



WALKING THE BLANKETS

Last fall, Baptist Women sponsored the Indigenous Conference Walking the Good Way Together. One of the workshops offered was the Blanket Exercise. Joan Peacock shares her experience walking the blankets.

by Joan Peacock

Joan is Baptist Women's newest board member

IN OCTOBER I attended the Indigenous Conference: *Walking the Good Way Together* and took part in the Blanket Exercise.

The Blanket Exercise is an interactive teaching tool designed to raise awareness and deepen understanding of the denial of Indigenous peoples' nationhood in Canada, the historic relationship between Europeans and Indigenous nations, and the impact of colonization. It reveals the historic ways Indigenous peoples lost access to their land, what impact this loss had on their communities, and how Indigenous people have resisted, and continue to resist, assimilation.

Participants build understanding about their shared history as Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples in Canada by walking through pre-contact, treaty-making, colonization and resistance.

Before the activity begins, facilitators spread blankets out on the floor. These blankets represent North America before the arrival of the Europeans. The participants represent the Indigenous peoples and they

move about freely on the blankets as they are using and occupying the lands. A narrator reads a text while another person, playing the role of a European, joins the group and talks with those walking about on the blankets.

They gave me a white card, and I was one of the first who had to withdraw from the blanket because I represented one who died of the many sicknesses brought by the Europeans, such as smallpox, scarlet fever and tuberculosis; sicknesses that had never been previously known. It is estimated that at least 50 per cent of the Indigenous peoples died—perhaps even as many as 90 per cent.

I was shocked to hear that sometimes, even deliberately, blankets infected with smallpox were given or traded to Indigenous peoples.

As the exercise continued, the blanketed area slowly got smaller to represent the taking of land, so that today, where Indigenous peoples once had access to all the land in Canada, now only one percent of the land is “reserved for Indians.” Participants with yellow cards

were asked to step onto a small collection of blankets that represented the residential schools. Those with blue cards were asked to step off the blankets because they represented those who died of malnutrition. To represent the '60s scoop, when Indigenous children were adopted by non-Indigenous families, participants were asked to crowd onto small scraps of blankets.

The Blanket Exercise always ends with a talking or sharing circle. At the end of our time, we came together to reflect on what we had just experienced. I was shocked that this history was part of Canada's national narrative. *How could this have happened in Canada?* I hadn't known how much this has affected and still continues to affect Indigenous people. The circle offered me a safe space to share my thoughts, emotions and ask questions as I considered our role in the reconciliatory process between Indigenous and settler cultures.

If you have the opportunity to experience the Blanket Exercise I highly encourage you to do so. ■

BAPTIST WOMEN

In-Canada Mission Trip
July 21-26 | Dixon Ministry

"I often don't feel overly qualified for many things, but God confirmed that even I could be used!"

~ Heather Skeates (Dixon 2018 team member)

details: baptistwomen.com/events • \$1000 (includes lodging + meals)

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