

TRC CALL 60/BLANKET EXERCISE PROPOSAL

Origin: Rev. Betty Lou McNabb (Minister, Georgina Island United Church)

1. What is the issue?

We believe God is calling our church, beginning with our ministry personnel and leaders, to deeply immersive learning about the history and legacy of settler colonialism in Canada.

2. Why is this issue important?

From its longstanding proximity to the centres of power in our society to its involvement in the Residential School system, the United Church of Canada bears a heavy burden of responsibility in the ongoing work of righting relations between indigenous and non-indigenous peoples. But as our tradition of faith reminds us, broken relationships cannot be reconciled without repentance—without recognising and rejecting the sin that has caused the breach.

Accordingly, a crucial part of the church's work of righting relations is educating ministry personnel and other leaders of the church about the history and legacy of colonialism. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission has highlighted the need for this kind of education, calling on churches to "develop and teach curriculum" for clergy and staff on the religious dimensions of colonisation (see Call to Action 60). As learning that leads to repentance, such education cannot be limited to knowing facts, but must involve our entire beings—our minds, bodies, emotions, and senses of the spiritual.

One well-established example of this kind of immersive decolonial education is the Blanket Exercise, a highly participatory and interactive workshop that aims "to build understanding about our shared history as Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples in Canada by walking through pre-contact, treaty-making, colonization and resistance. Everyone is actively involved as they step onto blankets that represent the land, and into the role of First Nations, Inuit and later Métis peoples." The workshop has been developed by KAIROS, an ecumenical social justice organisation of which the United Church is an active member, and has proven to be an effective educational and empathy-building tool.

Many who have been called to positions of service and leadership in the United Church, led by and including many of our indigenous leaders and ministers, have already begun the work of understanding and resisting colonial legacies in their contexts of ministry, often using tools like the Blanket Exercise. However, at present, education for ministry personnel and leaders about colonisation in Canada is neither required nor held to a common standard, as it is with training on racial justice and ministry boundaries. In the absence of a denomination-wide program of education, ministers and leaders may not be prepared to follow the call of God's reconciling Spirit to repentance and right relatedness.

3. How might the General Council respond to the issue?

We propose that the General Council establish a policy that all current and future ministry personnel and church leaders undergo immersive education on the history and legacy of Canadian colonialism using a tool such as the KAIROS Blanket Exercise.

4. For the body transmitting this proposal to the General Council:

Are there comments, affirmations, suggestions you would like to make with respect to this proposal?