

I'd like to share with you my version of the Blanket Exercise, which I shared with All Saints, South Burnaby, for National Aboriginal Day, 2015. I attended the Blanket Exercise at St. James, May 2, 2015, and was challenged to consider my own family's history and the benefits they and I have received at First Nations expense. So I included "blankets" about my grandparents and the Smelter where my father worked.

I began by talking about "Joe", a young First Nations man I know at a Supportive Housing Society in Abbotsford where I offer counselling to people affected by FASD and other disabilities. Joe has FASD, and struggles with many of the features typical of that disability. He is a beautiful man, who loves his family and holds a job on the Yard Crew at the Society. He draws and carves First Nations art. Many of his family, on the Reserve out beyond Abbotsford, struggle with FASD, abuse, violence, addictions, and shame - aspects of intergenerational trauma. They also have great resilience and love, and Joe is especially proud of his grandfather who was Grand Chief of his Nation. His Nation once travelled over vast territory in the valley and fished in the river, and now lives on a tiny Reserve, their lives marked by tragedy and suffering. I asked "how did this come about? What happened?"

To answer that, I described the Blanket Exercise, and laid out my 10 "blankets" – written up briefly on 8 ½ x 10 pages – on the floor in the Nave. This depicted the vast lands once travelled over by Joe's Nation, and First Nations across the continent. As I described each oppression, loss, or blow, I picked up the paper and laid it on the Altar, to depict the loss of their lands. In the centre I had a small map of Joe's Reserve. These were offered at the Offertory.

I concluded by referring to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission and its 94 Recommendations. I invited the congregation to "read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest" them, and to ask themselves, as I do, which of these would be most helpful to Joe and his family.

1.

## European diseases

Measles, Whooping Cough, Flu, Smallpox, TB

- these arrived with earliest contact with explorers and traders
- families died, communities were devastated, social networks and oral traditions were lost

2.

## Alcohol as a trade currency

HBC and Northwest Company traders bought furs for European fashion statements

- this occurred with earliest contact
- the damaging effects of alcoholism and FASD were inflicted early, and continue

3.

## Treaties signed, lands taken

First Nations began to lose the vast territories they held in common, as gifts from the Creator

- colonizers believed in “private property”
- hundreds of treaties were signed, surrendering millions of square kilometres of territory

4.

## 1867 British North America Act

Establishment of the Dominion of Canada also established more powers over First Nations

- this meant more loss of autonomy and sovereignty
- tracts of lands became available for immigrants, railroads, and resource extraction

5.

## 1876 – Indian Act

This Act formally set up Reserves and the way they were governed, giving Indian Agents power

- this wiped out previous forms of First Nations government and social organization
- it also banned cultural and religious ceremonies such as the Potlach and Sun Dance

6.

Early 1900s – my mother's parents  
immigrated

The Dominion Land Act granted 160 acres for \$10.00, if they would clear and farm the land and build a house

- my maternal grandparents were poor immigrants from Eastern Europe, and settled in Saskatchewan
- the Cree were restricted to tiny scattered Reserves

7.

Around 1910, my father's parents  
immigrated

Settlements were important along the rail lines, to  
establish Canada as a continental nation

- my paternal grandparents were poor immigrants from  
Northern Ireland, and also settled in Saskatchewan
- the Cree were effectively invisible on Reserves

8.

## Residential Schools

The earliest was established in 1820; many were closed in the 70s; the last closed in 1996

- the “Gradual Civilization Act” assumed the superiority of European culture, religion, and language
- schools were isolated from families, discipline was punitive, sexual and physical abuse too common

9.

## The Smelter in Trail

The Smelter was first built in the late 1880s, after gold and silver mines were dug and the RR came through

- growing up there, we didn't know or care who was there before the Smelter, before we were
- when the river was polluted, the lands taken, and the animals driven away, the Sinixt people left or died

10.

## Intergenerational Trauma

The impact of the oppressions, losses and blows has created generational Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder

- this may be expressed as vulnerability to addictions, experiences of abuse and violence, higher incidence of poverty and unemployment, suicide, FASD
- systemic racism still pervades Canadian society

## **The Reverend Barbara Blakely's Reflection on Attending - THE BLANKET EXERCISE**

I attended the Blanket Exercise on May 2, held at St. James Church. I won't describe the exercise itself, because many people have by now participated in the event, and lots of information is available from the KAIROS website and online. I want to write some personal reflections, to describe the impact of the event, and the new discoveries I made.

I realized in my morning prayers on Sunday that the hosts for the event were NOT St. James Church, or the Diocesan planning committee, they were the First Nations elders, teachers, and facilitators. The drumming and chanting, and the ceremonies, were gestures of welcome and hospitality. We were welcomed not only to the event, but to the territory on which the event was held, and to the lands of the ancestors of the hosts. I wonder why I didn't recognize this at the time, maybe because it wasn't typically Anglican.

What really made the workshop worthwhile was participating in action in that vivid experience of standing on smaller and smaller sections of blanket. Some people "died" because of smallpox, or while in Residential School, and they moved back off the blankets. When land was lost because treaties were broken, we crowded together more tightly. These moves did create a sense of trauma and loss and helplessness.

We concluded with a ceremony like the Potlatch: a feast where the host family gave everything away (in expectation of being invited to another family's feast where they would receive as abundantly as they had given). We were all given gifts: the blankets from the exercise (cleaned and folded), mugs, apples and oranges. I received a soft cream-coloured fuzzy blanket, and an apple and orange. This Potlatch gift-giving has come to feel like a gesture of reconciliation and forgiveness. We White Anglicans may feel like we are in charge of offering this process of healing and reconciliation, but maybe we are the recipients.

After some struggle about this, I found a way to acknowledge the advantage my grandparents, parents and I have received, probably at First Nations expense. First, the Land Grants my grandparents likely received at low cost and easy terms enabled them to homestead and farm. That land in Saskatchewan had been ceded in treaties, but the First Nations Reserves in the area are tiny. The story is that they "came with nothing, from Northern Ireland and Eastern Europe, and made something of themselves" in the early 1900s; they were poor immigrants, and did not intend to dispossess others, but nonetheless they did, and found a place to start raising their families in Canada.

Then I thought about the smelter in Trail where my father worked as an unskilled labourer: who was there before gold and silver were discovered in the late 1800s, and the miners came and the smelter was built, and the railroad came through? What happened to them? Was it the 'sngaytskstx', Sinixt People who lived there? Prof. Google has helped me turn up this possibility, and maps of their traditional territory include Trail. It was a revelation to me, that these peoples had fished and hunted in my hometown area, and a shock that I had not known about this before.

My father did not intend to dispossess anyone else, but nonetheless he worked at a place where others had been dispossessed, and gained the means to support his family. I was expected to “make something of myself,” no-one in my family is particularly “privileged” but I have educational and professional advantages which I now want to offer back. Now that I see my place in “the evil that enslaves us, the evil done in my name” I want to make amends and take positive steps.

I felt some disappointment in the lack of follow-up plans, and suggestions or challenges for next steps. We’ve had some good consciousness-raising, and now I’m ready for action.

### **More Theological Reflection on the Blanket Exercise**

This Exercise looked at the relationship between First Nations and settlers. We can look at relationships among ourselves in our diverse ethnic, racial and cultural congregations, and also at our relationships with others in our neighbourhood who may be strangers or different from us. A good question to ask ourselves: how does racism, or other kinds of prejudice or exclusion, damage our own spiritual life? We may benefit from racism, prejudice, and exclusion, and they do put us in the wrong, in ways that we need to be accountable for: repent, confess, make amends, put right. In addition, in what other ways are we damaged - or to put it another way, what are we missing, what gifts are there for us that we are blinded to? What gifts are we not open to receiving from others who are different from us? Immediately it's not only a matter of guilt, but more of impoverishment and loss. How do we move from exclusion to inclusion?