties implicated (Yellowhead Institute, 2019; 2023). To date, the Institute does not mark Call 59 fulfilled.

Given the contradictory reports of these organizations, a review was conducted of available church documentation from the four denominations related to Call to Action 59. For the Anglican and United denominations, the review revealed statements made in response to Call 59 and a variety of accessible online resources. In 2023, the General Synod of the Anglican Church passed a resolution of commitment to Call to Action 59, which entailed directing all ministries and dioceses to engage with the historical realities of IRS and move toward addressing its impacts (Anglican Church, 2023). The Anglican Church's website also houses a Reconciliation Toolkit that contains documents related to the history of Residential Schools and resource suggestions for worship, further study, or interactive activities to better understand the experience of IRS and/or colonization (Anglican Church of Canada, 2025e). Other materials include prayers and a message from the National Indigenous Archbishop for the National Day of Truth and Reconciliation, a Doctrine of Discovery educational video and study guide, and the General Synod archive containing official church communication about Residential Schools (Anglican Church of Canada, 2025e). For the United Church, a statement from 2022 regarding the Calls to Action, including Call 59, highlighted their available resources as their response to the recommendation (United Church of Canada, 2022). Upon review, content related to Call to Action 59 on the United Church website largely centres around activities and resources for the observance of Orange Shirt Day (United Church, 2025d). However, the United Church also hosts a website entitled "The Children Remembered" which catalogues detailed information on the history of each Residential School operated by the United Church with photos where available (United Church of Canada, 2025e).

For the Presbyterian and Catholic Churches, no explicit statements about Call to Action 59 were found. However, the Presbyterian Church website resources covering the history and

legacy of Residential Schools and colonization include the following: archived official church statements; historical briefs about Residential Schools, colonization, and the Doctrine of Discovery; and guidelines for presenting apologies about IRS to congregations (Presbyterian Church in Canada, 2025). In the Catholic Church, the educational documents related to Call 59 provided online by the CCCB mainly focus on the Doctrine of Discovery and *terra nullius* (CCCB, 2025d). The website also houses official statements and documents that relate to the CCCB and other Catholic institutional apologies for IRS (CCCB, 2025c).

Taken together, the evaluation by third-party organizations and information provided online by denominations do not clearly indicate the completion of the Call to Action. Even for the two denominations with official statements about Call 59, only online resources exist with no mention of a cohesive national strategy. For this reason, in addition to the paucity of research regarding TRC recommendation implementation broadly, this study seeks to address these gaps by answering two research questions. As previously noted, Call to Action 59, states the following:

> We call upon church parties to the Settlement Agreement to develop ongoing education strategies to ensure that their respective congregations learn about their church's role in colonization, the history and legacy of Residential Schools, and why apologies to former Residential School students, their families, and communities were necessary (TRC, 2015i p102).

Based on this Call, the two research questions for this study are as follows: (1) How are the educational strategies developed by the national church parties to the Settlement Agreement being implemented in local congregations? And (2) what is the perceived effectiveness of these strategies at ensuring that each denomination's respective congregation learns about a) their

church's role in colonization and b) their church's role in the history and legacy of Residential Schools? To maintain the scope of this thesis, the additional facet of the necessity for apologies referenced in Call 59 was not included in this study.

5. Methodology

5.1. Social Location

At a Traditional Knowledge Keepers Forum sponsored by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (TRC), Anishinaabe Elder Mary Deleary confronted the responsibility for reconciliation that non-Indigenous people carry, while acknowledging the considerable work in healing that Indigenous communities continue to engage daily. To non-Indigenous Canadians, she said:

> Our relatives who have come from across the water [non-Aboriginal people], you still have work to do on your road.... The land is made up of the dust of our ancestors' bones. And so to reconcile with this land and everything that has happened, there is much work to be done ... in order to create balance (TRC, 2015g p5).

As a non-Indigenous person descended from recent Pakistani and German immigrants, raised in the church, and having found past employment in Christian ministry, this research is, in part, a response to Elder Mary Deleary's invitation to settlers and an attempt to work on the road for which I am responsible. Through the TRC and its recommendations, Indigenous individuals and communities have clearly communicated what work is required for reconciliation, especially for churches. In response, I hope that this thesis provides clarity into and accountability for the work that has and has not been done.

5.2. Participant Recruitment

5.2.1. Participant Requirements

The eligibility criteria of this research required participants to be English-speaking and current congregation-level clergy or lay leaders of an Anglican, Catholic, Presbyterian, or United Church in Ontario, Canada. These denominations were selected for their direct address in Call to Action 59 (TRC, 2015i). Clergy and lay leaders at the lowest, congregational level of church leadership were chosen as they would be best placed to comment on how the nationally developed education strategies were being implemented to ensure that their congregation was learning about the history and legacy of Residential Schools and/or colonization.

5.2.2. Sampling

This research used quota sampling to ensure that participants were obtained within specific denominational and geographic proportions (Leary, 2004). Based on this, the initial design aimed to recruit three to four clergy or lay leaders from each of the four IRSSA denominations, for a total of 12-16 participants. Additionally, to pursue a more reflective representation of the province, participants were intentionally recruited from both northern and southern Ontario cities. The cities were chosen using Statistics Canada's (2023) Census Metropolitan Area (CMA) designations based on the 2021 census. CMAs consist of one or more adjacent municipalities centred on a population core of at least 100,000 people (Statistics Canada, 2022b). Based on the CMAs, Greater Sudbury and Thunder Bay were the only two northern Ontario areas with populations that qualified for CMA designations. Given this, the populations of Thunder Bay and Greater Sudbury were averaged and the two southern Ontario CMAs closest to this average were selected to maintain as consistent populations throughout the sample cities as possible. The two southern Ontario cities chosen were Guelph and Brantford.

Given specifications around participant denominations and geography, the design intended for each of the four sample cities to have a participant from all four denominations. However, due to the limited number of churches in each city and resulting recruitment difficulties, Kingston was included as another southern CMA of comparable size.

From there, national church directories were used to amass a list of all Anglican, Presbyterian, and United churches in the applicable CMA. For the Catholic Church, the CCCB website hosts a directory of every bishop and associated diocese in the country. Websites of each diocese within the sample CMAs were then used to contact Catholic clergy for recruitment. From these lists, participants were purposively sampled. Snowball sampling also occurred in one instance wherein a clergy member recommended a Presbyterian key informant who did not reside in any of the chosen CMAs.

5.2.3. Recruitment Procedures

All participants were recruited via phone or email using the above compiled lists of potential participants. During recruitment, applicable phone, email, or voicemail scripts were used, which contained information about the project (see Appendix A). The Lakehead Research Ethics Board reviewed and approved this project prior to the commencement of participant recruitment (Appendix B).

5.2.4. Informed Consent

Interviews occurred via Zoom or in-person, depending on participant location. Before each Zoom interview, participants were read an information letter containing detailed information about the research project and participant rights (see Appendix C). This letter included the following content: the purpose of the research; eligibility requirements; what was requested of participants; the benefits and risks of participation; how confidentiality is

maintained; how to withdraw from the study; and contact information for the author, supervisor, and Research Ethics Board. The information letter specifically outlined the processes for data protection, along with the removal of any identifying information a participant may reveal. The Research Ethics Board approved the project for verbal consent, which was obtained after reading the information letter and consent form to participants and addressing any questions or concerns (see Appendix D). In-person interviews followed a similar process, with participants receiving a physical copy of the documents and signing the consent form.

5.2.5. Participant Demographics

The study had 18 participants (n=18). Five participants (n=5) were from the Anglican Church of Canada out of which four (n=4) were clergy, one (n=1) was a lay leader, three (n=3) were from northern cities, and two (n=2) were from southern cities. Four participants (n=4) were Catholic clergy members, out of which two (n=2) were from northern cities and two (n=2) were from southern cities. Five participants (n=5) were clergy from the Presbyterian Church in Canada, out of which three (n=3) were from the north and two (n=2) were from the south. One (n=1) of these Presbyterian participants was a key informant with extensive experience and leadership in the denomination's reconciliation initiatives, located outside of the sample cities. Four participants (n=4) were United Church clergy members, out of which half (n=2) were from southern Ontario and half (n=2) were from northern Ontario.

5.3. Data Collection

Interviews occurred from October 2023 to March 2024 via Zoom for all participants located outside of Thunder Bay. All Thunder Bay interviews were conducted in-person. Interviews ranged from 34 to 90 minutes, averaging 61 minutes. Semi-structured qualitative interviews were used to maintain flexibility while guiding conversations in line with the research questions

(Stuckey, 2013). An interview guide consisting of eight questions and several prompts helped to provide overall direction for conversations (see Appendix E) (Roberts, 2020). All interviews were recorded for later analysis.

5.4. Data Analysis

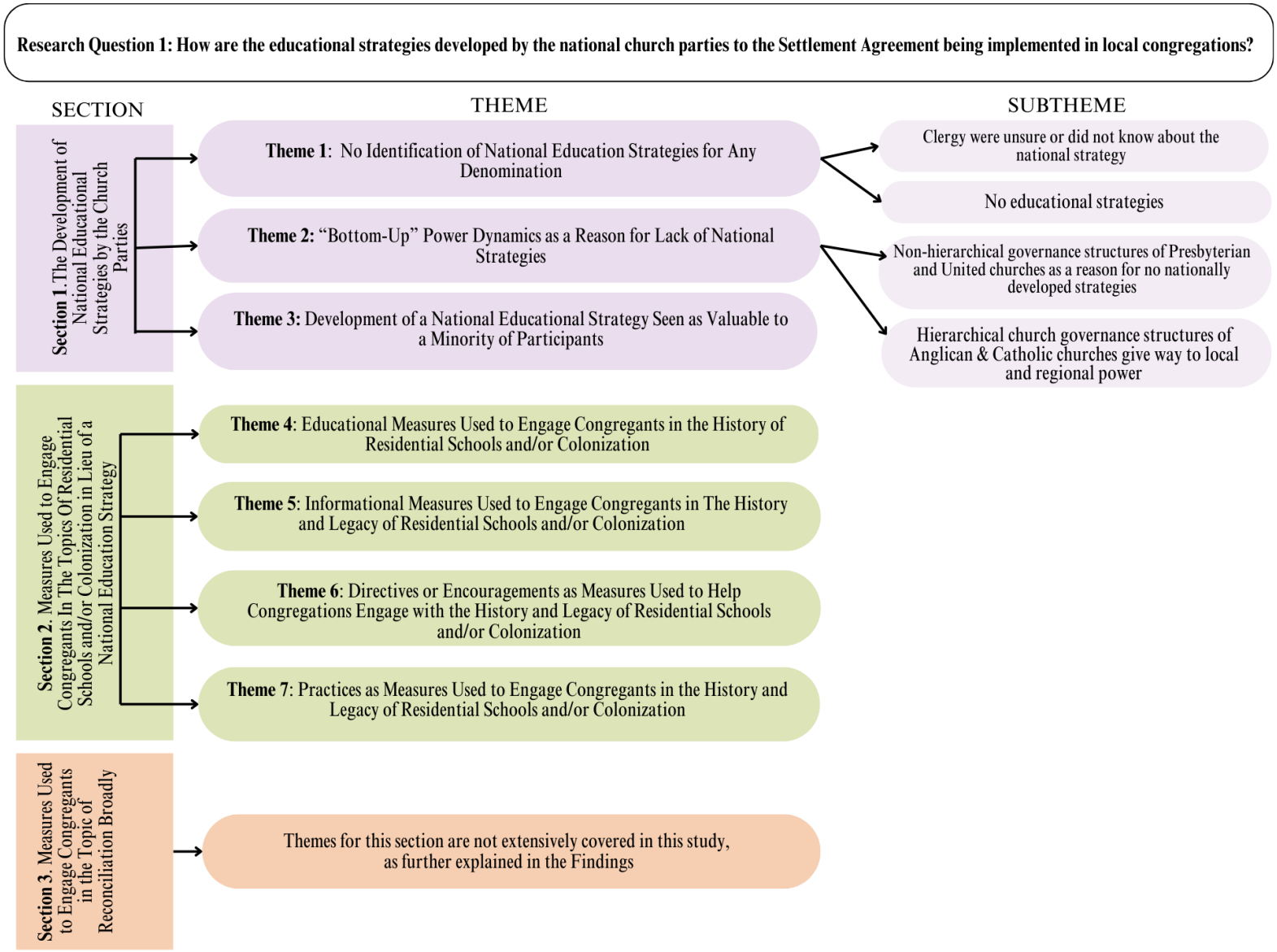
Following Braun and Clarke's (2006) method, thematic analysis was used to analyze the data. The purpose of thematic analysis is to identify, analyze, and report themes within qualitative research data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Thematic analysis is not associated with a particular theoretical framework and can be used to report the experiences and reality of participants (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Braun and Clarke (2006) outline six main steps in thematic analysis: (1) familiarizing yourself with the data; (2) generating initial codes; (3) searching for themes; (4) reviewing themes; (5) defining and naming themes; and (6) producing the report. To employ these steps, the data was transcribed manually and with OtterAI, a transcription software, and subsequently reviewed. Each interview was reviewed multiple times to check for transcription accuracy, remove identifying data, and familiarize the researcher with the data (Braun & Clark, 2006). Data triangulation between observational field notes and transcripts was used to increase rigour (Johnson et al., 2020). Initial codes were generated inductively on the third read-through, providing meaningful assessment of individual data units (Boyatzis 1998; Braun & Clark, 2006). This process used Nvivo, a qualitative data analysis software. Once all interviews had been coded, the generated codes were considered based on how they could be grouped to form a theme (Braun & Clark, 2006). To select themes, the following elements were considered: a) whether data within themes corresponded meaningfully; b) whether clear distinctions existed between themes; and c) how proposed themes related to the research

questions (Braun & Clark, 2006). Sub-themes then were developed predominantly to provide structure and meaning to larger themes (Braun & Clark, 2006).

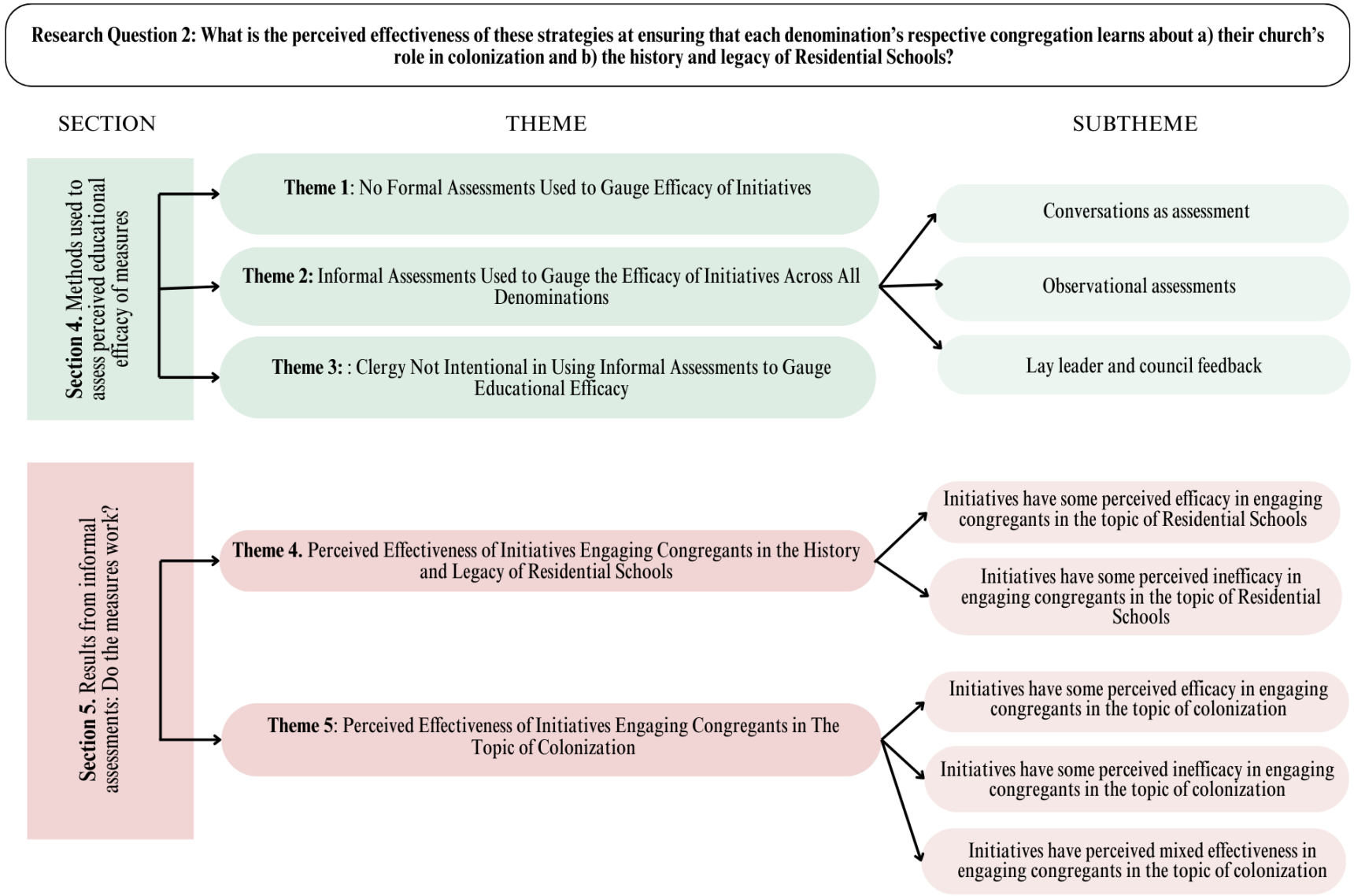
Included below is a visual depiction of the themes and subthemes of this study (see Figures 1-3). The findings section further explores these themes and subthemes in greater detail.

5.5. Figures: Themes and Subthemes

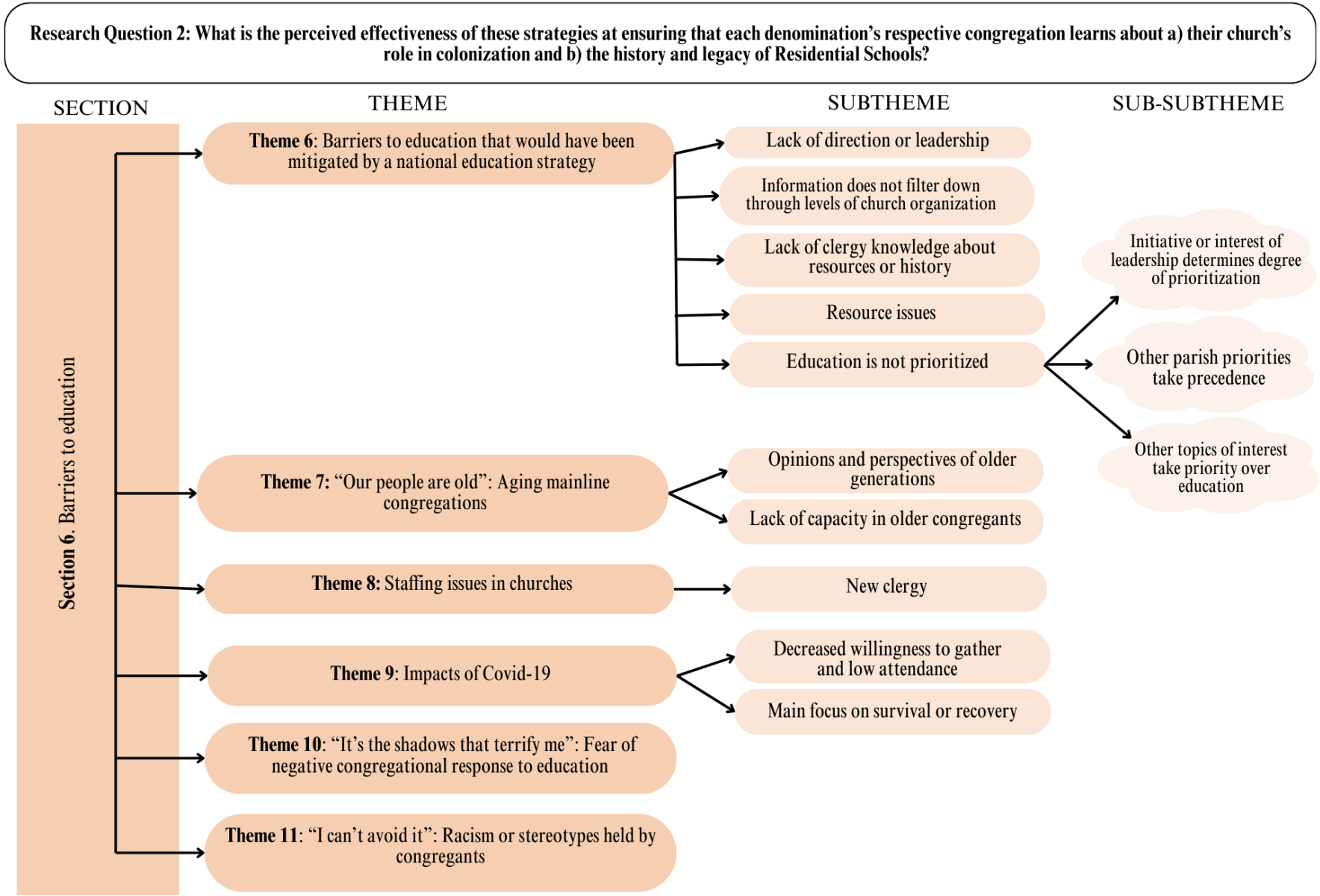
5.5.1. Figure 1: Themes and subthemes for Research Question 1.



5.5.2. Figure 2. Themes and subthemes for Research Question 2, part 1.



5.5.3. Figure 3. Themes and subthemes for Research Question 2, part 2



6. Findings

6.1. Findings Related to Research Question 1

The findings section begins by presenting the data associated with those themes which respond to the first research question: How are the educational strategies developed by the national church parties to the Settlement Agreement being implemented in local congregations? These themes fall within three main sections: a) themes relating to the development of national education strategies by the church parties; b) themes relating to methods used by churches to engage congregants in the history and legacy of Residential Schools and/or colonisation in lieu of national strategies; and c) methods used by churches to engage congregants in reconciliation broadly beyond the topics of Residential Schools and colonization.

Following the themes relating to the first research question, the findings section then outlines those themes which respond to the second research question: What is the perceived effectiveness of the strategies at ensuring that each denomination's respective congregation learns about a) their church's role in colonization and b) their church's role in the history and legacy of Residential Schools? These themes also fall within subsections, delineated as follows: a) methods churches used to assess efficacy of initiatives; b) results from informal assessments used by churches; and c) barriers to effective education.

6.1.1. Section 1: The Development of National Education Strategies by Church Parties

Responses to questions pertaining to the development of national educational strategies were analysed into three themes that collectively answer the first portion of the first research question. Together, these themes are the following: (1) none of the clergy from the Settlement Agreement church parties were able to articulate a national education strategy for their respective denomination; (2) "bottom-up" power dynamics within the church denominations were given as

a reason why there were no national strategies; and (3) a minority of participants from Anglican, Catholic, and Presbyterian churches (although not United) indicated that the development of a national educational strategy would be valuable.

6.1.1.1. Theme 1: No Identification of National Education Strategies for Any Denomination

Of the 18 total participants interviewed, no participants indicated the presence of a national strategy for their respective denomination. As such, clergy responses about the national strategy were divided into two categories, both subthemes within this section: a) those who explicitly expressed uncertainty or unawareness of the national strategy and b) those who either directly or indirectly indicated that their denomination did not have a national strategy for educating congregants on their respective denomination's role in the history of Residential Schools and colonization. When analyzing data, a strategy was defined as an intentional, detailed plan for achieving educational outcomes over a given timeframe (Cambridge Dictionary, 2025; Collins Dictionary, 2025). In this context, intentionality refers to the deliberate development of an education plan, as required by Call to Action 59. Based on this definition of a strategy, no national strategies arose from any of the Settle Agreement denominations, as detailed below.

6.1.1.1.1. "I Have No Clue": Clergy Were Unsure or Did Not Know About the National Strategy

This subtheme captures statements made by clergy explicitly indicating that they were unaware or unsure of their denomination's national strategy. Overall, 10 (P1, P2, P3, P4, P5, P6, P7, P8, P9, P16) out of 18 participants expressed uncertainty about a national strategy. These participants included all five Anglican (P3, P4, P6, P8, P9), all four United (P1, P2, P5, P11), one of four Catholic (P16), and one of five (P7) Presbyterian participants.

For Anglican clergy, when asked about an Anglican national-level strategy or directives related to educating congregants on the denomination's role in the history and legacy of Residential Schools or colonization, Participant 8 stated:

> And I don't know what resources are out there. I really don't. I have no clue about what the national church is doing beyond [the Blanket Exercise[1]]. So, if I don't know, a lot of our local parish[2] members won't know. And if you know anything more than I know, you could share that with me.

Similarly expressing uncertainty, Participant 6 responded that he was "not very clear on the national perspective," and Participant 3 stated, "if [specific strategies, directives, or schedules are] from the national level, I don't know." Participant 4, a lay leader, also indicated unawareness by saying, "I have no idea. I don't know anything, what the clergy has been given. And no, I don't know. I've not been given any directive." Citing time away from the Canadian church context as a reason, Participant 9 likewise voiced unfamiliarity with the Anglican national strategy stating that "because [the TRC] came to fruition not long after I was ordained, and then I was away...I haven't been keeping up to date during my time away, about what initiatives there are."

Similarly, One Catholic participant (P16) also expressed a lack of knowledge about a national strategy. When asked, he clarified that "this national viewpoint or perspective? I can only speak to what I've experienced locally, within the diocese."

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[1] The Kairos Blanket Exercise is an immersive, participatory activity that teaches about Indigenous history and colonization. It was created in 1997 by Kairos Canada, an ecumenical initiative administrated by the United Church of Canada, members of which include the three remaining Settlement Agreement church parties. (Kairos Canada, 2025; Herzog et al., 2021).

[2] The term "parish" is synonymous with congregation or church (Anglican Church, 2025c).

In response to questions about the strategy, two United participants (P5, P11) indicated that they could not speak to the national level. Participant 5 said, “I can't speak to communications [about a national strategy]. I think I more feel viscerally the storytelling of the administrators of the United Church nearest to me. Less about the national church.” Participant 11 responded similarly when he said, “I can't speak to the procedures and strategies. All I can speak to is that I'm available when resources come available.”

When asked about the denomination’s national strategy, two United participants (P1, P2) referenced resources housed on the denomination’s national website. However, while resources can be a component of a strategy, within themselves they do not equate to the level of detailed planning required for a strategy. More importantly, in accordance with this theme, both participants were unsure about the content of these resources despite referencing them. For example, Participant 2 expressed that she, “[hadn’t] done a thorough examination of [the resources],” as well as stating, “I haven't checked the website to see how much, how deep the resources go for the colonization piece.” When asked to describe the resources, Participant 1 similarly responded by saying, “well, it's probably a few months since I've looked at them.”

Like the United participants, Participant 7, a Presbyterian, also pointed to the national website resources when asked about the Presbyterian national strategy but was generally unsure of their content. During the interview, she attempted to locate these website resources to gain familiarity, stating:

> You would be able to find all kinds of things if you want at the Presbyterian Church of Canada's website. Which you maybe have done already, but I am just looking. Why am I not finding it? I was supposed to search before you got here. Because I knew that this would

probably be one of those areas to search. It's not that hard to find. I'm just not finding it. But there's a whole website. Just like…well, a page.

Collectively, these participant quotations indicate that many participants, especially those from the Anglican and United denominations, felt unaware and uninformed of any educational strategy at the national level for their denomination. The subsequent subtheme discusses how, aside from unawareness of the strategies, participants did not think strategies existed.

6.1.1.1.2. "We Don't Have a Dedicated, Clear, Systematic Way": No Educational Strategies

This subtheme represents indications from clergy that their respective denominations had not developed a national level educational strategy to-date. Eleven out of 18 participants expressed this theme, either directly (P6, P8, P10, P12, P16, P17) or by referencing national provisions that could be a component of a larger strategy but could not be considered a strategy in themselves (P11, P13, P14, P15, P18). These national provisions mentioned by the second group of participants will be covered in greater depth when discussing what churches have done in lieu of national strategies.

Altogether, the denominational breakdown included two Anglican participants (P6, P8), three United participants (P11, P14, P18), all four Catholic participants (P13, P15, P16, P17), and four out of five Presbyterian participants (P10, P12, P14, P18). Of the 11 total participants represented in this section, three (P6, P8, P16) had also stated that they were unsure of the national strategy in addition to directly indicating that a national strategy had not been developed and were therefore also represented in the previous subtheme. As an example of a direct indication that there was no national education strategy in the Anglican Church, Participant 6

stated that “we don’t have a dedicated, clear, systematic way of doing the education at this point.” This sentiment was echoed by another Anglican participant who said:

> There's no specific curriculum that's been developed by the [Anglican] national church or by a local diocese that pertains specifically to the Truth and Reconciliation. There's been attempts on national levels to have engagement with First Nation people, and to have these exercises. But there's not a curriculum that you can point to, or go through and say, “let's get into the meat of this and let's see how we can apply our Christian values and say, ‘what we did was not right, in the eyes of Jesus or any moral person. And we need to do better. And how can we use our Christian framework, our culture to change that?’”(P8)

Similarly, when asked if there was a national strategy, one Catholic participant indicated that it was, “not in a very structured way with guidelines. But from personal initiative” (P7). Another participant (P16) explained that the national level of the Canadian Catholic Church was at the stage where they had realized the importance of education but did not indicate the development a strategy:

> I think the Canadian bishops on a whole…have certainly recognized [the need for education], and they have certainly acknowledged [the need for education] finally, and they have recognized their need to begin to develop programming and resources that can help us on the ground at the grassroots level on the frontlines be able to open the doors for conversation. (P16)

However, when asked if a strategy had been developed, the participant noted that it was in process but had not been completed saying, “I think it's unfolding and I'm going to be quite honest with you…the church is slow moving. It’s very slow moving. And so, I would say it's unfolding” (P16). Participant 10, a Presbyterian, emphasized the importance of reconciliation

and education within the general Presbyterian denominational ethos. However, he also identified the lack of an educational strategy, along with the absence of plans or directives at the national level:

> I wouldn't say [we have a national strategy] directly, but…the Presbyterian Church has been, especially in recent decades, been very big on doing reconciliation. And the Presbyterian Church is a tradition that comes from a background of education…So, where no higher body has pointed their finger and told me, "you have to do this", it's always been sort of put out there and encouraged as just a general thing being brought up in the church … So, there's never been a direct push.

While participants from the four denominations indicated that those denominations feel positively toward education about the history and legacy of Residential Schools and colonization, no clear strategy for education emerged.

In summary of this overarching theme, no participants indicated the presence of a national strategy for their respective denomination. Participant responses were analyzed further into two subthemes: a) those who explicitly expressed uncertainty or unawareness of the national strategy and b) those who either directly or indirectly indicated that their denomination did not have a national strategy for educating congregants on their respective denomination's role in the history of Residential Schools and colonization. However, participants disclosed that the distribution of power within church structures was a main reason for the lack of strategies, as discussed in the theme below.

6.1.1.2. Theme 2: "Bottom-Up" Power Dynamics as a Reason for Lack of National Strategies

Ten (P1, P2, P3, P5, P6, P7, P12, P15, P16, P18) out of 18 participants across all denominations cited "bottom-up" power dynamics within their respective church denominations as a reason for the lack of national education strategies. "Bottom-up" power dynamics in the churches were described as those dynamics that resulted in local levels of church government, such as the local congregation or regional body, having more power to set priorities and influence change than higher, more centralized levels of government. However, the theme of "bottom-up" power dynamics can be further subdivided into two sub-themes, related to the individual denominational governance structures as articulated by participants. These differing governance structures are rooted in historical and theological context and fall into a) non-hierarchical governance structures (Presbyterian and United) and b) hierarchical church governance structures (Anglican and Catholic). The difference between these two structures will be further elucidated in the following two sub-theme sections.

6.1.1.2.1. "We Don't Get Dictated To": Non-Hierarchical Governance Structures of Presbyterian and United Churches as a Reason for No Nationally Developed Strategies

Six out of nine participants from United (P1, P2, P5) and Presbyterian (P7, P12, P18) churches cited internal governance structures as the main reason for a lack of national education strategies. According to participants, these structures are often referred to as "non-hierarchical" or "bottom-up" and are based in doctrinal or constitutional principles that govern church organization. As such, non-hierarchical governance structures intentionally locate the power to determine priorities and influence change at local and regional levels rather than national.

For the United Church, Participant 1 named this dynamic and provided historical context:

> I would say the United Church's approach is—because it's a conciliar[3] church, which means congregations ultimately have the last say in many policies…and most of what the church is. So, that partly comes out of its history. The United Church is a union of the Congregationalist Churches, the Methodist Church, and the Presbyterian Church in 1925. That shapes its personality still, I think, which is reflected in its structure. So, coming out of the Methodist and the Presbyterian Churches that came into union, there's a strong bias toward the individual congregation to make its own decisions for how it expresses the Church in its own context…So, I would say that the United Church really doesn't dictate that any education per se happen, is mandated to happen. So, the approach, rather, is to just flood us with resources.

When asked about the national strategy, other United Church participants further agreed with this idea but used the language of "bottom up":

> So, with the United Church, it's a bottom-up organization rather than a top-down. Some other denominations you would find that directions come from the top, from a bishop or what have you. Whereas with the United Church, it's bottom up. So, the congregation is the one that is the driving force for themselves…as far as educating themselves, it's pretty much up to them. (P2)

Participant 5 similarly referenced this dynamic when discussing the non-hierarchical nature of the United Church:

> We have instilled in us the very rudimentary principles and values of ministry, but we are given a lot of latitude. How that flows in terms of engagement and education… it was not

[3] For the United Church, conciliarity refers to a group of governance councils at various organizational levels, wherein members hold roles at multiple levels. This polity was created at the time of union based on the similar structures of the joining denominations, including Presbyterian, and prioritizes substantial freedom for local congregations (Bartlet, 2018).

> laid out, nothing is ever laid out as mandatory in the United Church. Unlike in hierarchical churches, it's more of a suggestion. (P5)

As discussed by Participant 1, given that the United Church adopted portions of its governance structure from its parent Presbyterian Church, the "bottom-up" dynamic was also expressed by Presbyterian participants. This is best exemplified by Participant 12 who used "bottom up" language when describing Presbyterian church governance:

> I'm not sure if there's anything in place to make sure people learn the history. Things are in place to ensure that that they have the ability to, that they are given the opportunity to. The Presbyterian Church in Canada really doesn't make anybody do anything… I think that they give us the resources to [educate our congregations]. But they don't make anybody do anything. Nobody will ask you, "did you observe Truth and Reconciliation Sunday this year?" and nobody will follow up on that or whatever. Being a bottom-up government as we are, as opposed to top-down, we don't get dictated to. We decide. Each congregation decides for themselves through their elders.

Participant 18, another Presbyterian, also reflected this relationship with the national leadership as not being "browbeaten into [education]. We're not demanded that we must do this, we must do that. It's primarily voluntarily." Similarly, Participant 7 noted:

> The churches are given, you know, their own whatever works, if they want to use it or not … For some places it ranks in different ways…it flows and ebbs in different ways. And even here it has. So, of the other churches within our presbytery[4], I think we're probably the ones who do the most work [on education] in our presbytery.

[4] A presbytery is a middle level of governance in the Presbyterian Church between congregations and synods. Some ministers and elders from each congregation in a geographical area compose a presbytery to provide oversight and support to congregations (Presbyterian Church of Canada, n.d.).

Overall, United and Presbyterian participants agreed that the intentional non-hierarchical or bottom-up governance structures of both denominations prevented a national strategy from being developed. This differed from the next subtheme, wherein Anglican and Catholic participants acknowledged the presence of a bottom-up power dynamic within their denominations but did not attribute this to an inherent governance structure.

6.1.1.2.2. Hierarchical Church Governance Structures of Anglican and Catholic Churches Give Way to Local and Regional Power

While not from denominations with formalized non-hierarchical church governance structures, four out of eight participants from Anglican (P3, P6) and Catholic (P15, P16) denominations noted that the power to undertake educational initiatives was functionally located at more local and regional, rather than national, levels of leadership. A Catholic participant described limitations to a bishop's ability to give mandates to congregations:

> Also [information from] national, that is usually communicated to the [local] bishop, and the bishop himself will communicate it to all the various pastors or groups, whoever's on the email... And now, [the bishop] can't mandate everything we're gonna do. And he also knows that there are parishes that have limited resources, limited talent, or understanding. (P15)

Participant 15 further expanded by identifying how autonomy to prioritize education exists at the local level:

> [Education] depends. It'll depend on the [local] leadership, whether the leadership or that order[5] takes [education] as a priority. It can be nuanced. They may say, "yeah, that's very important. But our job is to work in soup kitchens. That's what we do." … They might say

[5] Within the worldwide Catholic Church, religious Orders consist of members who take vows, such as to chastity, poverty, or obedience, and often live in community with one another. Examples of Orders in Canada include the Jesuits, the Oblates of Mary Immaculate, and the Grey Nuns (CCCB, 2025f; Choquette, 2004).

> though, "that's all politics. We don't want to get into that. Our job is to help heal the sick." [That's] their focus…Where I say that some Orders don't take it as seriously as they should or some dioceses[6] or some diocesan priests.

In agreement with the above statements, a second Catholic participant noted that, "[education] depends on the local diocese, the local bishop" (P16).

This dynamic was similarly expressed by Anglican participants, one of whom indicated the following:

> But from our diocesan level, so what happens is, the dioceses are quite large. And the bishops in the Anglican Church are each responsible for their own [diocese]. The national is more of a cooperative... There is a national bishop, but that national bishop has no power. It's to try and make cohesiveness over the entire—so that the national bishop brings all of the bishops from across the country together. (P3)

Another Anglican, Participant 6, noted that in contrast to a national effort, "in my experience, [educational strategy] has been much more of a congregational kind of impetus." He added that education "tends to happen much more from a congregational level." Thus, both Catholic and Anglican participants agreed that power tended to reside with the local or regional levels of church government, resulting in an inability to direct or mandate education within congregations.

In summary, participants cited some form of "bottom-up" power dynamics as a reason for the lack of national education strategies. This theme was further subdivided into two subthemes, depending on the structure of church governance as articulated by participants: a) non-hierarchical governance structures of Presbyterian and United Churches as a reason for lack of

[6] Both Catholic and Anglican churches use the term diocese to refer to a mid-level organizational structure led by a bishop and covering a specific geographic area (Anglican Church, 2025c; CCCB, 2025e).

strategies and b) hierarchical church governance structures of Anglican and Catholic Churches which give way to local and regional power.

6.1.1.3. Theme 3: Development of a National Educational Strategy Seen as Valuable to a Minority of Participants

Despite the lack of educational strategies across denominations, four (P8, P0, P16, P17) out of 18 clergy suggested that a national education strategy would be valuable to them. This viewpoint was expressed by two Catholic participants (P16, P17), one Anglican participant (P8), and one Presbyterian participant (P10). No United participants expressed the need for a national education strategy. Illustrating this theme, a Catholic participant (P16) expressed that having a centralized strategy would make education more feasible at the local congregational level:

> Because we're limited on resources at the local level…resources with regard to people, with regard to money, with regard to time, having something that was presented from the diocese that can be taken and run with, so that you're not inventing it [would be helpful]. You're managing it…Because it takes a lot more resources to invent it and then implement it than it does to have it given to you and then implement it. It takes less, obviously. (P16)

He further indicated that provision of a national strategy could lead to greater educational consistency across his diocese:

> There was an aspect of needing help [from national] … if the dioceses were to offer programming that was consistent, that was able to be presented…[If we were told] here's how you unfold it, and here's how you implement it, it would be much easier. (P16)

Another Catholic participant (P17) expressed that having an educational model was necessary to align with the purpose and mission of the church:

> The church needs to create a model. In a pastoral model, you have to drive down this knowledge or education. Who is going to do that? I don't know. But, where there is a will, there is a way. So, the lack of educational model around colonization and decolonization and Indigenous people within the church structure…This is at the heart of the mission of the church, to proclaim reconciliation, to proclaim truth and to proclaim justice. And for me, the way forward to doing that is to close the gap by establishing, I call it an office. But it doesn't have to be a separate office. I know when you think [of] HR and compensation, all of that is a drawback. But an office that will actually distill the whole thing and create a model for parishes to use in their ongoing efforts to educate the parishioners on this topic. (P17)

Additionally, Participant 10 said that national direction from the Presbyterian Church would help congregants achieve greater clarity regarding Truth and Reconciliation:

> Truth and Reconciliation doesn't have a clear end vision goal…there are certain personalities where they can't function unless they know how things are supposed to end…I know that there are some who are like, "how am I to know what this is supposed to look like" and then they know how to go forward. And so, I think there's a few in the congregation of that kind of personality where they wish they could do it, but because they don't know what it's supposed to look like or what's the end goal, they're frozen in fear or nervousness.

While not explicitly directed toward the Anglican national church, Participant 8 expressed a desire for an educational strategy by saying, "I don't have the curriculum…I think there's got to be some really good papers and an intentional effort from the academia and academics to come up with something that is age appropriate for different denominations." He further elaborated on this idea and said, "I would love to see a curriculum developed. But I just can't do it right now. I can't make a curriculum out of thin air. So that's a tough one."

Overall, this section reported those themes and subthemes related to the development of national educational strategies in answer to the first portion of the first research question. The main themes were as follows: (1) none of the clergy from the Settlement Agreement church parties were able to articulate a national education strategy for their respective denomination (2) "bottom-up" power dynamics within the church denominations were given as a reason why there were no national strategies; and (3) a minority of participants from Anglican, Catholic, and Presbyterian churches (although not United) indicated that the development of a national educational strategy would be valuable.

6.1.2. Section 2: Measures Used to Engage Congregants In The Topics Of Residential Schools and/or Colonization in Lieu of a National Education Strategy

This section refers to the fact that, while strategies for education were not provided nationally, denominations still undertook initiatives to engage congregants in the topics of the history and legacy of Residential Schools and/or colonization. As previously mentioned, a strategy has a high degree of intentionality and refers to a long-range, careful plan for the achievement of specific goals (Cambridge Dictionary, 2025; Collins Dictionary, 2025). In contrast, "initiatives" or "measures" are concepts which both refer to independent, smaller steps that could function as part of a larger strategy but are not a strategy in themselves (Miriam-Webster, 2025a; 2025b). Given these definitions, the data indicate that clergy and congregations engaged in measures or initiatives toward raising congregational awareness of the history of Residential Schools and colonization in the absence of formalized national strategies.

The themes within this section therefore respond, in part, to the first research question which asks how the educational strategies developed by the national church parties to the Settlement Agreement are being implemented in local congregations. However, because of the lack of

national educational strategies, this theme addresses the research question more broadly by laying out the various initiatives or measures used in lieu of national strategies to engage congregations in the topics outlined by Call to Action 59. For the same reason, this section cannot explore the implementation of the national strategies at local levels. However, given that some of the measures were developed at the national or regional level, this section does explore findings related to how regions or local congregations implemented measures developed at higher organizational levels, where applicable.

In addition to the implementation of national strategies, TRC Call to Action 59 explicitly states that churches must educate congregants about their respective denomination's particular role in the history and legacy of Residential Schools and colonization. However, participants did not specify whether the initiatives or measures they mentioned addressed their denomination's particular role as opposed to providing a more general history. Consequently, the data in this section does not indicate whether the denomination's role in the history and legacy of Residential Schools and colonization was addressed through the various initiatives.

Responses to questions pertaining to the initiatives undertaken by churches to engage congregants in the history and legacy of Residential Schools or colonization were analysed into four themes that collectively answer the second portion of the first research question. Together, these themes are the following: 1) educational measures, 2) informational measures, 3) measures that provided directives or encouragements for engagement, and 4) specific practices as measures.

6.1.2.1. Theme 4: Educational Measures Used to Engage Congregants in the History of Residential Schools and/or Colonization

Educational measures refer to those initiatives undertaken specifically with the intent to teach congregants about the history or legacy of Residential Schools or colonization. Out of all the initiatives found, educational measures are the most deliberate, complex, and designed to facilitate learning. Analysis of the data indicates that these measures were undertaken at all three levels of church leadership—national, regional, and local.

National. Data from Anglican, Presbyterian, and United participants indicate that some educational measures were created at the national level of these denominations. For Anglicans, five participants (P3, P4, P6, P8, P9) mentioned the following four distinct national educational measures: a) a nationally produced film about the Doctrine of Discovery (P3, P4, P6), b) an interactive activity about colonization called Mapping the Ground We Stand On (P3, P8), c) the Kairos Blanket Exercise (P9), and d) general educational documents about Residential Schools or colonization from the national website (P3, P6).

Five Presbyterian participants (P7, P10, P12, P14, P18) referenced a total of seven distinct national educational measures. These included the following: a) annual Residential School "exposure tours" (P14, P18) in 2015, 2016, and 2017, hosted by the national church for a limited number of interested congregants and clergy, b) nationally produced resources and literature related to the repudiation of the Doctrine of Discovery (P10, P14, P18), c) a nationally produced document outlining the denomination's position on expressions of Indigenous spirituality (P12), d) written resources specifically discussing the denomination's role in Residential Schools (P12), and e) other general website resources that address the history of Residential Schools and colonization (P7, P10, P12, P18).

Like the previous two denominations, United participants also identified website resources related to Residential Schools or colonization as a national measure (P1, P2, P5, P11). Additionally, one United participant (P2) mentioned a video that was produced by the national church and, in part, discussed the Doctrine of Discovery. This video was developed for an upcoming remit[7] vote for the establishment of an autonomous National Indigenous Organization within the United Church to acknowledge Indigenous voices and spiritual identities (United Church, 2023a).

Regarding implementation of the national measures, both Anglican and Presbyterian participants identified the application of national educational measures at the congregational level. Participant 4 described a screening in her congregation of the Anglican film:

> The Doctrine of Discovery … is this terrific film we all watched as well. It was the Doctrine of Discovery and how it was very inappropriate. Really anti-human rights. Now, we would never consider that. But we went through that with [the congregation].

When asked whether a significant proportion of the church attended, she replied, "I think we did have a showing of the Doctrine of Discovery and I can't remember how many people showed." Participant 3 similarly discussed the use of various Anglican website resources on Truth and Reconciliation with her congregation:

> I mean, we've promoted some of these books. And the Sacred Circle videos. Try to make those available to people ... and, you know, things like the Doctrine of Discovery, Stolen Land, Strong Hearts, the Sacred Circle videos we used all before Covid started.

[7] In 2022, the National Indigenous Council proposed the development and maintenance of an autonomous National Indigenous Organization within The United Church of Canada. Because fulfilling this request required changes to the church structure, a Category 3 Remit was required. Voting for each Session took place between March 15, 2023, and March 31, 2024, with the remit passing (United Church, 2023a).

Participant 12 revealed that Presbyterian congregants were widely using the national website resources, stating, "a lot of [congregants] have, in fact, used the church resources that were made available to the church." This participant further indicated that they had used the Presbyterian policy on Indigenous spirituality document when fielding negative feedback about Indigenous artwork in the church:

> I referenced the Presbyterian Church in Canada policy on expressions of Native spirituality, or Indigenous spirituality, which is a wonderful document…So, I referenced that document, which told us that putting [Indigenous artwork] up there was fine. There is absolutely nothing wrong with the art. (P12)

Regional. All four denominations also initiated educational measures at the regional level. Four Anglican participants (P3, P7, P8, P9) outlined the following educational measures: a) a diocesan partnership with a local Residential School site for congregant education (P9), b) two diocese-wide Blanket Exercises (P7, P9), c) an educational speaker and Sharing Circle about Residential Schools and colonization hosted by a deanery[8] (P8), and d) a diocese-wide session for clergy to learn about the history of Residential Schools (P3). One Presbyterian (P7) and one Catholic (P16) clergy member also spoke about a Blanket Exercise hosted by their regional leadership. For the United Church, participant 11 mentioned a session on Residential School history with a guest speaker at a regional conference. The only reported implementation of regional educational measures at the congregational level occurred when this participant (P11) later incorporated content from the speaker's session into a sermon illustration for his local congregants.

[8] In the Anglican Church, a deanery consists of several parishes within a diocese (Anglican Church, 2025c).

Local. Congregations also used and developed educational measures related to the history and legacy of Residential Schools at the local level. Four (P3, P4, P6, P8) out of five Anglican clergy described educational measures, with some similarities to those seen at other organizational levels. For example, three participants (P4, P6, P8) discussed how their congregations had either hosted (P6, P8) or attended (P4) a Blanket Exercise. Some of these events also involved collaboration with Kairos Canada (P6) or a local Friendship Centre (P4). One participant (P3) described a congregational "field trip" to a local Residential School site, although not related to any previously mentioned, nationally organized event. Members of another congregation attended a Residential School webinar hosted by a local Indigenous organization (P6).

Two Presbyterian clergy (P7, P10) also mentioned local educational measures. One clergy (P7) filmed a video to share with congregants about the relationship between long-term trauma effects of Residential Schools and the over-representation of homelessness in urban Indigenous populations. In weekly sermons, one clergy member (P10) recalled making several references to the history and effects of Residential Schools and colonization. Participant 7 echoed this mode of education through inviting an Indigenous speaker to teach the congregation about Residential Schools during a Sunday Service. Similarly, a Catholic clergy (P15) also invited an Indigenous Elder to discuss the history of Residential Schools, while one United clergy (P5) read Phyllis Webstad's Orange Shirt Day book during a Truth and Reconciliation Sunday service.

6.1.2.2. Theme 5: Informational Measures Used to Engage Congregants in The History and Legacy of Residential Schools and/or Colonization

This theme refers to those initiatives undertaken specifically with the intent to provide information or knowledge about the history and legacy of Residential Schools or colonization.

While the provision of information was also a component of the previously discussed educational measures, informational measures lack the increased complexity in content and delivery of an educational measure. Data analysis supports the presence of informational measures at the national and local levels of different denominations, but not regional, with some implementation of the national measures seen at the local level.

National. Interviews with Anglican (P4), Catholic (P15, P17), and Presbyterian (P7, P12) participants revealed that informational measures were used at the national level of each respective denomination. One Anglican (P4) clergy indicated that monthly newsletters from the national church often contained articles which discussed the history of Residential Schools or colonization, in addition to frequently advertising the Blanket Exercise. Of the two Catholic clergy (P15, P17) who mentioned informational measures, participant 15 referenced a letter written by a national bishop to explain the purpose of a denomination-wide reconciliation fund related to Residential Schools. Participant 17 described two statements issued by the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops in response to media coverage about unmarked graves. These statements discussed past Catholic Church involvement in Residential Schools and encouraged "awareness of our responsibility toward justice and truth." This clergy member further noted that these statements inspired him to host a solidarity mass:

> We held what we call a solidarity mass in the church and then we invited a prominent …Indigenous person to speak to the congregation, not at that mass. We also encouraged Indigenous members of the congregation and some other people—they wore orange T-shirts to mass that day. We also did have the community set up a teepee outside of the church. And then the worship and the message was on truth, reconciliation. So, that was a one-day event.

For the Presbyterians, participant 7 noted that the national church had provided some "suggestion" land acknowledgement content to help clergy and congregations "come up with something that is meaningful in our own context." This was in addition to the nationally produced newspaper, which participant 12 indicated often discussed "Indigenous issues," including the history of Residential Schools, and was regularly read by many congregants in the parish.

Local. The only example of informational measures given at the local level was from a United participant (P1) who described weekly blog posts that she wrote for her congregation:

> If something's been in the news, I often will provide a bit of theological reflection around that. So, sometimes it's been around finding unmarked graves. Sometimes it's around recognizing that we have to own our privilege and the impacts of colonialism, you know. I can't tell you how many times I've specifically talked about that stuff. Maybe once or twice? Two or three times over the past year?

6.1.2.3. Theme 6: Directives or Encouragements as Measures Used to Help Congregations Engage with the History and Legacy of Residential Schools and/or Colonization

This subtheme refers to those initiatives which were provided at the national or regional level and promoted, urged, or exhorted local congregations to undertake certain actions. While these measures do not actively provide education or information, they do have the potential to motivate congregations toward engagement with the history and legacy of Residential Schools or colonization. The data indicates that these measures occurred at both national and regional levels

of different denominations, with some resulting implementation or response from local congregations.

National. Three participants from Anglican (P4) and Presbyterian (P7, P10) denominations discussed specific encouragements from their respective national churches. An Anglican clergy member (P4) gave one example by saying:

> I would say, though, that there has been ongoing encouragement from [the regional archbishop] and the national church to really look at racism and the colonial methodology that has infiltrated our country from all walks of life. Yeah, to really examine that critically.

When the interviewer inquired about whether the monthly national newspaper was the medium for this encouragement, the participant responded affirmatively. Another participant (P10) discussed the Presbyterian national church's repudiation of the Doctrine of Discovery in 2019 and the resulting encouragement for clergy to educate congregants on the history and effects of colonization. Additionally, Presbyterian participant 18 mentioned the national church's position toward land acknowledgements, saying "we are encouraged to do them. If not every Sunday, at least on a regular basis. I am aware of some congregations that do it every Sunday before they begin their worship service." This was also emphasized by participant 7, as discussed in the previous section regarding the provision of suggested land acknowledgement components. However, they noted that in addition to these resources, the national church encouraged congregations to use and develop their own area-specific land acknowledgement. In response to this encouragement, participant 7 implemented the use of a land acknowledgement at monthly leadership (sessional) meetings but not at Sunday services. Similarly, a United participant (P2) noted both an encouragement from the national church regarding land acknowledgements as well

as the resulting implementation, saying, "[in] the United Church, it's not a requirement but perhaps an encouragement to do a land acknowledgement. So, that is part of every worship service that that we have."

Regional. Only Anglican participants (P3, P9) discussed directives or encouragements given by regional leadership to local congregations. These included emphasis from the diocese on acknowledging the denomination's role in Residential Schools (P9) and a directive to include a land acknowledgement in the Sunday service or bulletin each week (P3, P9). As a result, both Anglican participants represented in this section identified that they had incorporated an area-specific land acknowledgement in response to this recommendation.

6.1.2.4. Theme 7: Practices as Measures Used to Engage Congregants in the History and Legacy of Residential Schools and/or Colonization

This subtheme refers to those initiatives which primarily encompass actions or activities, something that people would do, as opposed to the provision of education, information, or directives. For clarity, while some educational measures included an active component, for example the Blanket Exercise, those initiatives differ from practices in that their primary goal was to actively teach individuals about the history and legacy of Residential Schools or colonization. In contrast, while practices or activities were used to engage congregants in these topics, the focus ranged from acknowledgement and solidarity to active reconciliation, rather than predominantly education. Based on the interviews, practices occurred at all levels of church organizations—national, regional, and local.

National. Twelve (P1, P2, P3, P5, P6, P7, P8, P10, P11, P14, P17, P18) out of 18 total participants from all four denominations noted nationally developed practices as measures for engaging with the topics of Residential Schools or colonization. This included three Anglican participants (P3, P6, P8), three Presbyterian participants (P7, P10, P18), four United participants (P1, P2, P5, P11), and one Catholic participant (P17). Specifically, Anglican (P3, P6, P8), United (P1, P5, P11), and Presbyterian (P7, 10, 18) participants all discussed the national recognition of Truth and Reconciliation Day by their respective denominations. All three of the United participants then discussed how they had implemented observation of this day with their individual congregations. Participant 5 noted, "taking advantage of the big national days, the National Day of Reconciliation, I've always believed in that and worked with the lay leaders to do something meaningful and maybe interactive around those big days. And Orange Shirt Day. That's always been important to me." A Presbyterian participant also discussed part of his observation of the National Day for Truth and Reconciliation with his congregation saying:

> On the Sunday closest to September 30th…I modified one of my own personal shirts, so that I could wear an orange-colored t-shirt, which to the best of my knowledge doesn't even exist [in the available clergy uniform]. But I was able to lead worship on that Sunday wearing the orange shirt symbolizing our support for [Orange Shirt Day]. And there were some people that jokingly commented about it and when I reminded them that today it was Orange Shirt Sunday…then quickly you could see in their faces the understanding of the decision I had made. (P18)

Similarly, two Anglican participants (P6, P8) also discussed the observation of this day with their individual congregations, demonstrating an implementation of the national denominational practice. This ranged from "being very sensitive" to the day and "having an appropriate

preacher" (P3) to "encouraging people to wear the orange shirt that day and marking it somehow in service as well" (P6).

Furthermore, one Presbyterian participant (P7) and one Catholic participant (P15) both mentioned their respective denomination's reconciliation fund, which were collected across the country to support reconciliation efforts specific to the history and legacy of Residential Schools. Land acknowledgements were also recognized as ongoing national practices by Presbyterian (P14, P18) participants. Participant 18 noted that, "[land acknowledgements are] always used. I haven't been to an assembly now in three or four years, but I'm pretty sure we do it at every Senate, every sitting of the Assembly, we acknowledge it." This was further confirmed by participant 14 who said, "the national church has a land acknowledgement that it uses consistently when the General Assembly meets, when its larger bodies meet."

Regional. The Anglican Church was the only denomination with a participant (P9) who discussed regional practices as measures for engagement with the topics of Residential Schools and colonization. Specifically, this participant (P9) mentioned a vigil that was hosted by the regional diocese at a proximate Residential School site as an act of remembrance. She also discussed the region's standard practice of including a land acknowledgement in communication such as emails and newsletters. For added texture, she described this practice saying, "at the bottom of their email or newsletters, [they'll] have a land acknowledgement of some sort. So, there's that constant. Trying to live into the 95 Calls to Action, specifically towards the reconciliation between churches and Residential School survivors" (P9).

Congregational. Eight participants (P1, P5, P6, P10, P12, P13, P14, P17) discussed practices that were in use at the congregational level, independent of any national or regional practices or directives. Land acknowledgements were the most common practice employed across the four denominations, as disclosed by one Anglican (P6), one Catholic (P13), three Presbyterian (P10, P12, P14), and two United (P1, P5) participants. Interestingly, the Presbyterian and United participants all emphasized that the land acknowledgements in use were crafted either by themselves or their congregants. Participant 14 described the frequency of use and impact of congregationally developed acknowledgements used in his Presbyterian congregation:

> We have done land acknowledgments but they are not an "always" event. And they are land acknowledgments that individuals have written themselves, which may not be as careful as one might want around naming the Indigenous groups that were present. But [they] are more a personal reflection on, "what does that mean? What does it mean to make this acknowledgement?" And we've had two or three really thoughtful presentations—very short, two minutes. But deeper thought pieces that have been used a number of times.

Another Presbyterian participant (P10) explained the process he used to derive his region-specific land acknowledgement by saying "I copied, pasted, edited something that was from the Anglican Church in Montreal. So, I just copy and paste what they said, and then took the names out and put in the Ojibwa people here." Similarly, a third Presbyterian clergy member (P12) discussed partnership with an Indigenous artist in the evolution of his congregation's land acknowledgement beyond a line in the weekly announcements:

> Me and a few other people in the congregation thought, "[a written line in the Sunday announcements] was not good enough. We need to put up a land acknowledgement, a permanent thing. Not within the sanctuary, but as people come in the door. That's the first

> thing they see. And so, we commissioned an Indigenous artist to do the land acknowledgement on this along with art.

For the Catholic participant (P13) the use of the land acknowledgement in his congregation was specifically tied to Catholic Women's League meetings. He explained their use of the land acknowledgement saying:

> We have an association and this is the Catholic Women's League. So, we have a meeting once a month. So, every time when we start the meeting, they always have a feather. And they have a prayer, which I think has the mention of the land acknowledgement prayer. So, they do that consistently, before they begin the monthly meeting and also their programs.

Aside from land acknowledgements, the Prayers of the People was another practice that was highlighted by a Presbyterian participant (P10) as a way that he helped his congregation engage with the history and legacy of Residential Schools. He illustrated this practice by explaining, "during our worship service, we have a time called the Prayers of the People. And so, when something has been highlighted, like certain graves have been dug up and discovered a history, then I do try to highlight those within [the Prayers]."

In short, while strategies for education were not provided nationally, denominations still undertook initiatives to engage congregants in the topics of the history and legacy of Residential Schools and/or colonization. These initiatives were categorized into the following main themes: 1) educational measures, 2) informational measures, 3) measures that provided directives or encouragements for engagement, and 4) specific practices as measures.

6.1.3. Section 3: Measures Used to Engage Congregants in the Topic of Reconciliation Broadly

Beyond the specific topics of the history and legacy of Residential Schools and colonization, churches also undertook measures to engage their congregants in reconciliation broadly. However, bearing in mind that the general topic of reconciliation was not included in Call 59 and therefore the research questions, these measures are examined only briefly in this section. The measures taken to engage congregants in the topic of reconciliation were analyzed into six main groups: (1) educational measures; (2) informational measures; (3) directives as measures; (4) inclusion of Indigenous culture as a measure; (5) building relationships with Indigenous individuals and communities as a measure; and (6) Indigenous denominational leadership as a measure. Six (P1, P2, P3, P4, P5, P11) out of 18 participants identified educational measures related to reconciliation. These two Anglican (P3, P4) and four (P1, P2, P5, P11) United participants mentioned educational measures like a lay leader-led book club on Indigenous topics, attending educational initiatives hosted in an Indigenous community, participation in a moccasin display for Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls (MMIWG), and congregational education about the upcoming United remit vote.

For informational measures, five (P1, P3, P5, P11, P15) participants, of which one (P3) was Anglican, one (P15) was Catholic, and three were United (P5, P11, P15), described initiatives such as regional emails about reconciliation resources and Indigenous Saint Days, advertising about webinars, and information about continuing education opportunities. One (P8) Anglican and one (P16) Catholic participant indicated the use of directives as a measure, like

encouragement to engage in reconciliation at the Anglican General Synod[9] and a regional Catholic bishop encouraging a focus on reconciliation in the diocese.

Inclusion of Indigenous culture as a measure to engage reconciliation was discussed by five (P1, P3, P4, P6, P8) participants, one (P6) United and four (P1, P3, P4, P8) Anglican. In this category, participants mentioned having a guest drummer and smudging in a service, attending a local powwow, inclusion of Indigenous languages in a service, and various Indigenous guests who shared their culture during sermons or events.

Five (P4, P6, P8, P15, P16) participants specifically identified building relationships with Indigenous individuals and communities as an intentional movement toward reconciliation. Of these participants, two (P15, P16) Catholic clergy mentioned partnering and visiting annually with an Indigenous parish, having a diocese-wide goal set by the bishop to build relationships between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people, and inviting Indigenous individuals to educate the diocese as a method of relationship-building. The remaining three (P4, P6, P8) Anglican participants disclosed working with homeless Indigenous individuals, reaching out to a local First Nation to build relationship, having a non-congregant Indigenous community member partner with clergy to provide feedback on reconciliation initiatives, and inviting Elders to various church functions.

Finally, seven (P3, P4, P6, P8, P10, P14, P18) participants identified Indigenous leadership within various levels of their denomination as a way that the church was engaging reconciliation. Four Anglican (P3, P4, P6, P8) participants noted Indigenous archdeacon, bishop, archbishop, and animator roles, while three (P10, P14, P18) Presbyterian participants mentioned an Indigenous animator, national council, and moderator. Overall, 13 (P1, P2, P3, P4, P5, P6, P8,

[9] The General Synod is the highest governing body of the Anglican Church of Canada (Anglican Church, 2025c).

P10, P11, P14, P15, P16, P18) out of 18 total participants indicated a measure used within their denomination to engage congregants in the topic of reconciliation with Indigenous Peoples broadly.

Overall, this subsection concludes the portion of the findings which present the data associated with first research question. These themes were divided into the above three main sections: a) themes relating to the development of national education strategies by the church parties; b) themes relating to methods used by churches to engage congregants in the history and legacy of Residential Schools and/or colonisation in lieu of national strategies; and c) themes relating to methods used by churches to engage congregants in reconciliation broadly beyond the topics of Residential Schools and colonization.

6.2. Findings Related to Research Question 2

This section explores those themes that relate to the second research question, which asks: what is the perceived effectiveness of these strategies at ensuring that each denomination's respective congregation learns about a) their church's role in colonization and b) the history and legacy of Residential Schools? However, because of the aforementioned lack of formalized educational strategies, this section pertains to the clergy preceptions of efficacy for those measures currently in place to engage congregants in the topics of the history and legacy of Residential Schools and colonization. Additionally, as with the findings for the first research question, participants did not specify whether the measures addressed their church denomination's specific role in the history. Therefore, this section only addresses the perceived efficacy of measures pertaining to the history and legacy of colonization and Residential Schools more broadly. Furthermore, as indicated by the data, perceived effectiveness of measures was characterized as a positive change or attitude in congregants toward these topics, such as through

increased knowledge or changes in perspectives. Perceived ineffectiveness was typically characterized by negative congregational responses to the topics or explicit statements about inefficacy made by clergy. As such, the findings to the second research question have been subdivided into three main subsections: 1) methods used to assess efficacy of measures in engaging congregants, 2) results of informal assessments used, and 3) barriers to effective education. These subsections have then been further subdivided into themes, as outlined below.

6.2.1. Section 4: Methods Used to Assess Perceived Educational Efficacy of Measures

This section discusses the findings related to the nature of the assessment methods used by local congregations to gauge the perceived efficacy of current initiatives. In doing so, it responds to the second research question by elucidating what clergy and congregations use to gauge effectiveness of the measures. Data analysis developed the following three main themes related to the assessment methods themselves: 1) clergy across all four denominations indicated that they conduct no formal assessments to gauge efficacy, 2) clergy from all four denominations indicated that they used informal assessments to gauge efficacy, 3) clergy indicated that they were not intentional in using these informal means of assessment on a regular basis.

6.2.1.1. Theme 1: No Formal Assessments Used to Gauge Efficacy of Initiatives

This theme refers to the tendency of clergy to rely on informal over formal assessments. That is, clergy report forgoing structured evaluation methods such as surveys, feedback groups, or annual reports when assessing the efficacy of current measures in engaging congregations with the topics of the history and legacy of Residential Schools or colonization. Thus, this theme captures all responses given by participants indicating that they did not use any formal assessments.

The data strongly support this theme in that no clergy from any denomination indicated the use of any formal assessment methods. For the Anglican clergy members (P3, P6, P8, P9), when asked about the kinds of assessments in use, none articulated any formal methodology as illustrated by participant 3 who responded, “nothing formal, that’s for sure.” Another Anglican participant similarly noted, “I would say informally because I don't write about it. I don't actually put numbers to paper…It's a general assessment of the pulse of the parish. And so, as priests we’re taught that it's just supposed to be instinctive” (P8). Participant 4, an Anglican lay leader, confirmed this when asked about her experience of assessment methods from a non-clergy perspective saying, “I have no idea. I don’t know. I’ve never been asked, myself, as a congregant.”

All five Presbyterian participants (P7, P12, P10, P14, P18) similarly did not report the use of any formal assessments. This was confirmed through responses such as, “there's nothing formal, I can tell you that right now” (P7), and “there's no formal assessment process” (P14), along with, “I guess it would have to be very informal” (P10). When asked whether the national Presbyterian church checked in with clergy to assess progress, participant 14 also stated that, “I think maybe when the animator was around but not anymore.”

The Catholic clergy (P13, P15, P16, P17) also demonstrated this theme with no reported formal assessment methods. Participant 13 indicated that he did not assess for efficacy, whether formally or informally, as education on these topics were not his “specific mission.” Participants 15 and 16 did not report any formalized assessment methods. Furthermore, Participant 17 described his approach as being, “very, very informal,” when asked directly about formal methods like surveys.

United clergy (P1, P2, P5, P11) similarly did not report the use of any formal assessment methods. Participant 11 described the assessment process by saying, “there's no formal assessment tool, really, that's being used. So, it's really up to the minister and worship committee.” Participant 2 agreed that “up to this point, I would say it’s more informal.” Overall, participants did not identify any formal methods used to assess the efficacy of measures. However, they did report the use of various informal assessments, as introduced in the next theme.

6.2.1.2. Theme 2: Informal Assessments Used to Gauge the Efficacy of Initiatives Across All Denominations

Interview responses relating to any informal assessments used by clergy were analysed into three subthemes that collectively respond to the first portion of the second research question. These subthemes delineate the type of informal assessments used: (1) conversations as assessments; (2) observational assessments; and (3) lay leader or council feedback as assessments. Overall, 16 out of 18 total participants (P1, P2, P3, P5, P6, P7, P8, P9, P10, P11, P12, P14, P15, P16, P17), identified some form of informal assessment used to gauge the efficacy of initiatives. This included four out of five Anglican (P3, P6, P8, P9), three out of four Catholic (P15, P16, P17, P18), all five Presbyterian (P7, P10, P12, P14, P18), and all four United (P1, P2, P5, P11) participants.

6.2.1.2.1. Conversations as Assessment

This subtheme refers to informal methods of assessment that centre around conversations between clergy and parishioners as a method of gauging the effectiveness of ongoing measures for engagement in the topics of Residential Schools or colonization. Overall, 12 (P2, P3, P5, P6,

P7, P8, P9, P10, P11, P12, P16, P17) out of 18 participants discussed conversations as a method for evaluation during their interviews, with all four denominations represented.

Every Anglican participant (P3, P6, P8, P9) discussed conversations as a key informal method of assessing the efficacy of measures within their congregations. Participant 3 briefly elaborated on how she employs this practice by stating, "if I hear something that comes from a conversation, I think, well, I guess we could do something about that." When asked, Participant 8 explained his preferred approach to conversations as assessments:

> [In] one-on-one and group[s]. Well, I think that's important to do both over coffee with someone, because that's when you can get them feeling the most safe and natural. But I think you do need to stretch people by talking about the elephant in the room.

A quotation from participant 6 adds texture to the type of conversational content used in assessments:

> I feel like I've seen progress in congregations throughout the years. So, the last pushback I have is kind of less…questioning about 'why are we doing this? Why do we have to always bring this up' and so on. And it feels like an acceptance level is growing. So yeah, just in conversation.

Two Catholic participants (P16, P17) also referenced conversations as an assessment method. Participant 16 noted that these conversations were one-on-one, rather than in a group. Participant 17 described how a conversation could help him assess congregational learning through "ongoing conversation with the people and feedback, that's what they testified. That, they lacked the knowledge of what happened [in Residential Schools]. So it was more of a testimony, you know, from the people."

For Presbyterian participants, three clergy members (P7, P10, P12) used conversations with congregants to assess the efficacy of past and ongoing initiatives. Participant 7 explained that, as opposed to formal assessment methods, “it's all just by comment that you learn anything. There's nothing written that that would tell you how this is going here.” Participant 12 described his approach to engaging his congregants in conversations to assess their responses:

> If I’m unsure about somebody, I'll call them. I'll give them a call [and ask] “hey, how you doing? What'd you think about what we talked about in church today?”…Or, “when that Indigenous family came in, you didn't sit in your normal pew. Why was that?”…And sometimes it's a very general question.

Participant 10 depicted a similar use of questions in conversations with congregants to gauge the efficacy of different measures:

> Usually, for anything new that I tried to do, I tried to ask a few people like, “hey, what did you think? Was there anything that I could have worked on? Or corrected?” But listening during some of the sermons where I've mentioned Aboriginal [topics], I did ask a few people, I pulled them aside, like, how's that so far?

He then explained that, depending on the response, he might further engage with an individual to gain deeper understand of where the congregation is at large:

> During conversations…I might try to dig a little bit more to see where they're at or their understanding. But while not trying to rush ahead too much as well, surveying myself to see exactly where the congregation is when it comes to reconciliation or the Residential Schools…I would just ask or just see what pops up in conversation.

Three United clergy (P2, P5, P11) also mentioned conversations as an assessment method during their interviews. Participant 5 described different conversations with congregants that

> helped him better understand how the church was responding to topics related to the history and legacy of Residential Schools and colonization. Participant 2 likewise described the types of conversations that help her gauge the efficacy of measures saying, "I'm looking for personal response or feedback in some way. Either [someone saying] I really appreciated that prayer that you offered or I really like that you do land acknowledgement, or I don't understand why we do land acknowledgement."

Participant 11 noted some types of comments that he finds particularly helpful to understand congregational responses saying, "when you hear congregants making racist comments related to the remit and things like that, then you have to deal with that. And that's more pastoral and more tricky." The interviewer clarified that he meant one-on-one conversations, to which he replied, "with congregations, yeah. When you hear the remit coming up, or when you hear comments coming up."

Generally, a majority of participants used conversations as an assessment method to gauge the efficacy of the various measures on their congregation's engagement with the history and legacy of Residential Schools or colonization. However, as detailed in the following section, some participants also used observational assessments for this purpose.

6.2.1.2.2. Observational Assessments

This subtheme refers to those assessments made by clergy based on what they notice or observe in terms of congregational responses to various measures. This subsection therefore outlines the use of observation as a method of assessment by clergy in gauging the efficacy of measures in engaging congregants in the topics of Residential Schools or colonization. It is important to note that while comments made by congregants appear as data in both this and the previous section, what distinguishes a conversation-based assessment from an observational

assessment is whether the comments were made directly to the participant or not. Overall, 11 (P1, P3, P5, P6, P7, P9, P12, P14, P15, P16, P18) out of 18 total participants used observational assessments with their congregations.

Three (P3, P6, P9) out of five Anglican participants discussed the use of observational assessments during their interviews. Participant 9 discussed observing interactions between congregants as well as comments that might be made during gatherings:

> Right now, it's more informal, just spending a lot of time observing and listening. The biggest component right now [is] just kind of listening to the stories, seeing the interaction between Indigenous and non-Indigenous [people] in the congregation. To hear, listen, and observe, not just non-Indigenous reaction to them, but vice versa.

Participant 6 similarly overheard comments made by congregants during services as a form of assessment but also noted the limitations of this method:

> It mostly happens through the Sunday [service], various Sundays, and [land] acknowledgments and so on. Yeah, I wouldn't be able to really assess what's actually going on in people's minds as they sit in the pews, you know, and hear this stuff. Except to say that you just don't get the same kind of either pushback or comments, or hearing people just say wrong things.

For the Catholic participants, two (P15, P16) out of four mentioned the use of observational assessments with Participant 16 noticing changes in congregant openness during an event:

> It’s sad. We had a huge gala here…and we had worked hard as part of that gala to do some education on culture. And people were buying into what we were doing. And we could see that there was some growth and some change. And then unfortunately, we had an Indigenous homeless fellow that came in and caused some issues. And all of a sudden, what we saw

> went from openness to completely backing away. And so, it's one small instance, those stereotypes just rushed back in.

When asked how he gained observational data, Participant 15 described his process for observing his congregation and assessing their responses:

> I can see on their face. I can read it in a crowd. When you're a public [inaudible], it doesn't take long, every politician will tell you whether they love the people or not, when they're booing you then, oh, it's not going very well. I can tell by a kind of an uncomfortable silence. I know when that silence is totally comfortable. And when the silence is uncomfortable.

He also discussed observing facial expressions as part of assessing his congregation and his own capacity to use this assessment method:

> People, now, they're getting used to it and they're smiling and they come up and there [is] very little disdain or a look or that smirky kind of look you see—and so I can tell the public, and I talked to [people] for years, so I can read my kids, you know, whether they are understanding something or not understanding something. I'm not gonna say all people are good at that. I think I'm fairly good at it.

Out of all the denominations, Presbyterians had the highest reports of observational assessment methods. Four (P7, P12, P14, P18) out of five participants described different ways that they observed their congregations to further understand how individuals were responding to various measures. Participant 12 mentioned looking for displays of emotions, saying, “some of them love what you're saying. When we did the dedication ceremony for the plaque, there were people who cried.” Participant 14 instead discussed looking at specific actions taken by congregants, like the installation of a sign with a land acknowledgement at a summer residence.

Both participant 7 and 18 discussed observing attendance for events or services, with participant 18 noting increased attendance as a piece of data that he used to assess change. Participant 7 specifically noted, “nobody walks out of the worship service or says anything in particular, and they come back the next Sunday. So, [I] figure out whatever I'm doing is, they're either putting up with or they're learning.”

Two (P1, P5) out of four United participants used observational methods of assessment. Participant 1 specifically mentioned observationally gauging how congregants respond during services stating, “I think it's reflected too in the language that we use. So around here…people don't freak out anyways when we use language like settler, like the settler community.” While a majority of participants cited observation as a key method of informal assessment, some also relied on lay leader and leadership council feedback to assess their congregations, as discussed below.

6.2.1.2.3. Lay Leader and Council Feedback

This subtheme refers to an informal method of assessment whereby clergy rely on feedback from lay leaders, various council structures, or other forms of congregational leadership to gain information about the efficacy of various measures. Two Catholic (P15, P16), one Presbyterian (P7), and one United (P11) clergy revealed use of lay leader or council feedback as an assessment method. Participant 16, a Catholic, illustrated the role of a council structure in helping clergy discern congregational engagement:

> Where I'm sometimes hearing it is when I'm sitting around table with the leadership…And so, there are lay members of the community that sit on an advisory committee for me and help me be able to discern what we're doing within the parish. And so oftentimes, I get [feedback] coming to me through that.

Another Catholic participant also described the role of a lay leader council in assessing congregational receptivity and therefore how best to approach engagement with the parish around Residential School or colonization topics:

> The people I've got on the [reconciliation-focused leadership team]…they're not people who are going to just start ramming things down somebody's throat, they're just always inviting and recommending and suggesting and so they make themselves known in the parish. (P15)

A Presbyterian participant similarly described the consultation role that their leadership team plays in assessing congregational engagement and the resulting impact on future endeavours saying, “in our leadership teams…we have an implementation team, we have different ones who we are actively engaging in conversations about how do we present opportunities for the congregation to learn” (P7).

Finally, a United participant again demonstrated this subtheme by discussing the role of multiple leadership teams in soliciting feedback about congregational engagement:

> It would be the board. It would be asking for feedback from a board after the service happened or after the sermon. Or it would be the worship committee. And again, the outreach committee. So those three would be places for getting feedback from and having discussion. (P11)

Overall, clergy from all four denominations indicated that informal assessments were used to gauge the efficacy of initiatives. These informal assessments were delineated into three main subthemes: (1) conversations as assessments; (2) observational assessments; and (3) lay leader or council feedback.

6.2.1.3. Theme 3: Clergy Not Intentional in Using Informal Assessments to Gauge Educational Efficacy

This theme refers to the intentionality with which clergy used the informal assessments discussed above. While clear that they were using informal assessments, four (P1, P7, P8, P11) out of 18 participants noted that they were not intentional in their use of these informal assessments. Two United participants (P1, P11) explicitly used the phrase, "not intentional" when describing their assessment process. An Anglican participant (P8) called his assessment practice "instinctive," indicating that he assessed based on his instincts, rather than a deliberate practice. Participant 7 went so far as calling his informal assessment "pretty sketchy," again indicating a lack of intentionality with assessment.

In brief, this section has reviewed the assessment methods used by local congregations to gauge the efficacy of current initiatives. Through data analysis, three main themes were established: 1) clergy across all four denominations indicated that they conduct no formal assessments to gauge efficacy, 2) clergy from all four denominations indicated that they used informal assessments to gauge efficacy, 3) clergy indicated that they were not intentional in using these informal means of assessment on a regular basis.

6.2.2. Section 5: Results from Informal Assessments: Do the Measures Work?

Based on the informal assessments conducted, clergy indicated that the measures had a range of perceived efficacy in their local congregations. Data analysis revealed two main themes related to perceived efficacy of the measures in engaging congregants in the topics of the history and legacy of Residential Schools and colonization. Collectively, these themes respond to the second part of the second research question and are as follows: a) the perceived effectiveness of initiatives in engaging congregants in the history and legacy of Residential Schools, and b) the

perceived effectiveness of initiatives in engaging congregants in the history and legacy of colonization.

6.2.2.1. Theme 4: Perceived Effectiveness of Initiatives Engaging Congregants in the History and Legacy of Residential Schools

This theme refers to the perceived effectiveness of the measures in engaging congregants in the history and legacy of Residential Schools, as articulated by participants and based on their informal assessment methods. Participants reported complexity related to perceived efficacy, with measures showing some combination of perceived effectiveness and ineffectiveness. Based on the data, perceived effectiveness was conceptualized as a positive change or attitude in congregants toward this topic, such as through increased knowledge or changes in perspectives. Perceived ineffectiveness was measured by explicit statements about inefficacy made by participants or negative congregational responses to the topic. Altogether, 10 (P3, P4, P8, P9, P10, P12, P14, P15, P16, P17) out of 18 participants commented on the perceived effectiveness of the measures related to Residential Schools, whether that was to indicate effectiveness or ineffectiveness.

6.2.2.1.1. Subtheme: Initiatives Have Some Perceived Efficacy at Engaging Congregants in the Topic of Residential Schools

This subtheme refers to indictors given by participants, based on informal assessments, that the measures used have had some efficacy in engaging congregants about the history and legacy of Residential Schools. Overall, four Anglican participants (P3, P4, P8, P9), two Catholic participants (P15, P17), and two Presbyterian participants (P10, P12) discussed a positive change in congregants related to understanding the history and legacy of Residential Schools. For

Anglican participants, one clergy member (P3) specifically noted increased understanding among congregants about the effects of Residential School trauma:

> But I've certainly seen a shift in people's understanding of how trauma informs people's mental health or ability to cope. And so, a less harsh, judgmental approach to the people that might present themselves [at the church] for help... I think, in understanding more about the trauma for the people from Residential Schools and their generations, that understanding helps [congregants] to inform a broader group of people that are struggling as a result of trauma. (P3)

Another Anglican participant (P6) described a change over time in comments made by congregants about Residential Schools:

> Once upon a time, you would hear people say, "well, good thing we weren't involved in the Residential Schools." But now I think people won't say things like that … those kinds of things don't happen as much, or I can't remember the last time that kind of conversation happened. Whereas, 10-15 years ago, you would often hear things like that.

Two other Anglican participants (P8, P9) described increased interest in topics or events related to Residential Schools. Participant 9 discussed the youth response to Orange Shirt Day in their congregation saying, "The youth love it. The youth are all over [it]. They think, 'hey, that's great. Let's wear orange shirts.'" The other participant (P8) said of his congregation, "but I do know that there are people that are passionate about, you know, the work of reconciliation and the TRC." When asked to expand, he described one congregant, "you know, one in particular, she has a passion. She took some [other congregants] under her wing…"

One Catholic participant (P17) similarly described the effectiveness of a solidarity mass event:

> I will say to that extent it was well received, in the sense that people did testify to what they have learned through the whole process. I would say there was some educational advancement in terms of the people, the congregation, who were part of the whole event… that's what they testified that they lacked the knowledge of what happened [in Residential Schools].

Another similarly described his leadership team's increased understanding of the effects of Residential Schools because of educational measures:

> And we did the, what do you call it, the Truth and Reconciliation? The 95. And that, helped, because it encouraged the parish to try to get involved… All of that literature, all of that documentation, all of the raising of that content has helped raise our consciousness and become more compassionate and understanding. (P15)

A Presbyterian participant (P12) also indicated the effectiveness of the online resources and national newspaper in engaging congregants:

> I think the vast majority of the congregation is very well educated in the Residential School issue. A lot of them have used the resources that were made available to the church. There's also our church newspaper that comes from the national church that does speak about Indigenous issues a lot. And then a lot of them will pick up one of those newspapers and bring it…The vast majority is on board. They're well educated. They know exactly what happened. They know exactly—some of them can name the schools, or I'm not sure [if] there's more than one.

Another Presbyterian clergy member (P10) described some positive attitudes toward practicing Orange Shirt Day saying, "I do recognize a few of them have worn orange shirts on appropriate days and have been vocal about, like we have to remember this." Overall, there were some

indicators given by participants that the various measures were contributing to an increased positive engagement with the history and legacy of Residential Schools by congregants. However, the next subtheme outlines statements by participants which demonstrate some ineffectiveness of the measures.

6.2.2.1.2. Subtheme: Initiatives Have Some Perceived Inefficacy at Engaging Congregants in the Topic of Residential Schools

This subtheme refers to those evaluations based on informal assessments wherein clergy found the measures to have some ineffectiveness in engaging congregants in the topic of the history and legacy of Residential Schools. Two Anglican (P8, P9), two Catholic (P15, P16), and three Presbyterian (P10, P12, P14) participants made comments which pointed to this lack of efficacy. One Anglican participant (P8) disclosed that he felt the measures employed thus far were insufficient saying, “you’ve got to do something. You’ve got to be proactive in trying to change the whole culture. And so, I think that's still a work in progress. Quite frankly, I don't think we're, they're not even close. To be honest.” He also mentioned a lingering lack of participation from senior congregants in response to Truth and Reconciliation Sunday, a further indicator of low efficacy, saying “there's very few seniors that'll wear an orange shirt and I don't think they really buy into, why are we doing it? Like I think they just don't feel connected emotionally to that.” He later expanded on how senior congregants continue to respond to the topic of Residential Schools:

> [In] my talks with some of the seniors, they're saying, “well, we did right by [Indigenous people attending Residential Schools]. Most of them, they'll admit, there were some that were abused, but they don't see it as being a sin to have the schools. But there, they won't acknowledge that there was some really bad stuff that happened in those schools.

Another participant (P9) from an Anglican church described how a contingent of her congregation seemed to not understand the continued need to engage with the topic of Residential Schools:

> I'm still trying to figure out if it's really racism that's the underlying tone and what kind of education needs to be done to help them understand that this isn't just, “oops” or “sorry”, “ok let's move on” kind of thing. Like what I mean, do you see the intergenerational trauma? And the last Residential Schools closed in 1996. So, it's just on the tail end. That's a question for me to ponder and inquire in my own congregation here.

Similarly, a Catholic participant (P15) illustrated his perception of the low efficacy of the measures by describing lingering attitudes of some Catholic clergy and congregations toward Residential School education:

> Some orders don't take [education] as seriously as they should or some dioceses, or some diocesan priests. They may just see it as, “this is all about a land grab [for Indigenous people], it's all about money.” I'm sure you have too. I see that kind of response. Believe it or not, that can even come out of the mouth of a priest. I wouldn't say many [think that], but I would say it's evident. We come from where we were born. And we bring that environment in many ways to other places. Those attitudes are there.

Another Catholic participant (P16) described a sense of not doing enough in response to the unmarked graves and the resulting confusion felt by parishioners about the historical Catholic role in Residential Schools:

> Our role in Residential Schools is important to—moving forward from that time—and the rebuilding of relationship and the reconciliation—I think we could have done a lot better than what we did locally with that … And I think we dropped the ball on that. It wasn't enough at

> all. It ended up creating confusion [for congregants]…because there wasn't lots of clarification on things in us dropping the ball.

A Presbyterian participant (P12) similarly disclosed that some of his congregants had negative responses to the mention of unmarked graves in a sermon:

> When those graves were found [at] that Residential School in British Columbia, I did say something about that…I used that as an example on the Sunday following in my sermon…And that was met with backlash, believe it or not. Yeah, it's an uphill battle. You know, there are people who are afraid to take responsibility, I think, for anything.

He further elaborated on a specific response saying, "I actually received some nasty emails from a parishioner that was like, 'oh, yeah, well, if it follows and kids were killed, show me the bodies' kind of thing, you know."

Another Presbyterian clergy member (P10) pointed to a continued lack of responsibility felt by different congregations within the Presbyterian Church and the resulting need for further education:

> Because the Residential Schools—many congregations might be far from that reality. And then they may not feel like they bear the responsibility of, say, an individual school. But it's still important to be educated to understand that the Presbyterian Church as a national body did take part in this. And though individual congregations may not feel that responsibility, we're still meant to know about it and understand that as a collective, we played a part.

When asked how he thought implementation of educational measures was going in the Presbyterian church, participant 14 said, "not well. Certainly, here in Ontario, I don't think it's going well at all. I think in the West it's a different story because it's unavoidable. But here, I don't think it's went well." He further explained the lack of efficacy, saying "[Education is] not

happening…I don't think my colleagues are struggling with that. I don't think they're helping their congregations struggle with that. I don't think we see this as important."

Overall, 10 out of 18 participants spoke to their perceptions of effectiveness for the measures in engaging congregants in the topic of Residential Schools. They indicated that the measures showed some efficacy and inefficacy with their congregations.

6.2.2.2. Theme 5: Perceived Effectiveness of Initiatives Engaging Congregants in The Topic of Colonization

This theme refers to the perceived effectiveness of the measures in engaging congregants in the topic of colonization, as articulated by participants and based on their informal assessment methods. Altogether, seven (P2, P5, P6, P7, P10, P12, P14) out of 18 participants commented on the effectiveness of the measures related to colonization, whether that was to indicate some markers of perceived effectiveness, ineffectiveness, or a mixed response.

6.2.2.2.1. Subtheme: Initiatives Have Some Perceived Efficacy at Engaging Congregants in The Topic of Colonization

This subtheme captures all data indicating that the measures used within denominations have had some perceived effectiveness in engaging congregants about the history of colonization. Three participants (P5, P10, P14) out of 18 indicated that the measures geared toward engaging congregants in the topic of colonization had some degree of efficacy, as demonstrated by positive responses, actions, or changes seen in congregants. To illustrate this subtheme, one Presbyterian participant (P14) disclosed how a congregant was personally engaging with the land acknowledgement by including a land acknowledgement sign outside their cottage. A second Presbyterian participant (P10) described a lack of negative response to a land acknowledgement and indicating congregational change by saying, "I've made the point to do [land

acknowledgements] on those special Sundays, to have this statement of a recognition of whose land this is. And so far, I have not been getting any rumbles or anger."

A third participant (P5) noted another positive encounter about a land acknowledgement with a congregant at his United church:

> A younger father had come up to me and said, "I really liked that." And I brought it back. And he said to me, again…"I really liked that." And I said, "I know you told me that a couple of months ago, that you like us having to do the acknowledgement… Which confirms the hypothesis, in my mind that this is part of the educational process, when people have to speak it, as opposed to just listening, there's more commitment, or a challenge to their value system.

Generally, responses indicate that participants perceive land acknowledgements to have had some efficacy in engaging congregants in the topic of colonization.

6.2.2.2.2. Subtheme: Initiatives Have Some Perceived Inefficacy at Engaging Congregants in The Topic of Colonization

This subtheme captures all data indicating that the measures used by denominations have had some degree of perceived inefficacy in engaging congregants about the history of colonization. Three (P2, P6, P7) out of 18 participants commented on a sense of ineffectiveness. For example, an Anglican participant (P6) predicted a widescale lack of knowledge about the Doctrine of Discovery within his congregation:

> If I were just to ask people [to] raise their hand on a Sunday morning and say, "if I were to want to talk about the Doctrine of Discovery, how many people would know what I'm talking about," maybe a third of people might raise their hands. And of those third, probably only a third of those would have a deeper understanding of what it actually was and its effects.

In another illustration of this subtheme, a Presbyterian participant (P7) described an incident in response to the use of a land acknowledgement in the service where "that day there was a gentleman in the congregation … [who] said, "why are we doing this?" So, it had to be that congregation hadn't really thought too much. Another participant (P2) from a United church similarly experienced a negative response to a land acknowledgement:

> I had one couple that said to me that they completely tune out when I begin the land acknowledgement and probably don't start listening again until the Scriptures are being read. So that was, "if you don't stop using it, we're just not really there." And the husband of that couple said that he felt it was just lip service, that it really didn't mean anything and doesn't do any good. He got quite angry about the fact that it happens.

6.2.2.2.3. Subtheme: Initiatives Have Mixed Perceived Effectiveness in Engaging Congregants in the Topic of Colonization

This subtheme reflects a mixed response from congregants to engaging with the topic of colonization, with both some perceived effectiveness and ineffectiveness present. Only one participant (P12) noted a mixed response from congregants. He described how the congregation reacted to the installation of a plaque containing a land acknowledgement in the foyer of the church saying, "some of them love what you're saying…there were people who cried. And there were people who sat there and thought, I hate every second of this."

In summary, this subsection is included within a larger section which examines the perceived efficacy of measures in ensuring education for local congregations. The data were analyzed into two main themes: a) the perceived effectiveness of initiatives in engaging congregants in the history and legacy of Residential Schools, and b) the perceived effectiveness of initiatives in engaging congregants in the history and legacy of colonization.

6.2.3. Section 6: Barriers to Education

Given the lack of national strategies and the limited efficacy reported above, data analysis revealed several barriers to effective education of congregations related to the history and legacy of Residential Schools and colonization. These barriers are broken down into the following themes and are explored in the next sections: a) barriers to education that would have been mitigated by a national education strategy, b) aging mainline congregations, c) staffing issues within the denominations, d) impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic, e) fear of negative congregational responses to education, and f) racism or stereotypes within congregations.

6.2.3.1. Theme 6: Barriers to Education that Would Have Been Mitigated by a National Education Strategy

When examining data involving barriers to education, a collection of barriers were grouped together based on the analysis that these barriers could reasonably have been mitigated, in part or whole, by the existence of a national education strategy from each denomination. Correspondingly, these mitigatable barriers form the following subthemes within this section: a) a lack of direction or leadership for education, b) a lack of clergy knowledge about resources or history, c) issues with the provided resources, d) information not filtering effectively between organizational levels, and e) lack of prioritization for education. Seventeen out of 18 participants, apart from participant 12, discussed in their interview the existence of a barrier that in some way could have been addressed by a national strategy.

6.2.3.1.1. Subtheme: Lack of Direction or Leadership

Four (P8, P14, P16, P17) out of 18 clergy indicated that a lack of direction or leadership from a higher level of their denominational organization was a barrier to educating their congregation.

One Anglican participant (P8) illustrated this issue when he described the national church's provision of online resources:

> And they usually just post something on the national website … what I would like to be able to have is a rep come to our parish church and say to the local people here, "this is what you've got to do as far as starting the process."

He further commented on the lack of direction provided on how to put resources, like the toolkit, into action:

> I don't think there's been [pauses] You can maybe provide a toolkit, but I think we need some real, like the 59-step thing that we just need to put a little more grit into each of those instead of just having it as a paper. How can we make this paper come alive? So, I just don't see how that's translating.

When asked directly if having more direction would be helpful, he replied, "some leadership in it, yeah." Like participant 8's reference to a dedicated representative, a Catholic participant noted a barrier in the lack of specialized leadership roles related to education:

> If such an office was to exist, then a lot of things will be coming out from another office and then that can inspire more action. So, the diocese currently does not have an office. There are personnel, who can issue documents or statements on behalf of the Archdiocese. But if such such policies and initiatives are to be taken to the grassroot…there has to be an office…somebody who is in a department of the Archdiocese to further push.

Another Catholic participant (P16) also expressed a lack of leadership as a barrier when describing potential differences in education between congregations:

> I can do something here, [parish name], but you can go 15 minutes, 5, 10 minutes up the road to another parish. That's why it's so important that it be implemented from a diocesan level.

> So that we're all as parishes trying to do the same thing. And that can be sometimes an issue. Because I may be open to it, but my neighbouring parish and pastor may not be open to the same level or wanting to do it, so it doesn't get done. But if it's something that can be rolled out from the diocese, where you're including the lay leadership, then all of a sudden more begins to happen.

6.2.3.1.2. Subtheme: "A Huge Lacuna": Filtering Information Through Levels of Church Organization

Three participants (P6, P8, P17) from Anglican and Catholic denominations noted challenges in how information filters from higher to lower levels of their respective Church. An Anglican clergy member (P8) demonstrated this theme by stating:

> The challenge we have is that there's very few resources from the national to the local diocese level. And so, because there's not that much resource networking from the national to the diocese level, and of course that trickle-down effect is we get even less resources for the local parish.

Participant 6, also an Anglican, agreed with this sentiment when he said, "I would say, I have not seen a lot of material filtered down through to the congregational level." Participant 17 described a similar phenomenon within the Catholic church:

> There has to be a creative way to distill [the educational piece] through the archdiocese, and therefore, you know, offices and then down to the parishes. Because the average member of the congregation does not even know that the Conference of Catholic Bishops has a website, not to talk of knowing what is there, right? They know about the archdiocese or their diocesan website. But not to the extent that they know their parish's website. So, if it comes down from the CCB, and then goes down to the archdiocese, and then comes down to the

> parish level, then it goes to the individual parishioner. So that gap is huge. It's a huge lacuna. And it has to be breached for there to be more educational effort…For me, that will be a recommendation for the future as to how this is going to happen in churches, like the Catholic Church. With well-established structure. We should not leave a gap in the educational piece. That gap has to close. If it doesn't close, everything becomes just a document not translated into action.

6.2.3.1.3. Subtheme: Lack of Clergy Knowledge about Resources or History

Six (P3, P5, P8, P9, P11, P13, P18) out of 18 participants disclosed a lack of knowledge or familiarity with the provided resources or the general history of Residential Schools or colonization. As previously noted, three Anglican clergy (P3, P8, P9) illustrated this theme by indicating that they were unfamiliar with the national website resources provided by the Anglican church. Having immigrated to Canada as an adult, another clergy member (P13) discussed a lack of education about the history of Residential Schools and colonization and the resulting lack of investment in educating his Catholic congregation on these topics:

> Not with the Truth and Reconciliation. Not my mission. Maybe this interview might inspire me go and read a little more. Because I never did it formally…I never did any other education here. So that's probably why I never had to learn the history of Canada. I didn't have to study that…and I didn't specifically learn about anything about Canada other than you have wonderful people here or the place here.

When asked whether his ordination in Canada required him to learn, formally or informally, about the history of the Catholic Church in Canada, he replied that he only was required to learn about Canon Law.

A Presbyterian participant (P18) further demonstrated this theme when he expressed that a lack of education about these topics impacted his capacity to educate his congregation:

> On a personal level, I'm still coming up trying to figure out what's the best approach for me to bring it forward and be a teacher of it as someone who is not as well educated in what's the best way to do that. I'm still grappling with what's the best way for me to do that.

Another participant (P11) described a lack of familiarity with regional initiatives and resources that could help to educate his congregation:

> And sorry, just with the amount of time, I'm not remembering the details of the speakers, and then I try to remember what else our region—I'm newer to this region…So, I'm not familiar yet with what initiatives they're working on.

6.2.3.1.4. Subtheme: "There's Just Not Very Good Resources Out There": Resource Issues

This theme captures any issues with the nationally or regionally provided resource materials themselves, such as availability, quantity, or content. Five (P1, P5, P8, P14, P16) out of 18 participants noted issues of some kind with the materials that their denomination had provided related to the history and legacy of Residential Schools or colonization. This included one Anglican (P8), one Catholic (P16), one Presbyterian (P14), and two United (P1, P5) participants. The Anglican participant (P8) identified several concerns, first citing resource quality and availability by saying, "I probably could do more spearheading in [education], but it's partly there's just not very good resources out there." He also stated that there was a lack in resource diversity beyond written material: "so that's the effort on the national church end but there's not very much video resourcing, I have to say." His other concern centred on the age of the target audience for available resources:

> But as far as organized education, I don't even know where to start really. I mean, the toolkit would be helpful, I guess, but I don't know if it has anything appropriate for young ages … Maybe like I would say preteen. Teen to young adult, they could probably segue into that toolkit area, but I would have strong reservations about whether it'd be appropriate for the preteens.

The Catholic clergy member (P16) specifically discussed a lack of education resourcing related to the Pope's visit to Canada and apology for Residential Schools in 2022:

> Unfortunately, we dropped the ball on the Pope's visit. I think we could have used—I think we could have done a lot better educating our people with what happened in its history of Residential Schools. Our role in Residential Schools is important to moving forward from that time, and the rebuilding of relationship and the reconciliation, I think we could have done a lot better than what we did locally with that, and I think we dropped the ball on that. There wasn't enough…And so, I think, and then lots fell on individual clergy members to try and bridge that gap.

Participant 14 discussed several issues that he perceived with the national Presbyterian resources, including the introductory nature of the materials:

> This will sound very arrogant. I've been inside the story too long. I find a lot of the stuff we produce nationally is introductory and also does too much virtue signaling. I think the conversation is deeper than lots of the resources provide…And there's that level of everyday reality [that] the nationally produced material does not confront, or the fact that I live on contested territory, which is an everyday reality. The national material just doesn't help dig down into what does this mean, that this is an everyday reality [that] I am living as a colonial person.

He further mentioned the abstract nature of the resources stating, “I guess it's abstract, it feels abstract, but much material feels abstract as opposed to no, this is a lived reality, not just for Indigenous people. But for me.” When asked specifically about the availability of resources related to the history of colonization and the Doctrine of Discovery he said, “[it’s] not a lot. It's primarily print material that's been produced. And it's, to be honest, it's not a lot.

A United participant (P5) shared similar concerns about the abstract nature of the materials provided by the United church:

> [The national church] gave us these documents, but actually putting it into play is a big difference from words on a page to a worship leader saying it in a sanctuary or at a board meeting or at an annual meeting. And I learned that, and I think that's been one of the challenges with the documents is they're very abstract documents. And the implementation depends on the closer to the grassroots administration, translating that abstract material, and it really depends on who you've got [in leadership].

He also illustrated this section’s theme when discussing resource availability and accessibility:

> We're trying to find as much as we can. There's not a plethora of resources. It's looking and digging to find these things that will help us. I don't think the national church, like I think it tries. And maybe this new effort [with the remit vote], if we can empower the Indigenous church to forge out in its own way and have its own voice that is equal to the United Church’s, maybe there will be more push to provide resources to us that are more what we need in leadership. I think they try but I think we're still playing catch up a lot of the time in terms of the resources available to us.

Participant 1 echoed the sentiments about resource availability saying, “and the United Church website sucks. The big one. It's so hard to find stuff. Like stuff you know is there and you put it in the search engine and…[trails off].”

6.2.3.1.5. Subtheme: Education Is Not Prioritized

Fifteen (P1, P2, P3, P4, P5, P6, P7, P8, P10, P11, P13, P14, P15, P16, P18) out of 18 participants identified a lack of prioritization as a key barrier to educating congregants about the history and legacy of Residential Schools or colonization. This included four Anglican (P3, P4, P6, P8), three Catholic (P13, P15, P16), three Presbyterian (P7, P14, P18), and four United (P1, P2, P5, P11) participants. Within the theme of prioritization, data falls into one of three subthemes: 1) initiative or interest of leadership determines degree of prioritization; 2) other parish priorities are prioritized over education; and 3) other topics of interest are prioritized over education.

6.2.3.1.5.1. Sub-Subtheme: “It Really Depends on Who You’ve Got”: Initiative or Interest of Leadership Determines Degree of Prioritization

Eight (P2, P5, P7, P8, P11, P15, P16, P18) out of 18 participants indicated that the initiative or interest of leadership determined the degree to which education was prioritized. Two (P5, P16) clergy noted that education efforts were significantly impacted by the initiative taken by leadership above the congregational level. One participant shared that a lack of focus by the Canadian Catholic Bishops led to the current lack of education seen broadly:

> I think what happened is there was lots of denial within the Catholic community as to our role. And I think what happened with Truth and Reconciliation is it brought some of it to the floor so that we were able to start talking about it. But I really think—because the Canadian

> bishops in lots of ways dragged their feet on acknowledging the reality of our role. And recognizing the importance of asking for forgiveness and offering an apology. And so things got swept under the rug in some ways. (P16)

Another participant placed similar emphasis on the role of leadership in prioritization, but highlighted the presbytery or regional level of the United Church rather than national:

> If a presbytery was really engaged…if it was really good at right relations, then those lay people that have to be at the presbytery meetings—because there has to be half lay, half ordained in those in any group—so they have to be there. So often, that's where they could catch the lay people to say, "hey, we've got this workshop that we wanted to do." But I don't think it was mandated that they, I don't think there was any gotta do it. So, if the presbytery as a collective decided, yeah, this is really important, then the lay people would get educated. If not, it would trickle through the paid personnel in the church. And I think that was a flaw.

Seven participants (P2, P5, P7, P8, P11, P15, P18) also pointed to the initiative or interest of leadership as a barrier to education but focused on the congregational level. An Anglican participant summed up this idea saying, "partly, I think it's clergy that aren't spearheading it enough. I could include myself in that" (P8). A Catholic participant echoed this thought by stating:

> I think it's got to do with your passion and who's interested in what you're interested in. And what do you believe is important to be able to build a proper faith that does justice. Yeah, I understand if you're not there, if you're not at that level. And I'm sure there's parish priests, they just want to say mass, that's it. (P15)

Participant 13 illustrated this reality when discussing his own leadership in his Catholic congregation:

> But as I mentioned at the beginning, I was never interested much in history. So, it's not my cup of tea…I never personally read all the things [the bishop] has sent all these years. And he sent, at least five or six different things related to the Residential Schools and praying for Truth and Reconciliation and things like that.

Participant 7 identified that different clergy may have different levels of interest in education about Residential Schools or colonization, leading to different outcomes:

> I think the thing here for the most part is that in this particular congregation, because this is important to me, it becomes important to others. I don't know if that's the case depending on what congregation you're with in the Presbyterian Church, those conversations and the importance is different.

Another Presbyterian participant admitted that he had not prioritized pursuing education with his congregation by saying, "but has [interest in the topics] continued onwards [in the congregation]? I'm not sure yet. I just haven't had the chance to, it hasn't been on the top of the agenda at this point" (P18). A United participant (P2) indicated that her personal passion determined what areas she prioritized when considering educating her congregation about the history of Residential Schools: "And so sometimes it's what I would call a plethora of information and trying to filter through things to find what's relevant and what is, you know, essential that has to be shared, and things that I'm passionate about need to be passed on as well." Another United participant (P5) affirmed this reliance on individual interest saying that use of national materials "really depends on who you've got" as clergy at the grassroots level.

6.2.3.1.5.2. Sub-Subtheme: "There's Only So Much Time": Other Parish Priorities Take Precedence

Ten (P1, P2, P3, P4, P5, P6, P8, P15, P16, P18) out of 18 participants identified that other parish responsibilities and tasks were a barrier to prioritizing education with congregations. Four (P3, P4, P6, P8) out of five Anglican participants mentioned this dynamic, with participant 3 stating, “it's like my life is so busy and there's so much in it that I do the thing and then I have to move on to the next thing, and then to the next thing.” Participant 4 also said, “I just don't see [education] happening. I guess there are lots of other priorities perhaps.” Similarly, Participant 6 identified “barriers—there's times and so many things that are going on in the world and in our lives. That and trying to keep people interested.” Participant 8 also expressed this issue when discussing investigating the national Anglican website for educational resources to use with his congregation saying, “I do from time to time, but I've got lots of commitments…”

Two (P15, P16) out of four Catholic participants also identified this barrier. One participant expressed the reality of competing priorities within his parish:

> I would say that there are so many groups and so many things that you have that are all important. But to sit down and say which ones are absolutely essential—that have to get a little bit more exposure, a little bit more discussion, a little bit more of my time, a little bit more of publicity…so, I have to pick or choose because there's only so much time. And there's only so much some people can hold. They can't have fifty very important thoughts or groups in their head or the parish. They're all important but there's priorities…(P15)

Likewise, participant 16 discussed some responsibilities that compete for priority with education:

> I don't think it's a lack of willingness. I think it's a lack of time and energy and ability. There’s so many things going on, from a day to day, every day. You know, there's a misconception that clergy work on the weekends and then that's it. And within the Catholic

> community, because of our involvement with hospitals and the Catholic school system here in Ontario, there's that much more.

One (P18) out of five Presbyterian participants also illustrated this theme by stating, “so at this at this point, I haven’t tried to push that agenda because there have been so many other things that have taken priority.” Additionally, three (P1, P2, P5) out of four United clergy shared that other priorities divert attention from education. This was summarized by Participant 2:

> And even trying to deepen their own spirituality, which is where I've been trying to take them. We're not just here as a social group. We're here because we follow a man named Jesus Christ. And you know we are spiritual beings as well as being, you know, emotional and physical beings. And so that needs to be worked on as well. So, there’s so much.

Participant 5 similarly noted that “we don't have like, [educational] programs. I just, that was not something I had time for. And I've lamented it. But doing right relations stuff outside of worship has been a challenge.”

6.2.3.1.5.3. Sub-Subtheme: “The New Squirrel”: Other Topics of Interest Take Priority Over Education

In terms of prioritization, four participants (P7, P8, P14, P16) noted that other topics of importance, like sexuality or global issues, can compete with education about the history and legacy of Residential Schools or colonization for priority. An Anglican participant (P8) expressed his opinion that the national church’s intensive focus on topics like the environment and sexuality had detracted from education about Residential Schools and colonization:

> Because we're focused too much, well, I don't know about too much, on the environment. But they've been beating that drum a long time. And also, the same sex, which I think we really shouldn't be on that topic right now. Let's stop with that topic. And we're still divided on that.

> And, you know, can we not be welcoming to the First Nation people who welcomed us initially? I think there just hasn't been enough on that.

He further expanded this idea:

> I think the problem we have is that the same sex marriage and blessing took a lot of energy. And a lot of papers, a lot of books were written on that topic, but hardly anything is on the colonialization…I would say, ten to one, if you're looking at homosexuality and the church, or you're looking at same sex marriage, there's piles of stuff on that and piles of stuff on gender identity and all this kind of stuff. But I would say there's precious little compared to that on this topic of colonization.

Two Presbyterian participants (P7, P14) also identified sexuality as a key topic affecting the prioritization of education about Residential Schools and colonization. Participant 7 concluded that conversations about affirming same-sex marriage were more of a priority for some churches than reconciliation:

> But you could go to another congregation, it's just not going to be top of their list. They have other things. One of the other conversations that's taken a huge amount of time in the Presbyterian Church in Canada is around gender. And we've just now, in the last year and a half, been able to be what we call affirming, where I can marry or we can ordain people who are of a different sexual orientation. So, there are other congregations for whom that is their focus, because that's the context they find themselves in, where in this congregation—long before the denomination became affirming—this congregation was. So, it's not a conversation I have to have here…But our context is such that healing and reconciliation is an important conversation for us…It would be very different in another congregation in the

> Presbyterian Church of Canada, even with the other congregations that are in our city that are Presbyterian. They're not having those conversations right now, in the same way.

Participant 14, a Presbyterian key informant, agreed with this estimation and provided more context nationally:

> The denomination nationally has limited resources and made some choices and moved into the area of spending, of transferring resources that had been on Indigenous matters, and transferred them to matters of sexuality…which is the new squirrel. If I understand the metaphor I'm playing with, in the movie Up, you know the squirrel distracts. And not to say that sexuality is not an important issue. It just became the new thing that gathered all the attention.

Both Presbyterian participants (P7, P14) also mentioned current events like the wars in Ukraine and Gaza as other competing topics:

> Yeah, I think that right now Ukraine stole a whole lot of energy around thinking about the big shiny object. And Gaza. I know from colleagues, Gaza is a huge, big, shiny object that is drawing attention from just about everything. (P7)

Participant 14 similarly disclosed that these topics acted as a barrier to education:

> And another barrier…there's so many issues in the world that we're trying to take a look at. There's so many inequalities, so much inequity, so much strife…it's one of many pieces that, you know, in a year of worship services and fifty-two Sundays we're trying to cover…there's Gaza, there's the Ukraine…there's things that affect different people in the community or in the faith community that we're trying to provide.

Additionally, a Catholic participant (P16) pointed to cultural diversity and immigration as topics competing for priority:

> And in the last ten years…[there's been a] cultural shift within our diocese, as far as people's cultural heritage is so changed with the increase in immigration, the increase to international students. And so, in lots of ways, people are just trying to catch up, not only with Indigenous, but catch up with our African friends that are coming in, immigrating to Canada, and are now in our parish, our Indian friends that are now immigrating to Canada, and are in our parish, our Asian friends, and so on. And so, as much as people are wanting to be involved in understanding Indigenous, but they're also trying to figure out and understand these other cultures, as we see them more prevalent in our community…I only have so many resources and so much time and effort and energy to be able to recognize all of this in the parish.

In summary, participants indicated that a lack of prioritization was a key barrier to educating congregants about the history and legacy of Residential Schools or colonization. Within this sub-theme of prioritization, data fell into one of three sub-subthemes: 1) initiative or interest of leadership determines degree of prioritization; 2) other parish priorities are prioritized over education; and 3) other topics of interest are prioritized over education. These subthemes and sub-subthemes belonged to the larger theme of barriers which could reasonably have been mitigated, in part or whole, by the existence of a national education strategy from each denomination. This overarching theme was divided into the previously discussed five sub-themes: a) a lack of direction or leadership for education, b) a lack of clergy knowledge about resources or history, c) issues with the provided resources, d) information not filtering effectively between organizational levels, and e) lack of prioritization for education.

6.2.3.2. Theme 7: "Our People Are Old": Aging Mainline Congregations

This theme refers to the reality that congregations within mainline churches are steadily aging, which acts as a barrier to education in several ways. Overall, nine (P1, P2, P3, P4, P7, P8,

P11, P16, P18) out of 18 participants identified aging within the church population as a barrier, split across two subthemes: a) opinions and perspectives of older generations and b) lack of capacity due to aging. Participant 3, an Anglican, succinctly summarized this theme saying, "I think one of our challenges is, as I said, our people are old."

6.2.3.2.1. Subtheme: "It's Worldview, It's Age": Opinions and Perspectives of Older Generations

Of the nine participants who discussed aging congregations, four (P8, P11, P16) specifically expressed that the opinions or perspectives of older generations acted as a barrier to education in some way. Participant 3 identified her own concerns about raising the topic of Residential Schools for fear of re-traumatizing some of the older members of her Anglican congregation because of their own experiences of abuse in boarding schools during their childhoods:

> They were reliving their own beatings, the way they were treated, what they were given or not given to eat, where they got to sleep … And so, it's not keeping one's head in the sand. I just have to be really sensitive to what's gone on in these folks. Because they end up reliving their own trauma. Like they totally relate to, they hear it, they feel it, they've experienced it, not as an annihilation necessarily of a people. But as them, as children or poor children. We didn't treat kids properly.

Another Anglican participant (P8) discussed how seniors in his congregation tended to have a less negative view of Residential Schools and colonization because of their past involvement:

> And [seniors are] a very tricky demographic because they would have been in the leadership ages when [Residential Schools were] happening. The youth, they wouldn't even have known of Residential Schools. They would have been wrapped up by the time they were born. Whereas the seniors would have been of the generation that established these things

> and got them off the ground…And I think a lot of them might, I hate saying it, but I just think some of them are still stuck in a colonial mindset.

He later noted:

> And it just depends on [seniors'] own personal interactions with First Nation people. And there's still that kind of racist undertone of, you know, [Indigenous people are] unemployed, undereducated. And I don't know how you change that. I think that literally that generation has to die off. And there has to be new teaching. Because they're just not changing their whole way of thinking on that.

When asked about barriers to education about Residential Schools, participant 16 also cited age as a reason why some Catholic congregants retain stereotypes about Indigenous people:

> And yes, there tends to be those old stereotypes. Our population, parish-wise is old, right? Like we're hoping to, striving, and doing everything we can to bring in a younger generation of family. But the reality is they're old. And there's no two ways about it.

Similarly, a United clergy member (P11) indicated that the increasing age of her lay leadership contributed to a worldview that did not always promote education, despite the intentions of the national church:

> And then also congregations that are getting older, where people are lifers on committees. But the bulk of our congregation is [seniors]. So, then it's worldview, it's age. And worldview is a barrier, even though the United Church intentionally works to create a culture of justice and understanding.

6.2.3.2.2. Subtheme: "They're Worn Down": Lack of Capacity in Older Congregants

When discussing aging congregations as a barrier to education, six participants (P1, P2, P4, P7, P11, P18) expressed that capacity limitations of senior congregants was a key factor. An Anglican participant (P4) disclosed the leadership limitations of an aging congregation with regards to education:

> I would love to see this be an active part of ministry, but…I don't see a lot of leadership happening in this congregation. I think people tend to be older, they're worn down. They've given a lot for different reasons. They've suffered lots of losses in their personal lives, So, I don't see a lot of energy or leadership.

Additionally, two Presbyterian participants (P7, P18) indicated that aging congregations lacked the capacity to shifting their focus toward education. Participant 7 illustrated this by stating, "and the congregation is not huge. It's quite elderly. So, many of them are like, 'well, we're at this point in our lives, where you really don't need to delve much deeper.'" Participant 18 similarly noted:

> At this point, for my current congregation the challenge is how open are they to continue learning at this stage in their life? Again, because the vast majority of them are in the later stages of life and it depends on where you are…A lot of the [older] people I serve are at that point where they're just functioning day-to-day.

Participant 1, a United clergy member, also expressed a limited capacity for having multiple areas of focus among her older congregation saying, "we're also in the middle of a refugee sponsorship…So, some of our congregational focus outward has been on that project at the moment. You can only do so much with a congregation particularly as they age." Another United participant (P11) described the energy limitations that older congregants face which can act as a barrier to taking on new educational pursuits stating, "and then having a shortage of new people

to take on things, people sort of get tired. So, then it's just sort of that weariness of being stuck in a role. And then oh, we have another thing to take on. You know what I mean?" Participant 2 also mentioned energy, as well as other age-related limitations when describing her United congregation:

> And the volunteers are, I think the base age would be probably 80? So, they're getting burned out. They're getting tired. We've lost so many, even in the 3 years I've been there…One week they're doing okay and then the next week, all of a sudden, they're gone. So, it's been really hard on them for looking at their own personal losses and trying to figure it out…So consequently, they don't seem to have the passion or the interest to learn more about what's happening in different situations such as the Residential Schools.

6.2.3.3. Theme 8: Staffing Issues in Churches

Five (P2, P3, P10, P11, P16) out of 18 participants discussed staffing issues as a barrier to further education about the history and legacy of Residential Schools or colonization. Of these five, one was Anglican (P3), one was Catholic (P16), one was Presbyterian (P10), and two were United (P2, P11). Participant 16 expressed the aging of clergy as a significant barrier to increasing the focus on education:

> I'm going to be quite brutally honest; I'm getting old. And I just don't have the energy that I once had 20 years ago, or 10 years ago. And so, sometimes it's trying to keep all the balls in the air. And so that can be different, that can be difficult.

He also discussed decreasing clergy numbers in the Catholic church as a barrier to sharing denominational resources with lay leaders:

> It's also—and this is another thing as our clergy numbers drop. This is where I say remember, I was saying how the church works very slowly. Well, some of the unfolding of

> this is really because the church has a hard time sharing with its laity…the resources with those that are non-clergy, they'll get stuck in this clericalism. (P16)

Concerns about lack of staff were similarly echoed by a Presbyterian participant (P10) who stated:

> It didn't help because some churches, they don't function well without a minister like they don't know which way to go. Because sometimes the minister has the vision or the passion, points them in a direction. [This congregation] hasn't had a minister for, before me, I think, five or seven years, and then COVID hit and they were trying to keep themselves afloat. So, I think also, just as this congregation went to, engaging with Truth and Reconciliation, are learning about the schools, very limited when it comes to a church environment.

Another Anglican participant (P3) identified the temporary nature of her current clergy placement as a barrier to initiating more education:

> I don't see in this short term that I supposedly am here—I can't see a place for me to be able to do anything more…Because you have to stick around to pick up those pieces. When you fling something into the air…to me, it would be irresponsible.

Participant 2, a United clergy member, similarly expressed the limitations associated with her imminent transition to another congregation:

> Depending on whether we cover the information for the remit...But unfortunately, I'm leaving the congregation at the end of the year. We have a very short time to try and fit [remit education] in, which would be an information session with videos available and resources from the National Church and from the region...And so, we would take an opportunity for the whole congregation…So, it's entirely up to [the Session] whether they want to try and get this facilitated and voted on before I leave.

She also disclosed that the part-time nature of her position created barriers to further education saying, “so there's so much, and I'm only half time. So, without even full-time hours of ministry, it's hard to get a lot of these more difficult topics covered.” In a similar fashion, Participant 11 expressed the limitations of having a part-time clergy placement within the United Church:

> Here, I'm three-quarter time. I don't have much time to do programming. I can barely manage worship, pastoral care. I'm using some of my time to do outreach with marginalized people in the area, but very little time for programming.

6.2.3.3.1. Subtheme: “I’m Still Getting My Feet Wet”: New Clergy

In accordance with the overall theme of staffing issues within mainline churches as a barrier to education, six clergy members (P1, P3, P9, P10, P11, P18) specifically cited newness to their congregations as a barrier to education. These concerns centred around needing more time to understand congregational attitudes before launching new educational initiatives, as described by an Anglican participant:

> I'm still kind of learning and assessing how to go about that what's been done, what hasn't been done. And if there is some angst behind it, how do I move forward in a way that will be fruitful to learning, as opposed to "why are we doing this? You know, we've moved on, we've said we're sorry. Let's go back to our ways,” kind of thing. (P9)

Participant 18 also illustrated this theme of newness as a barrier to starting education in his Presbyterian church stating, “in my current congregation, I haven't really got settled into the mix as yet to see what's their experience with those kinds of resources.” He then noted a need to gather further information about the congregation’s attitude before embarking on education:

> I very much hope that having looked at some of the congregation's history and their connection with the Indigenous community in this area, they are very much connected and

> want to be participatory. Now, what I don't know is whether what I'm seeing in history was because my predecessor was very, very vocal and active in it or whether it was the congregation. I have to learn that part yet, whether it was being pushed from one direction or whether it was a community joint effort. As I say, I'm still getting my feet wet and figuring out all the all the nooks and crannies and where the roadblocks are.

Participant 1 echoed this idea when saying, "well, I've spent the first year here just trying to get the lay of the land. So, I haven't done much education stuff here period. It's more just been getting to know people." Participant 11 agreed that "there's nothing [related to education that] I'm doing right now. Your first year in a congregation, you're just getting to know that, getting to to know the culture of the congregation before you start [education]."

Participant 10 further demonstrated this theme by discussing how he had spent his time since joining his Presbyterian congregation:

> So, two years, I'm still—part of that two years is trying to figure out who this congregation is to make sure that I can tailor any things that I want to address or teach or promote. That I do it well, instead of stepping on anyone's eggshells, and then they don't even want to listen. So, I have not done a lot towards Aboriginal and First Nation and the history of the Residential Schools outside of having mentioned them in sermons.

6.2.3.4. Theme 9: Impacts of Covid-19

Overall, nine (P2, P3, P4, P5, P7, P10, P12, P14, P16) out of 18 total participants identified the Covid-19 pandemic as a barrier to ongoing education. This included two Anglican participants (P2, P4), one Catholic participant (P16), four Presbyterian participants (P7, P10, P12, P14), and two United participants (P2, P5). Participant 7 called the pandemic the congregation's "biggest barrier" in terms of moving forward with educational initiatives, while

participant 12 indicated that education would be significantly "further along" had Covid not occurred. Similarly, participant 3 pointed to a sense of stagnation in education since the pandemic, noting that "before Covid, many of these things were much fresher…I feel like we were much more on top of this four years ago. And then Covid happened and it was like people drowning in water." Another participant indicated that the pandemic had slowed the trust-building process with her new congregation, leading to a lack of education:

> No, I haven't tried [education]. Establishing trust within a congregation, it takes probably at least 2 years. And considering the first 2 years we were dealing with Covid, I'm not sure that trust has yet been established and won't be at this point. So, they would have to really trust me in order to dig into those or lean into those difficult topics.

6.2.3.4.1. Subtheme: "It's Really Dwindled": Decreased Willingness to Gather and Low Attendance

Out of the nine participants who identified the pandemic as a barrier to education, seven (P2, P3, P4, P5, P7, P14, P16) discussed decreasing attendance or willingness to gather as distinct facet of this barrier. Given that gathering functions as a necessary precursor to education, an Anglican participant (P3) explained the lasting effects of Covid on attendance for events like educational programming:

> I think one of the barriers is that, aside from the hour on Sunday that we're together and then there's coffee hour afterwards, people don't come to educational things or Bible studies or things like that anymore. It's very hard to get them to come out and participate in anything. And I know I don't mean to make Covid as an excuse, but I think that we all went from being quite social animals in this church, being filled every day with people that were here for whatever reason, to literally it feels like they're here for Sunday worship and not much more.

> And if, even when we try to offer various programming, we're lucky if we get one person to come. And I think it's because people got so used to, in those fearful days of the first two years…people were afraid to go grocery shopping long after things were being lifted. The church was still being required to mask. We still don't exchange the Peace by shaking hands…And so, there's a fearfulness and a less drivenness...at that time it was Covid. But now, I don't know that they even know why there's that hesitancy.

Another Anglican participant (P4) described a similar pattern in decreased attendance since Covid:

> The congregation has markedly changed since Covid. So, I just don't see [leadership for education] happening…There are a number of things that I did [to educate] within the church, and it was just kind of resistant and so I decided I wasn't gonna bang my head against the wall…There used to be two services. They used to be very full. And it's really dwindled. The number of people attending is really dwindled now. And there's one service. And I would say it's about a third full.

When asked about barriers to education, participant 16 similarly illustrated this theme by describing congregational changes since Covid:

> I'm sick of talking about it and I'm sure people are sick of hearing about it, but COVID really beat on us. Because people became much more insular, and they became more fearful. And as much as we tried to help our people by being able to broadcast digitally, what we're offering, it's also it's been hard to get people back into the community.

As a key Presbyterian informant, participant 14 was able to identify this trend across the denomination:

> Declining membership. The reality is that post-Covid, [for] many current locations in terms of attendance, who's watching online? No one knows. No one can tell you how many people are watching online. Because none of the data gives us a way to measure that. But basically, most congregations are down 30% in terms of attendance…Everything just feels dicey, edgy, and everyone's tired…If you were doing this research four years ago, I wouldn't be talking quite like that around how Covid has changed things.

Participant 7 confirmed this observation when looking at the decreasing attendance in her own Presbyterian congregation:

> We're coming up, feeling like Covid…with everything in the world stopped in 2020. And we're only slowly now, we're three years out only almost four, slowly being able to consider how to broaden things again because we're only now feeling safe enough to be gathering. And even at that I have people who are staying away from church because Covid is out there again, and I got somebody at home that's not well, and I can't be out…How do we have gatherings together when it's still people are not feeling safe enough to gather…but having to rebuild it again.

Gathering limitations imposed by Covid were also identified as a barrier to education about Residential Schools by one United participant (P5):

> Trying to get a program in Covid has really done a number on my present church because it hit about a year after I arrived. And so, it just basically shut everything down. The hope was we were going to have a Blanket Exercise.

6.2.3.4.2. Subtheme: Main Focus on Survival or Recovery

Three participants (P2, P10, P14) disclosed that a focus on survival or recovery as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic acted as a barrier to education. Participant 10 highlighted this focus on recovery in lieu of education:

> But right now, the congregation after COVID is trying to reform itself trying to bring itself back and then try and figure out how to get more people involved. Because I think they would love to be able to do truth [and] reconciliation work. But we don't have that strength.

He further expressed how a recovery focus was impacting educational efforts in the church:

> One of the things I know as a presbytery, we're not in the best place to be able to reach out and help Aboriginal communities or do better reconciliation work because after Covid, many of the churches…are in recovery mode. We had one church close down, one church has sold their buildings, is renting under another church that they had helped…So, I know within this congregation, there is a bit of fear, like are we next?

Similarly, participant 2 described a diversion of focus toward survival when working with her United congregation during the pandemic:

> A lot of my focus when I first arrived was figuring out how to keep them together as a community of faith, how to bring worship to them when it wasn't safe to meet in the building. And their technology when I arrived was minimal.

6.2.3.5. Theme 10: "It's the Shadows That Terrify Me": Fear of Negative Congregational Response to Education

Ten (P2, P4, P8, P9, P10, P11, P12, P15, P16, P18) out of 18 participants indicated that fear of negative congregational responses to the topics of Residential Schools or colonization affected their willingness to engage in education. Three (P4, P8, P9) out of four Anglican participants expressed concerns about approaching these topics for this reason, illustrated by Participant 8:

> I've learned just over decades of experience, but it can be very difficult if you try and broach [a] topic when the person that you're with doesn't feel it's appropriate, or it's not the right time. So, you have to really be sensitive about that. And who you're in communion with at the time…

When asked whether he was doing education, Participant 9 similarly identified worries about potential responses from congregants as a reason for not having started:

> Not yet. I'm still kind of learning and assessing how to go about that what's been done, what hasn't been done. And if there is some angst behind it, how do I move forward in a way that will be fruitful to learning.

Participant 4 discussed how she does not do land acknowledgements with her congregation because of anticipated pushback, based on the previous clergy's assessment:

> I did approach the previous minister that we had. And so, I said, "this is the trend to host or to speak land acknowledgements before meetings and getting together for worship on Sundays is a meeting of a sort." But he was not in favor of a land acknowledgment and felt that the congregants wouldn't tolerate it.

Two Catholic clergy (P15, P16) also expressed concerns about congregational responses. Participant 15 described his worry prior to a speaker smudging in the church for the first time:

> And the first time we did it, I will say I was nervous. I didn't show it. But I was very concerned that there might be people rejecting what she's doing, call it superstition, or call it whatever they want to, heresy or call it paganism or whatever.

Participant 16 also expressed concerns about negative responses and how that might affect the organizational viability of his church:

> We want them to be engaged, of course. But, and I'm going to be very blunt when I say this to you, we are also a business. And so those people pay the bills. And so, there's a fine line between recognizing how long you can keep them here, and what you can present to them. And so, it's been my experience that you can offer some pretty controversial things, you can certainly engage with them on some difficult issues, and I've seen it as we've discussed, the reality of what's gone on with colonization or Residential Schools. I've certainly preached on it…but I also recognize the window can be rather small at times. And so, it's trying to find that balance of being able to engage and inform and enlighten, keep people interested, make them feel welcome and comfortable. Because the church has become very much a consumer-driven kind of mindset of, "I give my money every week, and this is what I expect. And if I don't like it, I'm going to take my money and go somewhere else." And so unfortunately, that's part of the reality of churches…that balance of understanding I need to be able to pay my heating and my electricity and the salaries of staff.

Out of five Presbyterian participants, three (P10, P12, P18) identified that concerns about congregant reactions affect how they engage with education. Participant 10 disclosed that the potential of poor reactions led him to take a slower approach to education:

> What is happening is I'm using [land acknowledgements] on those special Sundays. I've been bringing them up because I'm still trying to figure out how everyone in the congregation feels because I don't want to rush them into things. Presbyterians do have a stereotype of being slow at change. I mean, it was just maybe two years ago, was it, that we got two definitions of marriage to allow LGBT inclusion. Where the United Church has done that almost a decade before us…I've kind of also been having that habit of taking time to figure out where everyone's feeling, and knowing how, because even here where they like

> LGBTQ officially as the Session has said yes to it, but then hearing smaller voices, not quite the whole congregation is on board.

He further explained his apprehension of underlying malcontent within smaller pockets of his congregation:

> Because right now, if I were to look with my own eye, I feel like it is a very positive "yes" [to education]. But even if that's the majority of the group, it's those who whisper in the corners that could cause trauma, or they might be a nuisance, or say, "why do you have to do it every Sunday?" And I kind of want to avoid that, or I want to gauge that, or how to address that if it does pop up.

When asked if not knowing how many people felt discontented engaging with the topics was a main barrier, he admitted, "yeah, it's the shadows that terrify me."

Participant 12 described using a more subtle approach to education because of potential congregant responses:

> It's such a delicate thing. I mean, you don't want to piss a bunch of people off because that stops the conversation. You know what I mean? You have to be subtle about it. And then that sounds like I'm being wishy washy. But I'm not. I'm being very deliberate when I say that. You have to be deliberately subtle about the way you go about this thing. Because if you just go out and start, you get on a soapbox about it, that's going to be the end of it. Either people are going to tell you to shut up or they're going to say, "hey listen, you need to tell us when you're going to do that, because we're not going to come that Sunday." Or they're going to leave the church period, which then I don't have any chance at all of trying to talk to them, right.

He further clarified his motivation for not wanting congregants to leave the church saying, "because if they leave, or if they shut me down, then I don't get to talk to them. And I always want to have that door open. I always want to leave the door open to that conversation." Participant 18 acknowledged that continued education was dependent on reactions from the congregation:

> And then see what kind of reception there is to those to first steps. And if there's a welcoming interest in it, then we can look into how do we work on further education to bring about that implementation of not just two or three of the TRC recommendations, but the ones across the board as a whole.

Two (P2, P11) out four United participants also cited congregational reactions as a main concern in further educating congregants about the history and legacy of Residential Schools and colonization. Participant 11 expressed concerns about raising the topic of increasing education in his church "without people feeling insulted or judged for where they are focusing." He likewise expressed this concern regarding education related to the upcoming remit vote:

> So, some people may feel self-conscious and judged, right? But I need to sort of make that connection, while at the same time helping people realize I'm here to love them, to be their pastor no matter where they land on this, even if we strongly disagree on where we vote. And yeah, so it's a piece around helping people see that and recognize that. And so, I'm wondering how people will respond.

Like participant 12, participant 11 explained these concerns as a motivation to maintain relationships with congregants for the sake of effecting change:

> But for me, it's about maintaining the relationships so you can get them to the place of learning and growth like that…You're working with whatever kind of change, whatever your vehicle is. You try to maintain the relationship so you can get to that place.

Participant 2, another United clergy member, described how potential negative congregant feedback dissuaded her from employing educational initiatives: "As much as I would like to educate them if they don't want to listen, it's not a good use of my time."

6.2.3.6. Theme 11: "I Can't Avoid It": Racism or Stereotypes Held by Congregants

Five (P7, P9, P11, P12, P16) out of 18 participants indicated that racism or stereotypes toward Indigenous people still existed within their congregations. An Anglican participant (P9) noted that she "was talking to someone the other day. I'm like, sounds like racism…They were very, very sassy." Similarly, a United participant (P11) also discussed a conversation with a congregant:

> You know, I just remind myself—and even though I just cringe at the thought of some of the things that were said by that individual to me afterward about why they disagreed, and just cringe worthy statements. And so, I think I was personally in too much shock, hearing the comments to be able to do much education then.

When asked if those comments related to financial concerns regarding the remit vote, the participant said, "yes, and generally just racist comments."

When speaking generally about his congregation, A Catholic priest (P16) disclosed that "[he] think[s] it's better than it was. Are there still lots of stereotypes? Absolutely. Do people have a hard time getting past their prejudices? Yes." Two Presbyterian participants (P2, P7) also discussed the presence of racism in their congregations, with participant 2 stating, "I mean, there

are people in this church, as there are people in every church, who are racist. You can go downstairs on any given men's group. And you can hear somebody's telling a racist joke." Likewise, another Presbyterian participant (P7) identified that "there's still racism, even in this congregation. I know it exists. It's in the city. It's in our congregation, I can't avoid it."

Overall, this section concludes the barriers to effective education of congregations related to the history and legacy of Residential Schools and colonization. These barriers are broken down into the following themes: a) barriers to education that would have been mitigated by a national education strategy, b) aging mainline congregations, c) staffing issues within the denominations, d) impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic, e) fear of negative congregational responses to education, and f) racism or stereotypes within congregations.

7. Discussion and Implications

The purpose of this research study was to gain an understanding of a) how the educational strategies developed by the national church parties to the Settlement Agreement are being implemented in local congregations and b) how effective these strategies are at ensuring that each denomination's respective congregation learns about their church's role in the history and legacy of Residential Schools and colonization, as per Call to Action 59. The findings from this study indicate that none of the participants from the Settlement Agreement church parties were able to articulate a national education strategy for their respective denomination and that "bottom up" leadership dynamics within the denominations were partly responsible for this. The findings further indicate that only a minority of participants considered the development of a national education strategy to be beneficial. However, in lieu of a national educational strategy, churches took various measures to engage congregants in the topics of Residential Schools and/or colonization, including the provision of education, information, directives, and practices.

Additionally, churches took various measures to engage congregants in the topic of reconciliation with Indigenous Peoples more broadly. To assess the perceived effectiveness of these measures, the research revealed that clergy do not conduct formal evaluations, instead employing informal assessments through conversations, observations, and lay leader feedback. Given this, the measures used to engage congregants in the topics of Residential Schools and/or colonization were found to have mixed perceived efficacy overall, with both positive and negative congregational responses. The findings suggest that several barriers impede the provision of education about the history and legacy of Residential Schools and colonization to congregants including, some barriers that would have been mitigated by the existence of a national strategy, aging mainline congregations, staffing issues in churches, impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic on congregations, clergy fears of negative congregational responses, and lingering racism or stereotypes held by congregants.

The discussion section situates the study findings within the broader literature and discusses the accompanying implications for the following three areas, along with study limitations: (1) implications for policy, (2) implications for social work practice, and (3) implications for church leaders and communities. Due to the marked paucity of academic research related to TRC Call to Action 59, this discussion does not have a section dedicated to the implications of the findings on the current academic literature. However, this study intends to contribute to the conspicuous gap in the research, considering that it has been 10 years since the publication of the TRC Final Report and recommendations.

7.1. Implications for Policy

This section explores the implications of the findings on policy related to Canada's TRC and the development of truth commissions broadly. As such, this area considers the implications for three relevant policy areas: (1) evaluating the completion of Call to Action 59; (2) accountability in truth commissions; and (3) recommendations in truth commissions.

7.1.1. Evaluating the Completion of Call to Action 59

As previously noted in the literature review, evaluations of TRC recommendation implementation by both the CBC and Indigenous Watchdog consider Call to Action 59 complete (CBC, 2022; Indigenous Watchdog, 2023). For the CBC, this conclusion largely rests on the Settlement Agreement churches' membership in Kairos Canada, along with the provision of some of the measures outlined in the findings. Indigenous Watchdog cites the churches' "commitment to ongoing education activities" as the main evidence for their evaluation (Indigenous Watchdog, 2023). However, the Yellowhead Institute, an Indigenous-led research and education centre within the Toronto Metropolitan University, continues to mark this Call to Action as incomplete based on their last report in 2023 (Yellowhead Institute, 2023). According to the Yellowhead Institute's stated methodology, completion is only determined when all steps are taken to fully implement the Call by all parties implicated, indicators that the Institute does not yet consider fulfilled for Call 59 (Yellowhead Institute, 2019; 2023).

Given these conflicting evaluations of completion, the findings lend agreement and further justification for Yellowhead Institute's assessment. None of the participants interviewed were able to clearly identify or articulate an educational strategy for their denomination. As crucial leaders who facilitate the main connection between national and congregational levels of denominational organization, it is reasonable to conclude that if national strategies were in place

to ensure that congregations learn about their history and role, as set out in Call to Action 59, clergy members should have some awareness of this strategy to ensure its successful implementation at the congregational level. Additionally, the findings demonstrate that while initiatives were taken by all four denominations to engage congregants in the topics of the history and legacy of Residential Schools and/or colonization, all of these initiatives were isolated steps or actions with no clear connection to a larger, overarching educational strategy. Furthermore, the mixed perceived efficacy of the initiatives as demonstrated in the findings, coupled with significant barriers to education such as low prioritization of education and fear of negative congregational responses, indicate that the initiatives have failed to ensure that congregations learn the requisite content. Taken together, the lack of educational strategies and failure to ensure that congregations learn about the history and legacy of Residential Schools and colonization prescribed by Call to Action 59 therefore substantiate Yellowhead Institute's assessment that the Call has not been completed.

This lack of completion and the conflicting reports surrounding it raise several questions about the methodology and standards for evaluating the completion of TRC recommendations. It also raises questions about the implications of low recommendation implementation on the efficacy of the TRC and truth commissions more broadly. Both will be discussed more thoroughly in the subsequent sections.

7.1.2. Accountability in Truth Commissions

Despite the Final Report having been submitted ten years ago, participants consistently disclosed a lack of national education strategies. One participant further expressed that national church leadership had only begun to see the importance of education about Residential Schools and colonization within the last few years. These findings indicate a notable absence of

mechanisms designed to ensure accountability in the completion of TRC Calls to Action. Specifically, Canada's TRC does not have a body which is formally responsible for tracking Call to Action progress (Bean, 2022). As such, this task has been left to various independent organizations, some of whom have altogether ceased this work in recent years (CBC 2022; Indigenous Watchdog, 2023; Yellowhead Institute, 2023). Additionally, as previously discussed, evaluating whether objectives have been met in reconciliation depends on the methods and perspectives of those conducting assessments (Flisfeder, 2010).

While not much appears to be written directly on accountability structures for post-commission implementation, several insights emerge from the literature related to these findings. Typically, as is the case with Canada's TRC, the work of a truth commission ends when the final report is placed in the hands of the government (Brahm, 2007; TRC, 2015h). Furthermore, commissions often exist extrajudicially with no power to mandate legal actions (Bakiner, 2021). Given the limited authority of these temporary bodies, Bakiner (Bakiner, 2021) notes that post-commission implementation of a final report subsequently relies heavily on the selective motivation of individuals, groups, and organizations, rather than a specific institution tasked with monitoring and ensuring progress. For this reason, commissions are more effective when birthed from extensive public interest with widespread concern for the rights of the victims represented (de Costa, 2017; Stanton, 2022). However, Canada's TRC arose out of the government's response to costly IRS litigation, with most non-Indigenous attendance at events due to a professional interest in reconciliation or an organizational implication in IRS operation (de Costa, 2017; Niezen 2017; Stanton, 2011). The reliance on public interest over systems of accountability is reflected by the eight participants who expressed that individual and institutional interest was a main factor affecting the provision of education about the history of

Residential Schools and colonization in churches. As demonstrated in the findings, when individual or organizational will is weak, recommendations are less likely to be implemented.

As such, the presence of a dedicated body and process for close monitoring of implementation may increase the adoption of recommendations. Additionally, developing concrete systems of post-commission accountability during the initial planning phases may help future commissions to avoid weak implementation. Considering these findings, if Canada is serious about achieving full implementation despite ten years having passed since the Final Report, it may also consider the value of forming a specific body dedicated to monitoring and supporting implementation of the recommendations across sectors. This could also allow for greater clarity in defining and outlining markers of completion for specific recommendations, like Call to Action 59.

7.1.3. Recommendations in Truth Commissions

The findings' overall conclusion that the TRC Call to Action 59 remains incomplete is perhaps unsurprising when considering the previous literature exploring the completion of truth commission recommendations. Before the publication of the TRC final report, hope flourished that substantial findings and recommendations for cross-sector reform would create public pressure for institutions to address decolonization and reconciliation (Nagy, 2013). However, despite a lack of consensus on the exact numbers, multiple sources indicate a low rate of implementation for Canada's TRC recommendations (CBC, 2022; Indigenous Watchdog, 2023; YellowHead Institute, 2023). While a generous volume of academic work explores the broader effects of truth commissions on human rights and democracy (Bakiner, 2014; 2021; Chapman, 2009; Olsen, 2010), recommendations and the resulting implementation remain under-researched (Martin, 2022). The findings of this study hope to contribute to this gap in literature.

Although literature remains scarce, Hayner (2011) reported that implementation across truth commissions was generally poor. This was later confirmed by Skaar et al., (2025) who surveyed Latin American truth commissions and found that only 31% of institutional recommendations were highly implemented. However, they also noted that recommendations are frequently attempted, regardless of slow or partial movement (Skaar et al., 2025). The findings reflect this trend, considering the number of measures provided to engage congregants in the history and legacy of Residential Schools or colonization at various levels of church institutions. Across the same Latin American truth commissions, the completion of recommendations directed toward the rights and realities of Indigenous people was very limited (Wiebelhaus-Brahm & Wright, 2021). This is similarly reflected within the findings on Call to Action 59 and across Canada's TRC broadly. Additionally, recommendations are implemented more slowly or not at all if they focus on addressing past culpability rather than preventing future injustice (Martin et al., 2022). Martin et al. (2022) theorize that these recommendations prove threatening to perpetrators as a reason for their under-implementation. As Call to Action 59 is a backward-facing recommendation, the slow movement suggested by Martin et al. (2022) was similarly echoed by the findings. Additionally, when describing the content of the measures used, participants never explicitly discussed their specific denomination's role in the IRS, electing instead to talk about the history more generally. This trend in the findings could be explained by Martin et al.'s (2022) idea that backward-facing recommendations are more threatening to perpetrators and therefore are increasingly unlikely to be implemented the greater the specificity toward past wrong doings. While backward-looking recommendations have weaker implementation, they provide a critical contribution to education on human rights violations and the impacts for survivors and society

(Paulson & Bellino, 2017). This tension underscores the need for investigation into further mechanisms to address and support the implementation of backward-facing recommendations.

Despite the lack of implementation seen in Call to Action 59 and truth commission recommendations widely, some scholars maintain that these bodies contribute positively to increased public awareness of past injustices and reduction of future human rights violations (Bakiner, 2021; Olsen et al. 2010). However, determining that truth commissions have overall efficacy without considering the low implementation of recommendations seen here and in other studies seems like a partial conclusion at best. Further consideration should be given to the purpose of recommendations in the overall efficacy of truth commissions and how these can be preventatively structured and supported to increase the rates of implementation.

7.2. Implications for Social Work

This section discusses the implications of the findings for the discipline of social work in Canada. These implications first explore the ethical obligations of social workers surrounding Call to Action completion, followed by the provision of social services by religious organizations considering Call to Action 59. Finally, this section addresses psychotherapeutic practice with survivors of Residential Schools.

7.2.1. Ethical Obligations of Social Workers

Ostensibly, this research topic may not seem to have direct applicability for social work. However, closer investigation reveals that social work can play an important role related to the TRC's Call to Action 59. As asserted in the TRC Executive Summary (2025h) and subsequently echoed in the MMIGW National Inquiry (2019), Residential Schools were a key mechanism of cultural genocide against Indigenous Peoples in Canada. It then follows that effecting constructive action to address the history and legacy of Residential Schools, including the

implementation of the TRC Calls to Action, is a key component of reconciliation and the pursuit of justice (TRC, 2015g). Within the Code of Ethics and Standards of Practice, the Ontario College of Social Workers and Social Service Workers' (OCSWSSW) stipulates that affiliated social workers have an ethical obligation to advocate for social justice and "social change that challenges systemic oppression" (OCSWSSW, 2023 p. 13). The Code of Ethics further states that registrants must "take an anti-oppressive stance in their work" (OCSWSSW, 2023 p.1).

Additionally, like the church parties, social work possesses a complicit history in the cultural genocide of Indigenous Peoples in Canada (Blackstock, 2009; TRC, 2025f). Early social work ideology and practices in the English-speaking colonies based on Protestant Reformation theology emphasized poverty as a moral failing stemming from idleness and often combined with racism toward non-English people groups to withhold aid, such as with the Irish during the Potato Famine (Hick, 2014). More directly, a church-based approach to social welfare in the early French colonies primarily tasked Catholic organizations with the provision of social services (Hick, 2014). As such, the origin of social work in Canada has important historical ties to Church ideology and practices, including those toward Indigenous Peoples.

Furthermore, despite increasingly public reports of the widespread neglect and abuse occurring in IRS, neither social workers nor children's aid societies intervened, with the Canadian Association of Social Workers (CASW) publishing a statement in favour of the institutions in 1946 (Blackstock, 2009). Once IRS began to close, social workers then participated in the 60s Scoop, a mass removal of Indigenous children from their families due to systemic ignorance of the impacts of colonization on Indigenous communities (Blackstock, 2009; Sinclair, 2004; TRC, 2025f). As a result, the TRC Call to Action 1 explicitly names social

workers and child welfare agencies, emphasizing increased education on keeping Indigenous families together and the impacts of Residential Schools.

For their part, the CASW released a Statement of Apology and Commitment to Reconciliation (2019) which directly addresses the profession's historic and ongoing relationship with Indigenous Peoples in Canada. This document highlights a commitment to "bring humility and accountability to social justice efforts (p. 9)" within the context of ongoing reconciliation. It further strongly encourages the full implementation of the TRC's Calls to Action (CASW, 2019). Together, the codification of these ethical obligations and commitments necessitate action and advocacy within the social work discipline for the completion of the TRC Calls to Action, especially Call to Action 1. However, the statements made regarding the encouragement of full implementation therefore necessitate further advocacy within the discipline for the completion of all Calls to Action, including 59.

Furthermore, four participants within this study indicated that the development of a national strategy by their respective denominations would be valuable. Despite social work literature often displaying diffuse or disparate definitions of social justice, the previously outlined documents provide a clearer concept of social justice as related to reconciliation, along with pathways for its operationalization through advocacy and implementation (Atteberry-Ash, 2022). As such, social workers can be instrumental in advocating for the development of a national education strategy in partial fulfillment of Call to Action 59, as expressed by participants in this study.

7.2.2. Religious Organizations and the Provision of Social Services

Provision of social welfare and social services comprises another foundational dimension of social work's focus (Graham et al., 2017). Simultaneously, Christian churches and organizations

run appreciable proportions of social services within Canadian cities, including Anglican, Presbyterian, United, and Catholic churches (Cnaan & McGrew, 2006). Historically, movements like the Social Gospel among Protestant denominations, which applied Christian principles to issues of social justice, along with Catholic Action, a similar social doctrine among Catholic churches, contributed significantly to this trend (Schwartz et al., 2008). Conforming with Christian values, faith-based organizations continue to provide a wide range of social services in Canada, including food security programming, subsidized housing, and mental health and addictions care (Bielefeld & Cleveland, 2013; Gokani & Caragata, 2021). Additionally, research indicates that due to the enduring impacts of colonialism, Indigenous populations make up a high proportion of social service users across Canada (Anderson & Collins, 2014; Baskin & Sinclair, 2015). As such, many Indigenous service users receive social services from church and faith-based organizations. This dynamic was further confirmed in the findings by three participants who specifically mentioned congregational involvement with homeless Indigenous individuals.

Given the ethical obligations of social workers and the sector's commitment to the provision of high quality, harm-free social services, social workers can help to improves the cultural safety of social service programs for Indigenous service users by advocating for and holding church institutions accountable to the implementation of Call to Action 59. Furthermore, for social workers working in these faith-based organizations, engaging in education on their denomination's role in the history and legacy of Residential Schools and colonization is a critical component of the anti-oppressive practice outlined in the OCSWSSW's Code of Ethics (2023) and CASW's Principles of Reconciliation (2024).

7.2.3. Social Workers and Psychotherapeutic Practice

Considering the intergenerational trauma caused by Residential Schools, survivors may benefit from accessing therapeutic social work services (Bombay et al., 2014). Depending on geographic factors and area of practice, many social workers will encounter IRS survivors and intergenerationally affected individuals over the course of their profession. Additionally, several participants identified lingering racism and stereotypes toward Indigenous people within congregations, coupled with perceived ineffectiveness of the current initiatives to engage congregants in the history and legacy of Residential Schools. Consequently, social workers may find themselves supporting Indigenous clients who have experienced negative effects of these ongoing issues in church institutions.

Given this, when working with these clients, social workers may benefit from a trauma-informed practice that relies on the principles of cultural safety and humility, while seeking to confront the role of colonial violence in intergenerational trauma (Linklater, 2014). Decolonial trauma work centers Indigenous ways of knowing and acknowledges that healing can occur beyond psychotherapeutic and pharmacological approaches (Hart et al., 2009; 30 Linklater, 2014). For many individuals, this often involves practices like prayer, ceremony, spiritual connection and guidance, language reclamation, and land-based reconnection (Brave Heart, 2011; Gone, 2013; Linklater, 2014). In situations where social workers find themselves limited in their ability to provide these components, referrals to or collaboration with Indigenous Elders and community supports become increasingly essential.

However, as noted by participants, many Indigenous Christians attend congregations and hold various levels of Church leadership. Specifically, 47% of Indigenous individuals in Canada identify as Christian, with 76% of Indigenous Christians belonging to one of the Settlement

Agreement Church denominations (Statistics Canada, 2022a). As such, social workers must respect the diversity of Indigenous clients and be aware that different clients may have individual preferences for the incorporation of Christian and Indigenous spiritualities in their therapeutic journey. Therefore, regardless of their own religious viewpoints, social workers must engage a person-centred approach and support Indigenous clients' right to self-determination in expressions of spirituality (CASW, 2024).

7.3. Implications for Church Leaders and Communities

This section addresses the implications of the findings for the leadership of the Settlement Agreement church parties and their communities. It specifically discusses implications in the following four areas: (1) the development of national strategies in the four denominations; (2) identifying key drivers for change in further implementation; (3) impacts of organizational dynamics on implementation; and (4) addressing barriers through increased support and education for front-line clergy.

7.3.1. Toward Developing a National Strategy

Together with the lack of a nationally developed strategy, several participants noted that they typically used the initiatives engaged in lieu of a strategy inconsistently or sporadically. Clergy likewise expressed several barriers which could have been mitigated by the presence of a national strategy, such as low prioritization, lack of leadership, and resourcing issues. Given that Call to Action 59 was developed as a way for churches to demonstrate the authenticity of their previous apologies to survivors through meaningful action, the lack of national denominational movement in this recommendation serves to insubstantiate the veracity of those apologies (TRC, 2015g). While the apologies themselves remain a positive past step toward reconciliation, the lack of completion leaves these apologies without the necessary action and accountability urged

by survivors through the TRC process (TRC, 2015g). For this reason, development of national strategies for education by the four Settlement Agreement denominations continues to be a critical step in demonstrating the sincerity of the apologies and moving toward greater healing with Indigenous individuals and communities.

Furthermore, while a dearth of literature exists regarding the completion of TRC Calls to Action by religious or other institutions, two papers emerge which illustrate the importance of strategy development in the implementation of Calls to Action within organizational settings. Aitken et al. (2021) present a case study at Bishop's University in responding to the TRC's Calls directed at educational institutions, including those aimed at the education of post-secondary students on Indigenous issues. To support effective implementation across the country, Universities Canada (UC) produced a complementary framework with principles and actions to explicate necessary changes to institutional cultures and practices (Aitken et al., 2021). This framework underwent collaborative development with university leaders and Indigenous representatives to increase its applicability and effectiveness (Aitken et al., 2021). While barriers to and room for growth remain at Bishop's, the study suggests that the UC established framework and processes for its development could provide helpful insight for the generation of a national education strategy in the Settlement Agreement Churches. Similarly in developing a response to the health-sector related Calls, the University of Manitoba's Health Science faculty engaged in the creation of a reconciliation action plan. To do so, they examined the relevant Calls to generate specific institutional and individual level changes (Linton & Ducase, 2017). Taken together, these studies demonstrate the potential value of the strategic planning stipulated by Call to Action 59, with the potential of more widespread and consistent education occurring across the Settlement Agreement denominations. A closer examination of both strategic

processes therefore could be beneficial for denominations looking to begin the work of implementing Call to Action 59, including providing insight on the incorporation of front-line leadership, such as congregational clergy.

7.3.2. Spotting Drivers for Change

When further considering Aitken et al.'s (2021) work at Bishop's University, important drivers for change emerge in implementing TRC Calls to Action. The findings of the current study indicate that some of these components are already present within the four denominations and could be instrumental in moving forward the completion of Call to Action 59. Aitken et al., (58, 2021) found that advocacy by Indigenous individuals played a critical role in overcoming resistance to reconciliation. When outlining the measures used to engage congregants in the topics of Residential Schools, colonization, or reconciliation broadly, participants identified many Indigenous individuals at various institutional levels who were advocating for changes within their denominations. Furthermore, as previously discussed many Indigenous Christians are part of the Settlement Agreement denominations. Additionally, Aitken et al., (2021) identified the importance of non-Indigenous advocates and allies from within the university infrastructure. Correspondingly, many participants expressed their desire to lead their congregations toward greater education, with some identifying individual congregants who were passionate about reconciliation. Finally, Aitken et al., (2021) discussed the necessity of establishing long-term equitable partnerships with Indigenous individuals and communities as an essential driver for change. Some participants also described building relationships with Indigenous communities and individuals, whether through visiting First Nation communities, ongoing collaboration with Elders, or the ecumenical partnership with Kairos. Taken together, the presence of each of these drivers for change within the findings indicates the potential for

positive outcomes should the denominations engage the process of completing Call to Action 59. These drivers also could provide focused areas for growth in denominations and congregations that are struggling with institutional or individual resistance to change.

7.3.3. Organizational Dynamics in Effecting Change

Some participants from each denomination in the current study pointed to "bottom-up" power dynamics as a key explanation for the lack of national strategies. During interviews, participants noted that these dynamics typically made national level leadership unlikely to mandate specific actions across congregations, especially as related to education about Residential Schools and/or colonization. The tendency for change and innovation to emerge at the congregational level of church institutions rather than from more centralized leadership is consistent with previous literature, despite the complexity of many ecclesiastical polities (Junkin, 1992; Schlegel, 2025). Participants from United and Presbyterian churches cited their denominations' conciliar governance structures to further explain this phenomenon. This finding aligns with literature on the topic relating to both denominations. When discussing the full inclusion of sexual orientation and gender identity in a United Church resource on the issue, DeLisle (2010) noted that as an inclusive church, members are not required to agree with nor act on national positions. For example, decisions about whether same-sex marriage will be permitted and performed are made by an individual congregations' leadership, typically the Session, despite the United Church holding an affirming position nationally (DeLisle, 2010). While the issue being discussed is same-sex marriage rather than Residential Schools and colonization, the pattern seen in the literature regarding governance is consistent with the findings of this study. Similarly, the literature indicates that Presbyterians' purposefully conciliar structure allows

bodies at each level of church organization a degree of independent decision-making without interference from higher levels (Cressey, 1990; Mutch, 2016).

Participants from Anglican and Catholic denominations likewise referenced bottom-up power dynamics as a reason for the lack of national strategies, despite not tying these to an intentional governance ethos. Bowcott (2022) supports this assessment in a study which found that congregationally held beliefs and practices were the most critical element influencing growth in Anglican churches, rather than national efforts. Furthermore, Hayes (2004) describes the Anglican realities of decision making, accountability, and authority as consistently "diffuse and untidy (p.82)". Out of all four Settlement Agreement denominations, Catholics maintain the most definitively centralized hierarchical structure, with typically fewer opportunities for formalized non-clergy involvement (Mutch, 2016). However, the TRC (TRC, 2015g) discusses the lack of functional centralized power described by participants in this study. It notes that, despite the Pope having an unequivocally primary leadership role globally, no single authority exists in Canada to represent all Catholic entities because some of the various dioceses and orders do not affiliate with the CCCB (TRC, 2015g). Therefore, the CCCB relies on the Pope to make statements on behalf of the Catholic Church but the Pope typically elects to remain removed from events specific to individual countries (Choquette, 2004; TRC, 2015g). As such, for a substantial period neither the CCCB nor the Pope issued an apology, leaving individual dioceses to apologize as desired (TRC 2015g). This created a patchwork of uneven efforts across the denomination, like those seen in this research (TRC, 2015g).

This pattern within the Catholic church is reminiscent of the jurisdictional issues in Jordan River Anderson's Indigenous child welfare case, which led to the creation of Jordan's Principle (Blackstock, 2012). Jordan River Anderson, a child from Norway House Cree Nation, spent two

years in hospital because the federal and provincial governments could not agree on funding (Blackstock, 2012; Lavalee, 2005). Because off-reserve healthcare falls within provincial funding jurisdiction but Indigenous healthcare is funded federally on-reserve, neither branch was willing to pay and so kept Jordan unnecessarily in the hospital until his death (Blackstock, 2012; Lavalee, 2005). In this situation, as in the case with the Catholic church, the insistence on another level of governance holding responsibility results in poor outcomes for Indigenous people. Furthermore, it does not reflect the spirit of reconciliation through constructive action emphasized within the TRC (2015j).

Additionally, the overall "bottom-up" dynamic presented by the four denominations in this study is contradictory. Churches with less hierarchical structures attribute the absence of a national strategy to an institutional limitation on national power. However, churches with more hierarchical structures also attribute the absence of a national strategy to the lack of effective national power in instilling mandates. These conflicting accounts reveal that, regardless of governance structures, all four denominations have uniformly failed to produce national strategies and instead rely on congregation-level initiative to drive education. Unfortunately, this reliance on congregation-level initiative also has led to a failure for the national church parties to ensure that all congregations in their denominations learn about their role in the history and legacy of IRS and colonization, as stipulated by Call 59.

Given the demonstrably minimal direction and oversight characteristically provided to congregations from the national level of these four denominations, it is important to consider how early identification of these governance realities by the church parties or TRC could have resulted in measures to proactively circumvent low or uneven adoption of the national provisions. Possible suggestions for moving forward could include further exploration of how

organizational dynamics can be mitigated to see greater engagement with the current resources in addition to a future educational strategy. This also raises the importance of effective collaboration and disclosure of organizational limitations at the time of truth commission recommendation development.

7.3.4. Increased Support and Education for Front-Line Clergy

Many participants expressed certain barriers to education that point to the need for increased support for front-line clergy. These included overwhelming workloads and numerous competing priorities in managing congregational life. Significant occupational demands among clergy are correspondingly reported by other researchers (Terry & Cunningham, 2019; 98 2021). Long work hours, high congregational and self-expectations, and the provision of high intensity mental health or end-of-life support are only some of the realities of the profession (Terry & Cunningham, 2019; 2021; Young et al., 2003).

Half of participants also mentioned the lingering impacts of Covid-19, like decreased attendance and a resulting necessary prioritization of congregational survival. The literature agrees that Covid-19 fundamentally changed how many church leaders and communities engaged with religious life (Girdley & Benton, 2024; Johnston et al., 2022). In addition to increased stress and role ambiguity, Covid-19 precipitated a move away from in-person gatherings that continues to affect congregations across North America (Coe & Inanoglu, 2025; Girdley & Benton, 2024; Johnston et al., 2022).

Additionally, literature substantiates the negative impacts of congregational criticism on clergy mental health (Frenk et al., 2013; Garner, 2013; Proeschold-Bell et al., 2013). This was reflected in the current study when participants expressed significant fear of negative congregational responses regarding education about Residential Schools or colonization as a

barrier to providing education. These responses may be explained by the fact that congregational critiques frequently have longstanding consequences for clergy such as decreased workplace satisfaction and quality of life along with difficult emotions and physical exhaustion (Krause et al., 1998; Lee, 1999; Sielaff et al., 2020). However, given Participant 17's assertion that "the heart of the mission of the church" is "to proclaim reconciliation, to proclaim truth and to proclaim justice," it is imperative for the national churches to consider how to better equip and support staff to enable the provision of education in the face of criticism. Overall, like many other helping professions, the barriers raised by participants can lead to burn out (Jackson-Jordan, 2013; Adams et al., 2017). For this reason, clergy could benefit from increased institutional support to develop protective factors like mentorship, coaching, and peer relationships that prioritize encouragement and accountability (Bledsoe & Sutterland, 2015; Chandler, 2010; Hydinger et al., 2024; Jackson-Jordan, 2013).

Many clergy also voiced a lack of familiarity with the current resources provided by the national churches regarding education about the history and legacy of Residential Schools and colonization. Some further articulated feeling unknowledgeable about the history itself, with participant 13 most clearly expressing this gap. While education and training may vary across denominations, the findings of this research could provide an opportunity for the four Settlement Agreement churches to consider the degree of education and knowledge currently held by clergy regarding the history and legacy of Residential Schools and colonization. It also raises a consideration of how and why the resources provided by the national churches remain elusive for clergy and what measures could be taken to better resource this group. Two subsections under Theme 13, section 6.2.3.1.2 Subtheme: "'A Huge Lacuna': Information Does Not Filter Down Through Levels of Church Organization" and 6.2.3.1.4 Subtheme: "There's Just Not Very Good

Resources Out There": Resource Issues" could help to provide clergy insights into these issues when looking to address these barriers.

7.4. Limitations

This research study possesses several limitations. The limited sample size may have affected the breadth of opinions represented in this paper. Because of the scope of this thesis, only 18 participants were interviewed, made up of 16 clergy, one key informant, and one congregational lay leader. As such, a diversity of perspectives may exist on the topic that this research was not able to capture. Representation was similarly limited. Participants were recruited exclusively from within Ontario, spanning only six cities. Reasonably, responses may not be representative of other provinces or the national reality. Additionally, to provide a similar geographic and municipal context for the interviews, the intention of the methodology was to recruit four participants, one from each denomination, from a total of two northern and two southern cities of similar population size. However, due to recruitment issues, only the two northern cities had a participant from all four denominations. Due to this lack of geographical standardization with the four southern cities, it is possible that hidden factors, such as proximity to Indigenous communities or the political climate of a given city, may affect some participant responses in ways that are unacknowledged in the research. Furthermore, there was no known Indigenous representation among participants, likely due to the low number of Indigenous clergy in the sample cities. However, this would be an important area for future research, especially given the number of Indigenous members of the Settlement Agreement churches (Statistics Canada, 2022a). A delimitation of the research occurred in the exclusive recruitment of congregation-level clergy, to accommodate the scope of the thesis and the focus of Call to Action 59 on congregational education. However, this resulted in the absence of any national level

perspectives pertaining to the existence of and process surrounding national strategies. As such, no definitive conclusions can be drawn as to the existence of national strategies, despite clergy opinions. Perspectives of national, regional, or Indigenous-specific levels of leadership would ideally be included in future research on the topic. Finally, self-selection bias is another limitation of the current study. Because of the nature of the topic, it is possible that only those with strong feelings toward the TRC and reconciliation agreed to participate. As a result, the findings may not be reflective of overall trends within the denominations.

8. Recommendations

Key findings from this study indicate that no educational strategies have been developed by the national church parties to the Settlement Agreement, as outlined in Call to Action 59. While isolated measures not related to a national strategy have been taken by denominations and their congregations to educate congregants in the history and legacy of IRS and colonization, several barriers exist which inhibit effective education. In light of these findings, the following recommendations have been developed.

National Strategies for the Church Parties

- Completion of Call to Action 59 through the development of a national education strategy for each Settlement Agreement church party which consists of a formalized long-range plan with detailed steps for ensuring congregant education
- Ensuring that education content includes details about that particular denomination's role in the history and legacy of IRS and colonization
- Instituting formal assessments to evaluate efficacy and implementation of the national education strategy at the congregational level

Addressing Barriers for Clergy

- Increasing education and training for clergy on the history and legacy of IRS, colonization, and the resources available from their national church
- Equipping and supporting front-line clergy to provide congregational education on the history and legacy of IRS and colonization despite negative reception
- Increasing institutional support and training for clergy, including mentorship, coaching, and peer relationships to offset high occupational demands

TRC and Truth Commissions

- Formation of a body dedicated to monitoring and supporting implementation of the Canadian TRC recommendations across sectors
- Developing concrete systems of post-commission accountability during the initial planning phases of future commissions to avoid weak implementation

Research

- Future research into and support for mechanisms which increase the implementation of backward-facing recommendations which address culpability in truth commissions
- Further research into rates of recommendation completion for truth commissions and factors which effect implementation, including for Canada's TRC

9. Conclusion

This thesis aims to explore progress on Call to Action 59 by the Settlement Agreement church parties in implementing nationally developed education strategies to ensure congregational learning about the history and legacy of IRS and colonization. Indicating that the recommendation remains incomplete, participants in this study either expressed that they were unsure of existing national education strategies or that the strategies themselves had not been developed. However, in lieu of national strategies, participants identified some isolated measures

taken within their denominations to engage congregants in the topic of Residential Schools or colonization. This research raises questions about the Settlement Agreement church parties' commitment to reconciliation as well as the lack of broader accountability structures that exist for evaluating TRC Calls to Action progress. This thesis hopes to inspire the church parties to build on the current initiatives, remove barriers to education, and complete the Call to Action through the creation of fulsome educational strategies. It further hopes to provide areas for reflection in the creation of future truth commissions to increase accountability and support for implementation. In conclusion, Participant 8 accurately summarizes the participants' perspective on the current progress alongside a desire to see future growth: "What I've learned from [participating in this research] is that we've got a lot more work to do. And personally, I've got a lot more work to do…because we need to do more work on this [Call to Action]."

10. References

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11. Appendices

11.1. Appendix A: Recruitment Materials

Lakehead UNIVERSITY

955 Oliver Road
Thunder Bay, ON, P7B 5E1
School of Social Work

Recruitment Materials

Phone Script: Administrative Assistants, Reception, Someone Other than Potential Participant
Hi, my name is Ashley Rodericks-Schulwach and I am a Masters student in the School of Social Work at Lakehead University.
I am doing a research study about how congregations are implementing directives from their denomination's national leadership in response to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. I am wondering if I could speak with the priest/pastor or someone who might be responsible for that area?

(If they are not available) Is there a way that I can leave a message or send an email?
Thank you very much. Have a good day.

Phone Script: Priest, Clergy, Lay Leader (Intended Participant)
Hi _____.
My name is Ashley Rodericks-Schulwach and I am a Masters student in the School of Social Work at Lakehead University. I am conducting a research study for my thesis about how congregations are implementing directives from their denomination's national leadership in response to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's Call to Action 59. This Call to Action outlines the need for individual congregations to learn about their church denomination's role in the history and legacy of Residential Schools and colonization. The research involves participation in an interview which is fully confidential, you can withdraw at any time during it, and it takes between 60-90 minutes. As well, all participants will receive a 25$ gift card to thank them for their time. I'm wondering if you would be interested in participating and setting up an interview time?
(If no) Thank you very much for considering the study and for your time. Have a great day.
(If yes schedule a time). Thank you so much for your willingness to participate. Looking forward to talking again soon.

Voicemail Script: General Inbox; Administrator's Inbox
Hi my name is Ashley Rodericks-Schulwach and I am a Masters student in the School of Social Work at Lakehead University,
I am doing a research study looking at about how congregations are implementing directives from their denomination's national leadership in response to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. I am looking to speak with the priest/head pastor a bit more about the study and about the possibility of participating in an interview. My phone number is _____ and my email is _____ if someone could get in touch with me, that would be greatly appreciated. Thank you and have a great day.

Voicemail Script: Clergy Member's Inbox
Hi, my name is Ashley Rodericks-Schulwach and I am a Masters student in the School of Social Work at Lakehead University,

Lakehead UNIVERSITY

955 Oliver Road
Thunder Bay, ON, P7B 5E1
School of Social Work

I am doing a research study looking at how congregations are implementing directives from their denomination's national leadership in response to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. I am looking to speak with you a bit more about the study, what is involved, and about the possibility of your participation in an interview. My phone number is _____ and my email is _____ and if you could get in touch with me, that would be greatly appreciated. Thank you and have a great day.

Email Script: Clergy/Lay Leader

Subject: Research Study: Local Congregations and Teaching Tools on Truth and Reconciliation

Hi _____,

I am a Masters student in the School of Social Work at Lakehead University doing a research study at Lakehead University. This research looks at the ways congregations are implementing directives from their denomination's national leadership in response to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's Call to Action 59. This Call to Action outlines the need for individual congregations to learn about their church denomination's role in the history and legacy of Residential Schools and colonization.

I am wondering if you would be interested in participating in a 60-90 minute Zoom (or in-person, if in Thunder Bay) interview. The process is fully confidential and voluntary, meaning that the information you give will not be linked back to you or your congregation and that you can withdraw at any time during the interview. As well, all participants will receive a $25 gift card as thanks for their time. If you would like to participate or gain more information, you can either contact me at this email address or by phone at _____.

Thank you very much for your time.

Kind regards,

Ashley

11.2. Appendix B: Research Ethics Board Approval Letter

Research Ethics Board
t: (807) 343-8283
research@lakeheadu.ca

July 28, 2023

Principal Investigator: Dr. Ravi Gokani
Student: Ashley Rodericks-Schulwach
Health and Behavioural Sciences\School of Social Work
Lakehead University

Dear Dr. Ravi Gokani and Ashley:

Re: Romeo File No: 1469830
Granting Agency: n/a
Agency Reference #: n/a

On behalf of the Research Ethics Board, I am pleased to grant ethical approval to your research project titled, "Faith and (De)Colonization: Church Education Strategies in Response to Call to Action 59 of Canada's Truth and Reconciliation Commission".

Ethics approval is valid until July 28, 2024. Please submit a Request for Renewal to the Office of Research Services via the Romeo Research Portal by June 28, 2024, if your research involving human participants will continue for longer than one year. A Final Report must be submitted promptly upon completion of the project. Access the Romeo Research Portal by logging into mylnfo at:

https://erpwp.lakeheadu.ca/

During the course of the study, any modifications to the protocol or forms must not be initiated without prior written approval from the REB. You must promptly notify the REB of any adverse events that may occur.

Best wishes for a successful research project.

Sincerely,

Dr. Claudio Pousa
Chair, Research Ethics Board

/sa

11.3. Appendix C: Information Letter

Faculty of Health and Behavioural Science
School of Social Work
e: aroderic@lakeheadu.ca

Information Letter

Project Title: Faith and (De)Colonization: Church Education Strategies in Response to Call to Action 59 of Canada's Truth and Reconciliation Commission

Research Team: Ashley Rodericks-Schulwach (Principal Investigator; Master of Social Work Thesis Student); Dr. Ravi Gokani (Supervisor)

Dear Potential Participant,

Thank you for considering participation in this research study. Please read the following to understand the specifics of this study and to decide whether you would like to participate. After you have read the letter, please ask any questions you may have.

PURPOSE
This project explores how local congregations are implementing directives from their denomination's national leadership in response to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's Call to Action 59. This Call to Action outlines the need for individual congregations to learn about their church denomination's role in the history and legacy of Residential Schools and colonization.

WHO IS ELIGIBLE?
Any Anglican, Presbyterian, United or Catholic clergy member responsible for leading a local congregation in Ontario or any lay leader from these denominations who is responsible for overseeing education about reconciliation within their local congregation.

WHAT IS REQUESTED OF ME AS A PARTICIPANT?
Participation in this study is completely voluntary. You may withdraw at any time until the end of the interview and decline to answer any question during the process. You also will be asked to sign a consent form to show your understanding of what is required of you to participate in this research study.

The researcher will ask you around 6 questions verbally, in person or via Zoom, with the interview lasting between 60-90 minutes in length. Interviews will be digitally (voice) recorded, and transcripts of the interview will be created. Any identifying information will be excluded from the transcripts. All participants will receive a $25 gift card for participating in this study.

WHAT ARE THE BENEFITS OF PARTICIPATION?
One potential benefit of participating is that you will be able to share your perspectives. As well, your participation in this research may contribute to the learning of other congregations and clergy members.

WHAT ARE THE RISKS OF PARTICIPATION?
Your participation in this study poses minimal risk; however, the researcher will take steps to ensure that risk is minimized and to respect your confidentiality. As well, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, in-person research carries greater or additional risk.

HOW WILL MY CONFIDENTIALITY BE MAINTAINED?
Your confidentiality is ensured by the researchers as we do not require you to indicate your name or any other identifying information during the interview. When we record the interview and then transcribe or convert the audio recording to text, we also eliminate personal and identifying things you might have said. The only people with access to the audio recordings and transcribed data are members of the research team.

Any identified data (including recordings, master lists, etc.) will be stored on password-protected devices and securely locked in a filing cabinet in the primary investigator's office, as per their university's research data policy. Upon completion of the study, the data will be stored securely in a locked cabinet at Lakehead University, Thunder Bay for a minimum of seven years. Only members of the research team will have access to identified data. After seven years all data will be deleted.

WHAT IF I WANT TO WITHDRAW FROM THE STUDY?
You are able to withdraw from the study at any time up until the end of finishing the interview. To withdraw, simply tell the researcher that you wish to withdraw.

HOW CAN I RECEIVE A COPY OF THE RESEARCH RESULTS?
Please contact Ashley Rodericks-Schulwach at aroderic@lakeheadu.ca after December 2023 for a summary of the results or call (343) 363-0398.

RESEARCH ETHICS BOARD REVIEW AND APPROVAL:
This research study has been reviewed and approved by the Lakehead University Research Ethics Board (REB# 1469830). If you have any questions related to the ethics of the research or your rights and welfare as a participant and would like to speak to someone outside of the research team, please contact Sue Wright at the Research Ethics Board at 807-343-8283 or research@lakeheadu.ca.

Thank you for taking the time to read this information and for your consideration of our study.

Sincerely,

Masters Student
School of Social Work, Lakehead University
(343) 363-0398
aroderic@lakeheadu.ca

11.4. Appendix D: Consent Form

Faculty of Health and Behavioural Science
School of Social Work
e: aroderic@lakeheadu.ca

CONSENT FORM

Project Title: Faith and (De)Colonization: Church Education Strategies in Response to Call to Action 59 of Canada's Truth and Reconciliation Commission

Research Team: Ashley Rodericks-Schulwach (Principal Investigator; Master of Social Work Thesis Student); Dr. Ravi Gokani (Supervisor)

Please read the following and provide a dated signature OR contact me to participate and verbally consent your participation at the beginning of our Zoom interview.

My signature on this sheet indicates I agree to participate in a study being led by Ashley Rodericks-Schulwach and Dr. Gokani. This project is facilitated as part of a Master's Thesis and focuses on how local congregations are implementing directives from their denomination's national leadership in response to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's Call to Action 59. Individual interviews will be used to explore how church congregations are learning about their denomination's role in the history and legacy of Residential Schools.

My signature indicates that I understand the following (please check to indicate agreement):

- ☐ I have read and understood the information contained in the Information Letter;
- ☐ I agree to participate in this research;
- ☐ I understand the risks and benefits to the study;
- ☐ I understand that I am a volunteer and can withdraw from the study at any time before the end of the interview. I may also choose not to answer any question;
- ☐ I understand that the data will be securely stored at Lakehead University for a minimum period of 7 years following completion of the research project;
- ☐ I understand that the research findings will be made available to me upon request;
- ☐ I understand that what I say will be confidential and that all identifying information will be deleted;
- ☐ All of my questions have been answered;

With this understanding, I agree to participate in this research.

Participant Name (please print):_____

Participant Signature: _____

Date: _____

11.5. Appendix E: Interview Guide

Semi-Structured Interview Guide

Background Information

Target Population: Anglican, Presbyterian, United, and Catholic clergy or lay leaders in Ontario who are responsible for educating their local congregation about the history of Residential Schools and colonization.

Call to Action 59: "We call upon church parties to the Settlement Agreement to develop ongoing education strategies to ensure that their respective congregations learn about their church's role in colonization, the history and legacy of residential schools, and why apologies to former residential school students, their families, and communities were necessary" (TRC, 2015).

Research Questions for Current Study

> ***Research Question #1***: In response to Call to Action 59, how are the nationally developed educational strategies of the Settlement Agreement church denominations being implemented in local congregations?
>
> ***Research Question #2*:** What is the perceived effectiveness strategies at ensuring that their respective congregations learn about a) their church's role in colonization and b) the history and legacy of Residential Schools?

Category 1: Interview Questions about Strategies, Implementation & Effectiveness *for Education about Residential Schools*

1. **Educational Strategies about Residential Schools:** What ongoing educational strategies has your denomination developed nationally to ensure that congregations learn about your church denomination's role in and the history and legacy of Residential Schools, in particular?

    a. ***Prompt for Anglican Congregations***: I've noticed that the Anglican Church website has a 'reconciliation toolkit' section. How does the online reconciliation toolkit relate to the educational strategies, if at all? (e.g., Kairos Blanket Exercise, Mapping the Ground We Stand On)

    b. ***Prompt for Presbyterian Congregations*:** I've noticed that the Presbyterian Church website contains some healing and reconciliation documents. How do the nationally developed healing and reconciliation materials/documents available online relate to the educational strategies, if at all? (e.g., Documents: History of Residential Schools; Acknowledging Indigenous Territory in Church; Becoming Neighbours; Equipping for Leadership; Healing & Reconciliation Sunday PowerPoint & Prayer Resource; Study Guide for Confession).

c. ***Prompt for United Church Congregations***: I've noticed that the United Church website contains some Reconciliation and Indigenous Justice documents. How do the online reconciliation-focused prayers, documents and worship suggestions relate to the educational strategies, if at all? (e.g., Indigenous Day of Prayer; Apology Litany; Murray Pruden's Palm Sunday & Passion resources).

d. ***Prompt for Catholic Church Congregations:*** I've noticed that the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops' website contains some materials about renewing and strengthening relationships with Indigenous Peoples. How do the online resources relate to the educational strategies, if at all? (e.g., Residential School and TRC, Reconciliation fund, Returning to Spirit Reconciliation Workshops etc.)

e. ***Prompt for Local Strategies Not Related to National Strategies:*** Are there strategies for educating your congregation about the history and legacy of Residential Schools that are not informed by national strategies? If so, what are they?

2. **Implementation of Strategies about Residential Schools:** How are you implementing these national educational strategies within your local congregation?

    a. ***Prompt for Local Strategies Not Related to National Strategies:*** How are you implementing other (non-national) educational strategies about the history and legacy of Residential Schools within your congregation?

3. **Assessment Methods for Strategies about Residential Schools:** Formally or informally, what kinds of assessments do you use to gauge the effectiveness of national educational strategies on Residential Schools with your congregation? (e.g., Formal: surveys, feedback forms, annual reports; Informal: anecdotes, conversations with parishioners, observation etc.)

    a. ***Prompt for Local Strategies Not Related to National Strategies:*** Formally or informally, what kinds of assessments do you use to gauge the effectiveness of locally developed (non-national) educational strategies on Residential Schools with your congregation?

4. **Assessment of Strategies about Residential Schools.** Based on formal or informal assessment, how effective is the implementation of national strategies at educating your congregation specifically about the history and legacy of Residential Schools?

    a. ***Prompt about the nature of assessment****:* How do you assess effectiveness, formally or informally?
    b. ***Prompts about assessing effectiveness****:*
        i. Are there conversations occurring on the topics raised by the educational strategies?
        ii. Have attitudes shifted since the educational strategies were introduced? How do you know?
        iii. Are there new programs or initiatives that have started in your congregation because of education about Residential Schools?
        iv. Have relationships with Indigenous individuals or communities changed since the educational strategies began?

c. ***Prompt for Local Strategies Not Related to National Strategies:*** Based on formal or informal assessment, how effective is the implementation of local strategies at educating your congregation specifically about the history and legacy of Residential Schools?

Category 2: Interview Questions about Strategies, Implementation & Effectiveness *for Education about the Denomination's Role in Colonization*

1. **Educational Strategies about Colonization**: What ongoing educational strategies has your denomination developed to ensure that congregations learn about your church denomination's role in colonization?
    a. *Prompt about specific church doctrines:* What, if any, educational strategies exist to educate your congregation about:
        i. Early missionary contact?
        ii. Terra Nullius?
        iii. The Doctrine of Discovery?
        iv. Christian/church views of Indigenous Peoples during early colonization?
    b. *Prompt for Local Strategies Not Related to National Strategies:* Are there ongoing strategies for educating your congregation about your church denomination's role in colonization that are not based on national strategies? If so, what are they?

2. **Implementation of Strategies about Colonization:** How are you implementing these educational strategies within your local congregation?
    a. *Prompt for Local Strategies Not Related to National Strategies:* How are you implementing other (non-national) educational strategies about your denomination's role in colonization within your congregation?

3. **Assessment Methods for Strategies about Colonization:** Formally or informally, what kinds of assessments do you use to gauge the effectiveness of educational strategies on colonization with your congregation? (e.g., Formal: surveys, feedback forms, annual reports; Informal: anecdotes, conversations with parishioners, observation etc.)
    a. *Prompt for Local Strategies Not Related to National Strategies:* Formally or informally, what kinds of assessments do you use to gauge the effectiveness of locally-developed (non-national) educational strategies on your denomination's role in colonization with your congregation?

4. **Assessment of Strategies about Colonization**: Based on formal or informal assessment, how effective do you think your implementation of national strategies is at educating your congregation specifically about your church denomination's role in colonization?

    a. *Prompt about the nature of assessment:*
        i. How do you assess effectiveness, formally or informally?
    b. *Prompts about assessing effectiveness:*
        i. Are there conversations occurring on the topics raised by the educational strategies?

   ii. Have attitudes shifted since the educational strategies were introduced? How do you know?
   iii. Are there new programs or initiatives that have started in your congregation because of education about your denomination's role in colonization?
   iv. Have relationships with Indigenous individuals or communities changed since the educational strategies began?

c. *Prompt for Local Strategies Not Related to National Strategies:* Based on formal or informal assessment, how effective do you think your implementation of locally-developed strategies is at educating your congregation specifically about your church denomination's role in colonization?