



**Wisconsin Conference
United Church of Christ**

Ho-Chunk UCC Leads Members of First Congregational UCC in Menominee in the “Blanket Exercise”

by Rev. Karen Miller, member, First Congregational UCC, Menominee

What is the Blanket Exercise?

The Blanket Exercise is a two- to three-hour participatory activity that helps participants understand how colonization of the land we now know as the United States of America has impacted the people who lived here long before Columbus and other settlers arrived.

The exercise begins with blankets arranged on the floor to represent the United States before the arrival of Europeans. Participants are invited to step onto the blankets as Indigenous people, the original inhabitants. A narrator uses a script while someone playing the role of a European joins and interacts with those on the blankets. As the script traces the history of the relationship between Europeans and Indigenous people in the United States, participants respond to various cues and read prepared scrolls. At the end of the exercise, the devastation of the Indigenous People will be apparent as only a few people remain on the blankets, which have been folded into small bundles and cover only a fraction of the original area. A Talking Circle is included in the two to three-hour time estimate to allow participants to de-brief.



What was the inspiration for doing the Exercise?

We were inspired to bring the Blanket Exercise to our UCC congregation and community based on our experience of the Exercise at the Ho-Chunk Immersion event in June. Our Ho-Chunk hosts demonstrated the spirit of the Blanket Exercise – sharing, not shaming - through the generous offering of their home, their stories, their food, comfort, worship and good company. It was an invitation to begin to repair the relationship between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people that we took to heart. Collaborating with members of the Ho-Chunk UCC congregation and the Ho-Chunk Nation to replicate the Blanket Exercise was an honor and, we hope, the beginning of a new relationship between the two congregations that will continue to grow.

Remarks from Participants

Participants were asked to share what they liked most about the Blanket Exercise; sample responses are included below.

- The honesty, the warmth, the sense of compassion. An excellent summary of Native history with the U.S. It's good to hear the truth even if it's difficult. Hearing their own life stories from Native people. In the talking circle, people spoke honestly from the heart while others listened attentively. The honesty is a testimony to the atmosphere created by the organizers and facilitators.
- Exploring the past, led by Indigenous voices, planned cooperatively, exploring our shared past and a chance to share our present and future together.
- The experience of experiencing loss of land & people. Feeling the information in my body.
- Impact of the Doctrine of Discovery. The way it translates statistics into visual, physical experiences. Be present at this religious organization. This exercise is history and rebuilding of friends. The Community of coming together and the symbolism.
- Thank you for putting on this presentation. I look forward to sharing what I heard.
- I'm grateful for the opportunity. 3 hrs is pretty long for folks to stay with a difficult set of information. However...I wouldn't want to take out any pieces!

Link to a video of the Menomonie First Congregational UCC / Ho-Chunk UCC Blanket Exercise:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HXCTvC9Emd0&feature=youtu.be>

If your church is interested in learning more about the Blanket Exercise or hosting the exercise in your community, you can find out more from Rev. Kathleen Remund at First Congregational UCC in Menomonie or from Larry Littlegeorge, member of Ho-Chunk UCC:

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