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?Blanket Exercise? historic first for Shelburne

By Marni Walsh

Reverend Candice Bist of Trinity United Church invites the community to attend ?The Blanket Exercise? this Sunday, May 7, at 12 noon.

It is the first time that the experiential history event, supported by Dufferin KAIROS, has come to Shelburne.

According to KAIROS, fifteen years ago, the Aboriginal Rights Coalition worked with Indigenous elders and teachers to develop an interactive way of learning the history most Canadians are never taught; ?The Blanket Exercise? was the result.

An interactive history of Indigenous people, ?The Blanket Exercise? is a teaching tool which helps to clarify the history of land issues, treaties and reservations in Canada, how they impacted indigenous people, and the contemporary relationship with non-indigenous people.

As Canadians, we are all ?treaty people.? Canada evolved as a nation from broken bargains with Aboriginal peoples to share the land.

The Report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples highlights how government policies methodically removed and suppressed Aboriginal nations and even aimed to eliminate the indigenous identity.

Only by acknowledging these uncomfortable truths, through education and understanding, can we begin to heal the wounds of the past and move united, in what is right and fair, into the future.

Public participants at ?The Blanket Exercise? will have the opportunity to read from scripts as the voices of First Nations people, describing their way of life and the events that affected and destroyed that existence; most prominently the arrival of Europeans, treaties, land appropriation and forced assimilation.

As history unfolds, blankets representing their once vast tribal nations are scattered and many disappear.

?For those of the Christian persuasion, who have just recently come through the dark season of Lent to the uplifting joy of Easter, they will know that as an Easter people, there is always hope in the yet unseen, the yet imagined,? says Reverend Bist. ?They will know that though there is error, violence, tragedy, and seemingly unforgivable acts of treachery, so too, there is redemption, forgiveness, and a kind of justice that lifts both oppressor and oppressed into a new status of relationship that acknowledges past wrong doings at the same time it offers new horizons of mutual respect, resorted dignity, and new adventure.

?But these thoughts are by no means the sole proprietorship of Christians. All people of all faiths and inclinations to goodness, all those who desire to work towards the betterment of humanity, will see the possibilities in this gathering.?

The Blanket Exercise will be led by Dr. Daisy Radigan, a committed environmentalist and experienced facilitator, along with Dale Cimolai, a Mohawk Knowledge Keeper.

Rev. Candice Bist invites the community to ?Come and be illuminated. Come and participate in a unique historical event. Come and be part of a new rise in consciousness, throughout Canada, and throughout the world, that understands we can change and do things differently.?

The Blanket Exercise is FREE and open to all: May 7 from 12- 3 pm, includes a light lunch of traditional First Nations' fare, at

Trinity United Church located at 200 Owen Sound Street, Shelburne Tel: 519-925-2233. Bring a blanket.