

Minute for Right Relations

Praying to the Four Directions

Two times within a month, I had the opportunity to participate in praying to the four directions, outside, with First Nation leadership. One of the times was at a More Franchises educational event held at Emmanuel College, in Toronto, and involved quite a large circle of people. The other time was privately, with just one Anishinaabe fellow, Ken, explaining things to me. He invited me to participate at the sacred fire he was keeping watch for, in preparation for the carving of a tree at the site of a residential school building, at Spanish.

Two circles of rocks surrounded the fire and I was invited to walk the path around the fire, praying to the four directions. At the entrance to the circle were four baskets, containing sage, cedar, tobacco and sweetgrass – plants used by First Nations People for healing and prayer. Ken said that the baskets were there so a person could take some of each and hold them to their left side – close to their hearts – for healing. The idea was to enter the circle around the fire from the east and walk around clockwise, saying a prayer in each direction. The east (yellow on the medicine wheel) represents the rising of the sun and a new day and is where you give thanks for the day and for all creation. After the prayer you throw some of the mixture of sweetgrass, sage, tobacco and cedar into the fire. The prayer to the south (red) represents energy. Ken said he thinks of the energy of youth and what it was like being a teenager and prays for all young people. West (black) represents the death of the day and that we die many deaths in a lifetime. This is when Ken prays for and remembers people who have passed on before him. The North (white) is the direction that represents rest. Some call it the remembrance period, because after death, you rest and contemplate what has happened. But rest is also used here to remind us to care for and nurture our physical bodies.

Throughout his explanations, Ken repeated that there was no right or wrong way to do things and that different indigenous people may use other items in prayer – they are people of the land and use whatever is natural to their environment.

I greatly appreciated the opportunities to learn something about native spirituality.

Rev. Cathy Taylor