

MINUTE FOR RIGHT RELATIONS APRIL 2018

-----THE BLANKET EXERCISE-----

It was early in the morning as my friend and I headed off to the Sunrise Ceremony at St Patrick's Roman Catholic Church. Bea shared that she hoped we would be able to attend the Blanket Exercise that was taking place after the Sunrise Ceremony. I was excited at the prospect of learning what the blanket exercise was about. The high school students and some of us from the Reformation 500 North Conference, "Rebels with A Cause" that commemorated the 500 years since we stayed after the Sunrise Ceremony. I could hardly wait to see what would happen next. We gathered in the church hall. There were blankets all over the floor, different colors, different textures. We soon learned that these blankets represented the country of Canada. Anishinaabe roamed the countryside freely making a living. Then the government decreed that it was ("Terra Nullis") an empty land, belonging to nobody.

We were invited to take off our shoes and journey the countryside too as Indigenous people did in days gone by.

As we stepped onto the land we were handed little slips of paper with instructions on them. As the narrator told the story of how the settlers gradually took over the land, blankets were removed, making the land we were on, smaller and smaller. Some of us followed instructions while the narrators representing the government pushed others around. Some didn't follow instructions and unfolded their blankets in rebellion.

I felt overwhelmed when the narrator told me to get off the blanket. I had contracted smallpox from the blankets the fur traders had given us in exchange for our furs. I died at the age of ten years old. I need to say I felt angry with the settlers for just moving in and taking our land, and just tearing my life from me, before I had a chance to grow up.

After the exercise we took a little time to debrief and let go of our roles in the drama. I need to say that doing the blanket exercise helped me understand the feelings of the Anishinaabe and what an injustice had been done to them. I have a new sense of our role as settlers in that history.

This experience deepened my resolve to live into right relationship with the Anishinaabe. So, when I had an opportunity to take a series of three workshops on Cultural Competency Training through Kenjgewin Teg, I jumped at the opportunity. There were about forty people from both the Anishinaabe and the wider community that gathered for that three day seminar. The workshops were packed with information. That was helpful but what touched me the most was sitting in the sacred circle listening and sharing with each other. What a sacred holy time! At the end of the workshops we were each invited to write a letter to ourselves and name at least one thing we were going to do as a result of our growing awareness of Canada's true history and need for reconciliation with our First Nations brothers and sisters.

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