

# The Blanket Exercise

A learning and sharing  
activity for Presbyterians



The Presbyterian  
Church in Canada

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### The Blanket Exercise

#### A learning and sharing activity for Presbyterians

Justice Ministries, The Presbyterian Church in Canada, 2014

The Blanket Exercise is adapted from “In Peace and Friendship - a New Relationship with Aboriginal Peoples” ©KAIROS 2011. Used and adapted with permission.

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Blanket Exercise at St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church, Kingston, Ontario

## Introduction

The Blanket Exercise was developed by the Aboriginal Rights Coalition (ARC). The ARC was one of ten ecumenical coalitions the churches brought together to form KAIROS: Canadian Ecumenical Justice Initiatives in 2001. The Presbyterian Church in Canada is a member of KAIROS. The Blanket Exercise is one session in a five-session curriculum by KAIROS called "In Peace and Friendship - a new relationship with Aboriginal peoples."

The Blanket Exercise is an experiential activity that explores the 500-year relationship between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples on Turtle Island (a name for North America used by some First Nations). This version of the Blanket Exercise includes references of significance to The Presbyterian Church in Canada and its relationship with Indigenous peoples.

## Why do the Blanket Exercise?

Our connection to The Presbyterian Church in Canada, to Indigenous peoples and to history acknowledges an obligation to walk with the Indigenous peoples of Canada on their healing journeys. When Indigenous peoples can say that they have begun their healing journeys then we too can say that we have begun our own healing journeys as brothers and sisters of our Lord.

The Blanket Exercise invites us to be open and vulnerable as history is shared. When we are vulnerable to these stories, we allow ourselves to be open to God's love and companionship as we acknowledge the need for healing the broken relationship between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples. It is time to journey together. All my relations.

*The Rev. Stewart Folster, director of the Saskatoon Native Circle Ministry.*

# Preparing to do the Blanket Exercise

Fifteen to twenty people is the ideal group size for this activity. It can be adapted to larger or smaller groups. The Blanket Exercise takes 35-40 minutes. Group facilitators should include time for a briefing and debriefing discussion - resources are included. The entire activity typically takes 70 to 90 minutes.

This guide includes briefing and debriefing materials that can be adapted as needed. Permission is granted to photocopy the briefing and debriefing materials, activity script and scroll texts.

**Read through the script prior to running the activity.** Prepare the activity materials. The narrator has the largest speaking role. The facilitator should narrate the Blanket Exercise. Participants read the numbered scrolls. Identify one participant ahead of time to play the role of the European settler. The European settler reads the lettered scrolls, and interacts with Blanket Exercise participants. Give this person a copy of the Blanket Exercise script prior to the activity. The briefing and debriefing materials provide suggested questions and a structure for leading a conversation.

This activity may be done as a part of The Presbyterian Church in Canada's mission study, "Making Connections: Walking Side by Side-A Journey toward Healing and Reconciliation", available through the Book Room in the winter of 2014.

The 139<sup>th</sup> General Assembly (2013) passed a motion inviting groups in the church to commemorate the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary (2014) of the Church's Confession (see page 21).

The Blanket Exercise may be used by congregations, sessions, youth groups, mission committees, Healing and Reconciliation local leaders, AMS, WMS, or other groups in the church.

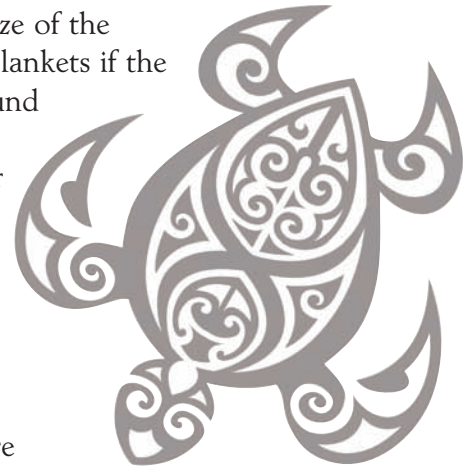
Additional liturgical and educational material from The Presbyterian Church in Canada's Healing and Reconciliation program is available online ([presbyterian.ca/healing](http://presbyterian.ca/healing)). Facilitators are encouraged to become acquainted with KAIROS' Indigenous Rights Program ([www.kairoscanada.org/dignity-rights/indigenous-rights/](http://www.kairoscanada.org/dignity-rights/indigenous-rights/)).

## Materials

You'll need the following materials:

1. The scrolls (see Appendix A, page 18).
2. Several index cards in any three different colours. Each colour represents one category: hunger, disease and school. In this script hunger cards are green, disease cards are grey and school cards are purple. Depending on the group's size, up to 10 cards of each colour may be needed. Cards should be given to approximately half of the participants. One third of people who receive cards should receive school or hunger cards. A minimum of three school and two hunger cards are needed in the activity. For example, if the group has 20 participants, 10 people will receive coloured index cards. Five cards will be grey (disease), three cards will be purple (school) and two cards will be green (hunger).
3. A copy of The Presbyterian Church in Canada's 1994 Confession (see Appendix B, page 22).

4. Paper, pens and markers for the debriefing.
5. Blankets for the activity. The number of blankets will depend on the size of the group. One blanket is needed for every two participants. Bring extra blankets if the blankets are smaller than 120 cm by 180 cm (4' by 6'). Bed sheets, ground sheets, unzipped sleeping bags may be used. Participants walk on the blankets, so don't use good linens, and ask participants to remove their shoes.



## Understanding your own response to the Blanket Exercise

It is important to examine your own reactions to the Blanket Exercise before leading others to discuss their responses. A leader who can say “Well, I used to believe...” or “I have learned...” invites others to feel comfortable and to be honest in his or her reflection and responses. Consider these questions before you lead a discussion:

- Do I understand my own reactions to the Blanket Exercise?
- Can I sense the needs and feelings of individuals in a group? Each person comes to this activity with different perspectives, assumptions and knowledge that can affect group dynamics.
- Do I believe that the faith-based context of forgiveness and reconciliation is God's way of doing justice, nurturing relationships and building a loving community?
- You do not have to know all the answers to historical questions. Defusing tension, focussing discussion, and suggesting resources is more important than being able to answer every question about history.

## Encountering different responses

Participants' responses and reactions might be influenced by:

- History (what has been taught, remembered or direct experiences).
- Learning the history of the relationship between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples for the first time.
- Stereotypical images, attitudes or unquestioned prejudices.
- Opinions formed from personal experiences or news coverage of current events.

## Selecting a venue

- Select a room with enough space to lay out the blankets. Clear the space of hazards. Lay out the blankets so all blankets are touching. Participants should have enough space to be able to walk around comfortably on the blankets at the start of the activity. Set up several chairs around the circumference of the blankets for participants who are not able to stand for long periods of time.
- Place chairs in a circle for briefing and debriefing discussions as an informal and inclusive setting which allows easy movement into small groups. Place a small table or blanket in the centre of the discussion circle. Place on the table a Bible, candle, and faith symbols to remind participants of the Christian focus.

# Session outline

## Introducing the Blanket Exercise

Time: 2-3 minutes

Consider sharing some of this information in your welcome:

- Thank participants for attending.
- It is important that participants feel free to ask questions, share feelings, and invite open and honest communication. To encourage clear and respectful listening and sharing between participants, it is helpful to set respectful communication guidelines. Eric Law is an American Episcopalian minister who works with churches to create inclusive communities. His “Respectful Communication Guidelines” are a helpful reference. ([www.kscopeinstitute.org/2007-02\\_Kaleidoscope\\_Newsletter.pdf](http://www.kscopeinstitute.org/2007-02_Kaleidoscope_Newsletter.pdf)).
- The Blanket Exercise provides an historical overview of the 500 year relationship between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples highlighting those events that have shaped and influenced this relationship.
- The Blanket Exercise invites participants into a space where this historical overview has an experiential component (participants will listen, talk and move around).
- The Blanket Exercise requires intentional listening. Invite participants to silently take note of their thoughts and feelings throughout the Exercise. This will help to focus debriefing conversations.
- The Blanket Exercise is about history, but provides contextual information that is important to understanding issues of importance to Indigenous peoples today, and in the future.

## Setting learning goals

Time: 2-3 minutes

1. To be aware of history. To learn what events, people and ideas have shaped the relationship between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples over 500 years, and how this history impacts and shapes the current relationship.
2. To make personal connections. People are relational. God wants us to be in right relationship with each other (Matthew 22:36-40).
3. To feel compassion. Compassion means ‘to feel with another.’ The Blanket Exercise invites participants to listen, to see and to move (or not move, in some situations). It may evoke an emotional response.
4. To take action. Consider these questions: “Where is God in this story?”; “Where am I in this story?” and “What is my next step toward healing and reconciliation?”

## Bible study

Time: 10 minutes

Ask participants to consider question 1 or 2 in the Bible Study section of this guide on page 7.

## Do the Blanket Exercise

Time: 35-40 minutes

Turn to page 9 for the narrator’s scrip.

## Lead a debriefing conversation

Time: 15-20 minutes

Before participants step off the blankets ask participants to observe the changes to the blankets, and to people, at the beginning and at the end of the exercise.

Sit in a circle. Begin with a moment of quiet prayer to rest and focus. Explain the process for discussion with the following:

- Listen for understanding.
- Remind participants of respectful communication guidelines.
- Holding different opinions, and sharing them, is a way to learn from each other.
- If desirable, create small groups of 2 or 3 people talking to each other. This is less threatening and enables each person to be heard.

## **Biblical reflection**

Time: 10 minutes

Select one or two discussion questions from the Bible Study Questions for Blanket Exercise facilitators on page 7 of this guide. Alternatively, select your own scripture passage for study.

## **Activity debriefing**

Time: 10 minutes

These questions are discussion questions, and can be used to focus discussion of participants' responses to the Blanket Exercise. Ask them one at a time.

- How did it feel to be on the blankets at the beginning and at the end of the activity?
- What did you notice when you had to move, and/or received a card?
- What surprised you? What did you learn?
- What did you learn in school about Indigenous peoples?
- What questions need to be explored?

Record these comments on a large sheet of paper. Recording comments helps people remember what is said, encourages new ideas, and enables all who share to feel a part of the process. It can also be a helpful to refer back to these ideas at a future date.

## **Next Steps**

Time: 10 minutes

The 1994 Confession said: "With God's guidance our Church will seek opportunities to walk with Aboriginal peoples to find healing and wholeness together as God's people."

Ask participants to consider the following questions: "Where are the opportunities for your congregation or group to continue the healing and reconciliation journey?" Write down your ideas.

If a conversation prompt is needed, consider these words from Rowan Williams, the former Archbishop of Canterbury: "Reconciliation does not happen unless we learn to see differently. We all know how pain, injury and humiliation affect our seeing - as if we were locked in darkness; as if we could only see ourselves and our past and our experiences in our own terms, in our own light, as we sometimes say. To be reconciled is to be able to see the other freshly and clearly - to see the person we thought a stranger or an enemy, and to see ourselves afresh. To see the past differently and to see that there is a future." (Coventry Cathedral Golden Jubilee Service, May 25, 2012.)

## **Close in prayer**

## Bible study questions for Blanket Exercise leaders

The goal of these questions is to reflect on a biblical text that will deepen our understanding of God's calling to the ministry of reconciliation (2 Corinthians 5: 17-20) as a foundation for doing the Blanket Exercise. These questions are starting points for reflection and discussion. There is more material than can be used in a single session. Pick one or two scripture passages.

### Question 1

**Scripture:** "And I said: "Woe is me! I am lost, for I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips..." (Isaiah 6:5, NRSV)

**Reflection:** The prophet's lament reminds us of our own brokenness, both individually and as members of society. From the fall of our first parents to the present time we know ourselves to be less than God made us and intended for us. This acknowledgement prepares us for the Blanket Exercise in a way that will not overwhelm us. It is a starting point for the journey of healing and reconciliation, and we know that God journeys with us.

**Reflection Question:** Isaiah's lament expresses his openness before God, and therefore his vulnerability. As you approach the experience of the Blanket Exercise, what emotions are you feeling?

### Question 2

**Scripture:** "I establish my covenant with you, that never again shall all flesh be cut off by the waters of a flood, and never again shall there be a flood to destroy the earth." God said, "This is the sign of the covenant that I make between me and you and every living creature that is with you, for all future generations: I have set my bow in the clouds and it will be a sign of the covenant between me and the earth." (Gen. 9:11-13)

**Reflection:** : The Christian life is about living in covenant. We affirm that we live in covenant with God and with other people. Covenants are a means of creating relationships, and we are a people of the new covenant in Jesus Christ.

**Reflection Question:** What is God telling us about covenants?

### Question 3

**Scripture:** "Which commandment is the first of all?" Jesus answered, "The first is, 'Hear, O Israel: the Lord our God, the Lord is one; you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength.' The second is this, 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' There is no other commandment greater than these." (Mark 12:28-31)

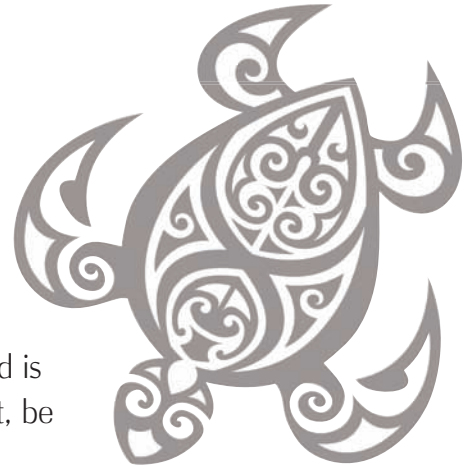
**Reflection:** The Christian life is about creating right relationships with God and with others.

**Reflection Question:** What is Jesus telling us about living in right relationship?



## Question 4

**Scripture:** So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new! All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation; that is, in Christ, God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting the message of reconciliation to us. So we are ambassadors for Christ, since God is making his appeal through us; we entreat you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God (2 Corinthians 5: 17-20).



**Reflection:** Paul's teaching to the early church with regard to reconciliation is crucial: Jesus placed this calling above the obligations of worship (Matthew 5: 23-24). The calling to be reconciled with our brothers and sisters places relationship building with our neighbors in an urgent context. Christianity is about new beginnings: "Behold I make all things new!" (Rev. 21: 1). It is hope and faith in Christ that calls us to seek right relationships between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples.

**Reflection Question:** In the context of reconciliation between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people, what does the Lord require of us?

## Additional resources

Consider these additional resources as you plan your reflection

- The Confession of the Presbyterian Church in Canada to God and to Aboriginal People ([www.presbyterian.ca/healing](http://www.presbyterian.ca/healing))
- Becoming neighbors: stories about healing and reconciliation ([www.presbyterian.ca/healing](http://www.presbyterian.ca/healing))
- "We are one in the spirit" liturgical resources for services of workshop in support of healing and reconciliation ([www.presbyterian.ca/healing](http://www.presbyterian.ca/healing))
- "The Parable of the Blanket Exercise" by Pastor John Van Sloten, Christian Reformed Church in North America ([www2.crcna.org/pages/mj\\_2011nov\\_blanket.cfm](http://www2.crcna.org/pages/mj_2011nov_blanket.cfm))
- "In Peace and Friendship: a New Relationship with Aboriginal Peoples" by KAIROS: Canadian Ecumenical Justice Initiatives. Available from KAIROS for \$10 ([www.kairoscanada.org](http://www.kairoscanada.org)).

# The Blanket Exercise

**Narrator** invites participants to step on to the blankets. Please note that text boxes are not a part of the script but are action prompts for facilitators.

**Narrator:** These blankets represent the northern part of Turtle Island\*, or what we now know as North America, before the arrival of Europeans. You represent the Indigenous peoples, the original inhabitants.

Long before the arrival of Europeans, Turtle Island was your home, and home to millions of people like you living in thousands of societies that were part of hundreds of nations.

Yours were fishing, hunting, and farming societies. Each society had its own language, culture, traditions, laws and governments. These societies worked together and cooperated with one another. Before the newcomers arrived, you, the original peoples, ended disputes by making treaties.

As different as you are from one another, you shared things in common with other First Peoples. Your relationship to the land defines who you are as peoples. All of your needs - food, clothing, shelter, culture, your spirituality - are taken care of by the land - by the blankets. In return, you take very seriously your responsibility to care for the land.



**Narrator** introduces the **European settler** and asks her or him to step on to the blankets.

**Narrator:** Things were happening in Europe at the end of the 15<sup>th</sup> century that would have a big impact on you and your societies.

In 1493, the King and Queen of Spain asked Pope Alexander to make a statement that would help Spain's explorers when they arrived in new lands. The statement was called the "Doctrine of Discovery" and this is what it said:

**Narrator** invites the **European settler** to read Scroll A.

**European:** *According to the Doctrine of Discovery nations that are not Christian cannot own land. The Indigenous people living on this land will be put under the protection and supervision of the Christian nations that "discover" their lands.*

**Narrator:** And so began the process of the European 'discovery' and colonization of Turtle Island.

**Narrator** invites the **European settler** to shake hands and **hand out the coloured index cards.**

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\*A name referring to North America used by several First Nations.

**Narrator:** When the Europeans first arrived on Turtle Island there were many more Indigenous people than Europeans.

The newcomers depended on you for their survival, and you helped them to understand how you did things; how you taught your children; how you took care of people who were sick; how you lived off the land; and how your governments worked.

These early relationships between you and the settlers involved lots of cooperation and support. The settlers and their leaders recognized you, the First Peoples, as distinct societies with your own governments. You were sovereign nations.

They made treaties with you. These treaties explained how you were going to share the land, the water, the animals and the plants. These treaties were very important because they were agreements between you and the kings and queens of countries in Europe. The treaties formally recognized your power and independence as nations.

The kings and queens of Europe made treaties with you, the Indigenous peoples, because you were here first and because the land belonged to you and because you had your own governments. The Europeans understood they could not force their laws or ways on you, the Indigenous peoples. You had rights.

**Narrator** invites the **European** to read Scroll B.

**European:** *In the Royal Proclamation of 1763, King George said the Indigenous nations own their lands, and that the only legal way newcomers could gain control of those lands is by making treaties between the two nations.*

**Narrator:** Later on, the Government of Canada was formed, and the Royal Proclamation became part of Canada's Charter of Rights and Freedoms and is a part of contemporary Canadian law.

For you, the Indigenous people, the treaties were very special and sacred agreements. They were meant to be statements of peace, friendship, and sharing, and they were based on the principles of respect and honesty.

Treaties explained how the land and waters would be shared, and tried to make sure there would be peace between you, the original peoples, and the newcomers. Sharing was very important to you. The hunters shared their food with everyone. And the families helped one another raise the children. In the treaties, you tried to help the Europeans understand what you meant by sharing.

The Europeans didn't see it that way. They had a different view of the treaties. For them, land was something that could be bought and sold, and treaties were a way of getting you, the Indigenous peoples to give up, or 'surrender' your land.

**Narrator** invites the **European** to begin folding blankets – **The European** begins to slowly fold the blankets over, making the blanket space smaller and smaller. Continue to do this – slowly – throughout the activity until no blanket is left touching another blanket, and all blankets are folded small. Some blankets should be removed entirely. Remind the participants that they must NOT step off the blankets. The objective is to stay on the blankets, even as they get smaller.

**REMINDER**  
During this narrative hand out all of the participants' numbered scrolls. Monitor the blanket folding. At this point, about 1/4 of the blanket space is removed.

After a while, you didn't get along very well with the Europeans. When the War of 1812 ended, the Europeans no longer needed you to help them with the fighting.

As the fur trade dried up, the European newcomers turned more and more to farming and started looking for more land.

Before too long, there were more Europeans than Indigenous peoples. One reason was the diseases the Europeans brought with them such as small pox, measles and tuberculosis. You, the Indigenous peoples, suffered badly from these diseases because you had never had them in your communities before and so you had no immunity. Many of you died. In fact, there are some people who believe that half the Indigenous people alive at the time died from these diseases. In some communities, nine out of ten people died.

As more Europeans arrived, they needed more land. The Europeans started ignoring or changing their laws to make it easier for them to take your land. Many Indigenous people were forced off their land. Some land was taken in war. Some land was taken after you died.

You, the Indigenous peoples, lost more than just your land. Because the land is so important to you, when it was taken away some of you also lost your way of living, your culture and, in some cases, your reason to live. Many of you died of hunger after being forced off your lands and away from your hunting grounds.

The Europeans had new ideas about how they were better than non-European people. They began to see you not as friends and partners, but as a 'problem' that had to be solved.

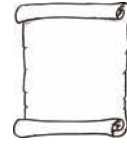
**Narrator** asks the participants with grey and green cards to step off the blanket. Explain that they represent those who died of the various diseases or who lost their lands and livelihoods.

**Narrator:** Please be silent for a moment to honour those who died due to disease and displacement.

**European** and the **Narrator** distribute the numbered scrolls amongst the participants. Some participants may receive more than one scroll.

**Narrator:** Would the participant with Scroll 1, please unroll it and read it aloud.

**Scroll 1:** *Terra Nullius - The idea of Terra Nullius, which in Latin means 'empty land,' gave the European newcomers the right to take over any 'empty' land found by explorers.*



**Narrator:** In other words, if the newcomers thought the land was empty they would take it. But because the land wasn't empty, they changed the concept to include lands not being used by 'civilized' peoples, or lands not being put to 'civilized' use.

It was the Europeans who decided what civilized meant and they used that to say that you and your people were not using the land in a civilized way and so were not allowed to stop Europeans from taking it from you. Please read scroll 2.

**Scroll 2:** *The BNA (British North America) Act - The BNA Act, also known as the Constitution Act of 1867, put "Indians and Lands reserved for Indians" under the control of the federal government.*

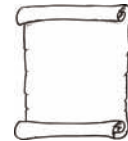


**Narrator:** This meant that you lost control of all your rights and lands. In other words, the law gave control of your lands to the Government of Canada, which was made up of European immigrants.

One reason the BNA Act was drafted was to help Sir John A. MacDonal reach his goal of forcing Indigenous peoples to give up their rights and traditions and become like other Canadians.

The Act talked about how Indigenous peoples were to be put 'under the protection' of the government, and emphasized the government's priorities of assimilation, enfranchisement, and civilization. Please read scroll 3.

**Scroll 3:** *Indian Act - In 1876 all the laws dealing with Indigenous peoples were gathered together and put into the Indian Act.*



### European unrolls and reads Scroll C

**European:** *Now hear this! According to the British North America Act of 1867, and the Indian Act of 1876, you and all of your territories are now under the direct control of the Canadian federal government. You will now be placed on reserves. Please fold your blankets in half.*

**Narrator:** The Indian Act completely changed the lives of First Nations and Inuit peoples.

It turned strong, independent nations into isolated and poor 'bands' that depended on the government for almost everything.

Indigenous people were treated like children and became "wards of the state," which means they became the responsibility of the federal government. Through the Indian Act, the federal government has denied Indigenous people basic rights that most Canadians take for granted. Please read scroll D.

## European unrolls and reads Scroll D.

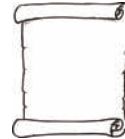
### REMINDER

Check the blankets. About 1/3 should be folded up. Remove 1 or 2 blankets entirely.

**European:** *You may not leave your reserve without a permit. You may not vote. You may not get together to talk about your rights. You may not practice your spirituality or your traditional forms of government. To do any of these things is to face prosecution and imprisonment in jail.*

**Narrator:** The Indian Act also severely restricted Indigenous land rights. For example, under the Indian Act, it was against the law to raise money to fight for land rights in the courts until the 1950s. Please read scroll 4.

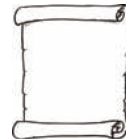
**Scroll 4:** *Enfranchisement - Under this federal government policy, all Indigenous peoples who became doctors, teachers, or who entered other professions, would lose their "Indian" status. This was called being granted "enfranchisement."*



**Narrator:** In other words, the government would rename Indigenous people entering the professions as Canadians. This means the government would no longer recognize you as Indigenous people.

Since this included lawyers, it prevented Indigenous peoples from using the courts to protect their land rights during the first half of the 1900s. Please read scroll 5.

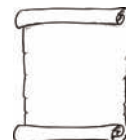
**Scroll 5:** *Assimilation - During the early 1900s the government thought the "Indian problem" would solve itself as more and more Indigenous people died from diseases and others were absorbed into the larger society. As one government employee said, the government's goal was "to continue until there is not a single Indian in Canada that has not been absorbed into Canadian society." [Indian Affairs deputy superintendent Duncan Campbell Scott]*



**Narrator:** The idea was that Indigenous people had to become more like the Europeans. They had to give up their rights and become like other Canadians. They had to farm like them, go to the same schools and pray in the same churches.

This idea was connected to the government's plan to force Indigenous peoples to give up their lands. Please read scroll 6.

**Scroll 6:** *Residential Schools - The residential school system was formally established in 1883, although there were individual church-run schools before then. The Indian Act was amended in 1920 and Aboriginal children were required by law to attend schools. First Nations and Inuit children were taken from their homes and communities. Most children stayed at school for 8 to 10 months of the year and were not allowed to speak their own languages. Some children stayed all year. Approximately seven generations attended residential schools. Many schools were run by churches. The last residential school was closed by the federal government in 1996.*



**Narrator:** All people with purple cards must now move to a separate, empty blanket. You represent those who were taken out of their communities and placed in schools far from home. Please read scroll 7.

**Scroll 7:** *In 1866 Presbyterian missionaries began working among Indigenous peoples. The Presbyterian Church in Canada was formed in 1875 and operated a total of 11 residential schools. After 1925 The Presbyterian Church in Canada continued to operate two schools: Cecilia Jeffrey near Kenora, Ontario and Birtle in Manitoba. In 1967 there were more than 300 students attending the two schools. The federal government took over operation of these schools in 1969.*



**Narrator:** While some students say they had positive experiences at the schools, many more say they suffered from the very bad conditions and from different kinds of abuse. Many of the children lost family connections and didn't learn their language, culture and traditions. Because they grew up in the schools and rarely went home, many of the students never learned how to be good parents. Some students died at the schools. Many others left the school, but never returned home, or were treated badly if they did.

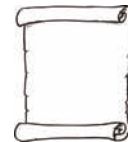
**Narrator** asks everybody to turn away from one person with a purple index card explaining that this person represents those students who died as a result of their experience at residential schools or were forever separated from their communities.

**Narrator:** Please be silent for a moment to honour those who were shunned, isolated or died as a result of their experiences at residential school. Please read scroll 8.

**Scroll 8:** *The 1969 White Paper - This proposed federal law tried to solve the "Indian problem" by getting Indigenous peoples to give up their rights and become like other Canadians.*

**Narrator:** Written when Pierre Trudeau was Prime Minister and Jean Chrétien was the Minister of Indian Affairs, Indigenous peoples were outraged by this attempt to take away even more of their rights and organized to defeat it. Please unfold one portion of your blankets to represent this strong act of resistance against discrimination. Please cheer for this action! Please read scroll 9.

**Scroll 9:** *Broken promises - Over the years, more than 70 percent of the land set aside for Indigenous peoples in the treaties has been lost or stolen by the government. Rarely has the government tried to replace this land, or tried to give Indigenous peoples something in return for its use.*



**European** unrolls and reads Scroll E.

**European:** *Meanwhile, treaties are ignored. Corporations often access resources on Indigenous land without adequate consultation with Indigenous peoples. These operations too often do not benefit Indigenous communities. In some cases mining and other development projects cause conflict within Indigenous communities because there is no agreement within the community about the projects. In some cases the wishes of entire communities are not honoured.*

**REMINDER**  
**Check the blankets. Half the blankets should be folded up or removed. Some participants should be “stranded” on isolated pockets of blankets.**

**Narrator:** Although Indigenous peoples are living on some of the most naturally resource rich land in the world, they continue to live in poverty. As Douglas, a student in Little Buffalo, Alberta (Lubicon Lake Nation) notes “there is a light on the side of the pump house that goes red. That tells us that there’s no water and that’s when we can’t go to school on some days.”

And yet, for Indigenous peoples, treaties continue to be important special agreements that explain how land can be shared equally and peacefully. Unfortunately, this view of treaties is not shared by the government and many non-Indigenous people, who see treaties as documents of surrender that give them control of the land.

In the west, decades of dam construction and searching for and removing from the land oil and gas have ruined the land and poisoned the water. You represent those Indigenous people who have died or were forced off their lands as a result of this destruction. Please step off the blankets.

In the early 1990’s allegations of cultural, emotional, physical and sexual abuse at residential schools began to be heard. These stories were difficult to hear and caused controversy. In 1994 the 120th General Assembly of The Presbyterian Church in Canada confessed its role in running residential schools. The Church is dedicated to walking with Indigenous People toward healing and reconciliation. This journey is based on building relationships between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people based on mutual respect and love-of-neighbour. This journey includes participating in the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada.

The **European settler** approaches one person with a purple index card and reads Scroll F.

*(Excerpts from the 1994 Confession of The Presbyterian Church in Canada)*

**European:** *...This confession is our response to the word of God. We understand our mission and ministry in new ways, in part because of the testimony of Aboriginal peoples....*

*....In our cultural arrogance we have been blind to the ways in which our own understanding of the Gospel has been culturally conditioned, and because of our insensitivity to Aboriginal cultures, we have demanded more of Aboriginal peoples than the Gospel requires, and have thus misrepresented Jesus Christ who loves all peoples with compassionate, suffering love that all may come to God through him.*

*The Presbyterian Church in Canada agreed to take the children of Aboriginal peoples from their own homes and place them in residential schools...used disciplinary practices which were foreign to Aboriginal peoples, and open to exploitation in physical and psychological punishment beyond any Christian maxim of care and discipline.*

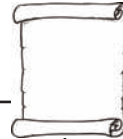
*We regret that there are those whose lives have been deeply scarred by the effects of the mission and ministry of The Presbyterian Church in Canada. For our Church we ask forgiveness of God... and Aboriginal peoples.*



**European settler** gives the participant a copy of the confession.

**Narrator:** Please read scroll 10.

**Scroll 10:** *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples - The Declaration is a set of standards on the rights of Indigenous Peoples. It took over 20 years for United Nations member states to negotiate and is one of the most debated and thought out human rights documents in United Nations history. It is unique because for the first time in UN history, those who are affected by the Declaration - Indigenous peoples - were an important part of its development. Canada endorsed the Declaration in 2010. The Canadian government now struggles to bring about programs and policies to implement the Declaration in a way that will make a difference in the lives of Indigenous people.*



**Narrator** asks all the remaining participants to unfold one corner of their blankets ONCE.

**Narrator:** Please cheer for this action! The Government of Canada and the United Nations have said again and again that the condition of First Nations, Inuit and Métis peoples is Canada's most pressing human rights problem. According to the United Nations, Canada ranked 11th on a list of best places in the world to live. However, if you use those same standards, the living conditions of Canada's Indigenous peoples are ranked 78th.

**Narrator** invites the **European** to read Scroll G.

On average, Indigenous men live seven years less than other Canadian men, and Indigenous women, five years less than other Canadian women.

**European:** 48 percent of Indigenous people are younger than 25 years of age, compared to 31 percent of non-Indigenous people.

Suicide rates among Indigenous people between the ages of 15 and 24 are five to six times higher than the national average for non-Indigenous people and accounts for 25 percent of all deaths among Indigenous youth.

Tuberculosis occurs 10 times more often in Indigenous communities. Diabetes rates are 2 to 5 times higher among Indigenous people.

High School graduation is 41 percent among Indigenous people. It is 77 percent for Canada as a whole. On average, First Nations schools receive \$2,000 to \$3,000 less per student than provincially run schools.

There are 120 Indigenous communities under boil-water advisories - some for more than a decade. The Government estimates that 25,000 to 35,000 houses are in dire need of repair or replacement. The Assembly of First Nations puts this number at closer to 85,000.

**Narrator:** As a church we are on a healing journey between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples. With God's grace, with humility and open hearts and minds we seek reconciliation - that is a restoration of right relationship with God, with creation and with all peoples.

**Narrator** invites the **European** to stand beside an Indigenous person (a participant still standing on the blanket) and read scroll 11 together.

### Scroll 11 - New Relationships

*What does reconciliation look like?*

*Georges Erasmus, former national Chief of the Assembly of First Nations:*

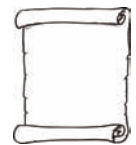
*Where community is to be formed, common memory must be created. . . The Truth and Reconciliation Commission, in bearing witness to what has gone before, will help to create collective memory and shared hope that will benefit Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples in Canada long into the future.*

*The Rev. Steven K. Smith, Zion Presbyterian Church, Port Carling Ontario:*

*Our first traditional Indigenous pow wow in Torrance, Ontario, went wonderfully well. We had a lot of fun, made some great new friends, shared a feast afterward at the church, and generally felt it was all worthwhile. Many of the dancers, drummers, singers and leaders were already speaking of this being an annual event. "See you next year!" was the parting refrain used by most.*

*Lori Ransom, former Healing and Reconciliation Animator:*

*At the heart of our faith, we are called to be reconcilers as Christ reconciled us to God, and taught us to love our neighbours as ourselves. [In Canada,] we must take into account the entire legacy of our colonial past and current issues in our relationship that keep us estranged and alienated from each other, that leave others feeling hurt, disrespected, or any way unloved by their neighbours. Reconciliation requires transformation of how our nation thinks of its history and of the relationship between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples.*



**Narrator:** Reconciliation requires both transformation and action, and we welcome both.

**END OF EXERCISE**

**Ask participants to observe changes to people and the blankets at the beginning and end of the activity. These observations may be shared in the debriefing.**

# Appendix A – The Scrolls

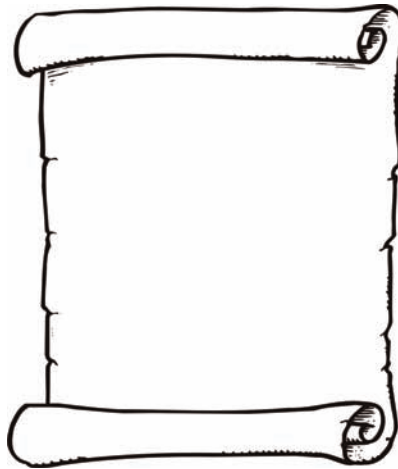
Lettered Scrolls are read by the European settler. Numbered scrolls are read by participants.

## Scroll A:

According to the Doctrine of Discovery nations that are not Christian cannot own land. The Indigenous people living on this land will be put under the protection and supervision of the Christian nations that “discover” their lands.

## Scroll B:

In the Royal Proclamation of 1763, King George said the Indigenous nations own their lands, and that the only legal way newcomers could gain control of those lands is by making treaties between the two nations.



## Scroll C:

Now hear this! According to the British North America Act of 1867, and the Indian Act of 1876, you and all of your territories are now under the direct control of the Canadian federal government. You will now be placed on reserves. Please fold your blankets in half.

## Scroll D:

You may not leave your reserve without a permit. You may not vote. You may not get together to talk about your rights. You may not practice your spirituality or your traditional forms of government. To do any of these things is to face prosecution and imprisonment in jail.

## Scroll E:

Meanwhile, treaties are ignored. Corporations often access resources on Indigenous land without adequate consultation with Indigenous peoples. These operations too often do not benefit Indigenous communities. In some cases mining and other development projects cause conflict within Indigenous communities because there is no agreement within the community about the projects. In some cases the wishes of entire communities are not honoured.

## Scroll F:

Excerpts from the 1994 Confession of The Presbyterian Church in Canada  
*...This confession is our response to the word of God. We understand our mission and ministry in new ways, in part because of the testimony of Aboriginal peoples...*

*...In our cultural arrogance we have been blind to the ways in which our own understanding of the Gospel has been culturally conditioned, and because of our insensitivity to Aboriginal cultures, we have demanded more of Aboriginal peoples than the Gospel requires, and have thus misrepresented Jesus Christ who loves all peoples with compassionate, suffering love that all may come to God through him.*

*The Presbyterian Church in Canada agreed to take the children of Aboriginal peoples from their own homes and place them in residential schools...used disciplinary practices which were foreign to Aboriginal peoples, and open to exploitation in physical and psychological punishment beyond any Christian maxim of care and discipline.*

*We regret that there are those whose lives have been deeply scarred by the effects of the mission and ministry of The Presbyterian Church in Canada. For our Church we ask forgiveness of God... and Aboriginal peoples. European settler gives the participant a copy of the confession.*

### **Scroll G:**

- On average, Indigenous men live seven years less than other Canadian men, and Indigenous women, five years less than other Canadian women.
- 48 percent of Indigenous people are younger than 25 years of age, compared to 31 percent of non-Indigenous people.
- Suicide rates among Indigenous people between the ages of 15 and 24 are five to six times higher than the national average for non-Indigenous people and accounts for 25 percent of all deaths among Indigenous youth.
- Tuberculosis occurs 10 times more often in Indigenous communities. Diabetes rates are 2 to 5 times higher among Indigenous people.
- High School graduation is 41 percent among Indigenous people. It is 77 percent for Canada as a whole. On average, First Nations schools receive \$2,000 to \$3,000 less per student than provincially run schools.
- There are 120 Indigenous communities under boil-water advisories - some for more than a decade. The Government estimates that 25,000 to 35,000 houses are in dire need of repair or replacement. The Assembly of First Nations puts this number at closer to 85,000.

### **Scroll 1: Terra Nullius**

The idea of Terra Nullius, which in Latin means 'empty land,' gave the European newcomers the right to take over any 'empty' land found by explorers.

### **Scroll 2: The BNA (British North America) Act**

The BNA Act, also known as the Constitution Act of 1867, put "Indians and Lands reserved for Indians" under the control of the federal government.

### **Scroll 3: Indian Act**

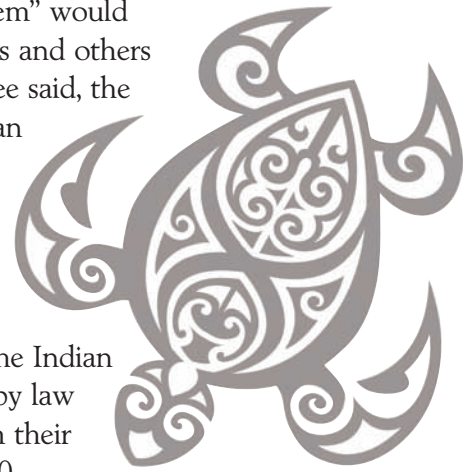
In 1876 all the laws dealing with Indigenous peoples were gathered together and put into the Indian Act.

### **Scroll 4: Enfranchisement**

Under this federal government policy, all Indigenous peoples who became doctors, teachers, or who entered other professions, would lose their "Indian" status. This was called being granted "enfranchisement."

### **Scroll 5: Assimilation**

During the early 1900s the government thought the “Indian problem” would solve itself as more and more Indigenous people died from diseases and others were absorbed into the larger society. As one government employee said, the government’s goal was “to continue until there is not a single Indian in Canada that has not been absorbed into Canadian society.”  
[Indian Affairs deputy superintendent Duncan Campbell Scott]



### **Scroll 6: Residential Schools**

The residential school system was formally established in 1883, although there were individual church-run schools before then. The Indian Act was amended in 1920 and Aboriginal children were required by law to attend schools. First Nations and Inuit children were taken from their homes and communities. Most children stayed at school for 8 to 10 months of the year and were not allowed to speak their own languages. Some children stayed all year. Approximately seven generations attended residential schools. Many schools were run by churches. The last residential school was closed by the federal government in 1996.

### **Scroll 7: Presbyterian relationships with Indigenous peoples**

In 1866 Presbyterian missionaries began working among Indigenous peoples. The Presbyterian Church in Canada was formed in 1875 and operated a total of 11 residential schools. After 1925 The Presbyterian Church in Canada continued to operate two schools: Cecilia Jeffrey near Kenora, Ontario and Birtle in Manitoba. In 1967 there were more than 300 students attending the two schools. The federal government took over operation of these schools in 1969.

### **Scroll 8: The 1969 White Paper**

This proposed federal law tried to solve the “Indian problem” by getting Indigenous peoples to give up their rights and become like other Canadians.

### **Scroll 9: Broken promises**

Over the years, more than 70 percent of the land set aside for Indigenous peoples in the treaties has been lost or stolen by the government. Rarely has the government tried to replace this land, or tried to give Indigenous peoples something in return for its use.

### **Scroll 10: United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples**

The Declaration is a set of standards on the rights of Indigenous Peoples. It took over 20 years for United Nations member states to negotiate and is one of the most debated and thought out human rights documents in United Nations history. It is unique because for the first time in UN history, those who are affected by the Declaration - Indigenous peoples - were an important part of its development. Canada endorsed the Declaration in 2010. The Canadian government now struggles to bring about programs and policies to implement the Declaration in a way that will make a difference in the lives of Indigenous people.

## Scroll 11 - New Relationships

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Where community is to be formed, common memory must be created. . . The Truth and Reconciliation Commission, in bearing witness to what has gone before, will help to create collective memory and shared hope that will benefit Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples in Canada long into the future.

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# Appendix B – The Confession of The Presbyterian Church in Canada

As adopted by the General Assembly, June 9, 1994

The Holy Spirit, speaking in and through Scripture, calls The Presbyterian Church in Canada to confession. This confession is our response to the word of God. We understand our mission and ministry in new ways in part because of the testimony of Aboriginal peoples.

1. We, the 120th General Assembly of The Presbyterian Church in Canada, seeking the guidance of the Spirit of God, and aware of our own sin and shortcomings, are called to speak to the Church we love. We do this, out of new understandings of our past not out of any sense of being superior to those who have gone before us, nor out of any sense that we would have done things differently in the same context. It is with humility and in great sorrow that we come before God and our Aboriginal brothers and sisters with our confession.
2. We acknowledge that the stated policy of the Government of Canada was to assimilate Aboriginal peoples to the dominant culture, and that The Presbyterian Church in Canada co-operated in this policy. We acknowledge that the roots of the harm we have done are found in the attitudes and values of western European colonialism, and the assumption that what was not yet moulded in our image was to be discovered and exploited. As part of that policy we, with other churches, encouraged the government to ban some important spiritual practices through which Aboriginal peoples experienced the presence of the creator God. For the Church's complicity in this policy we ask forgiveness.
3. We recognize that there were many members of The Presbyterian Church in Canada who, in good faith, gave unstintingly of themselves in love and compassion for their Aboriginal brothers and sisters. We acknowledge their devotion and commend them for their work. We recognize that there were some who, with prophetic insight, were aware of the damage that was being done and protested, but their efforts were thwarted. We acknowledge their insight. For the times we did not support them adequately nor hear their cries for justice, we ask forgiveness.
4. We confess that The Presbyterian Church in Canada presumed to know better than Aboriginal peoples what was needed for life. The Church said of our Aboriginal brothers and sisters, "If they could be like us, if they could think like us, talk like us, worship like us, sing like us, and work like us, they would know God and therefore would have life abundant." In our cultural arrogance we have been blind to the ways in which our own understanding of the Gospel has been culturally conditioned, and because of our insensitivity to Aboriginal cultures, we have demanded more of the Aboriginal people than the Gospel requires, and have thus misrepresented Jesus Christ who loves all peoples with compassionate, suffering love that all may come to God through him. For the Church's presumption we ask forgiveness.

5. We confess that, with the encouragement and assistance of the Government of Canada, The Presbyterian Church in Canada agreed to take the children of Aboriginal peoples from their own homes and place them in residential schools. In these schools, children were deprived of their traditional ways, which were replaced with Euro-Canadian customs that were helpful in the process of assimilation. To carry out this process, The Presbyterian Church in Canada used disciplinary practices which were foreign to Aboriginal peoples, and open to exploitation in physical and psychological punishment beyond any Christian maxim of care and discipline. In a setting of obedience and acquiescence there was opportunity for sexual abuse, and some were so abused. The effect of all this, for Aboriginal peoples, was the loss of cultural identity and the loss of a secure sense of self. For the Church's insensitivity we ask forgiveness.
6. We regret that there are those whose lives have been deeply scarred by the effects of the mission and ministry of The Presbyterian Church in Canada. For our Church we ask forgiveness of God. It is our prayer that God, who is merciful, will guide us in compassionate ways towards helping them to heal.
7. We ask, also, for forgiveness from Aboriginal peoples. What we have heard we acknowledge. It is our hope that those whom we have wronged with a hurt too deep for telling will accept what we have to say. With God's guidance our Church will seek opportunities to walk with Aboriginal peoples to find healing and wholeness together as God's people.