Bridging Aboriginal Spirituality and Catholic Faith

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When I attended Shawanosowe School in my home community on Whitefish River First Nation until Grade 4, I learned about native spirituality. We focused on the Medicine Wheel and Seven Grandfather Teachings. Since Grade 5 I have been enrolled at Sacred Heart School in Espanola, Ontario. Both these experiences have provided an opportunity for me to learn about my faith and spirituality. I have tried to include both teachings in my daily life in an attempt to bridge Aboriginal spirituality with my Catholic faith.

My Grandma Olive, who attended residential school, was a traditional dancer and keeper of our culture. She was able to bridge Native spirituality and her Catholic beliefs. She would attend Sunday Mass and later dance at our traditional Pow Wow gathering. I do the same. I happen to be a Grass Dancer and continue to pray in my own way.

**Bible and Native Legends**

To me one of the most important faith lessons is, even in the toughest times we still must show God and others our love. I do this in my daily life by being respectful to my teacher and fellow students.

In stories from the Bible and the Native Legends there always is a moral on how to live life. I use these teachings in my life to be unselfish and to be kind and help others. For example, when my Grandpa was not well, I helped him in and out of the car, pushed his wheelchair and was a shoulder he could lean on.

**Living the Golden Rule**

We all know the Golden Rule: treat others the way you want to be treated. As a student I have always tried to be kind and courteous to those students who don’t normally get that kind of attention. I have said a kind word, used a positive gesture, shared my lunch and tried to make someone feel better. Funny, people have done the same for me. As many people say, “What goes around comes around.”

**Native prayer**

In Native language class we pray every day and thank the Creator for life and the day. We also ask for help to walk a straight path. We ask God for forgiveness when we sin against Him. When I admit to God that I have done wrong it makes me feel better and it feels like a relief. I pray for my family, friends and relatives so that the Creator may bless them. In our Native tradition, we are taught to pray for others and not to ask anything for ourselves except for help to be kind to others. It is just hoped that others will pray for us.

Each student should learn to accept themselves and to show respect and kindness to others. It is important to respect and accept everyone’s culture, as that enhances our ability to be understanding. We want to have strong young people who live in harmony with each other and who will carry the message of truth from generation to generation.

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Zachary McGregor, Grade 8, Sacred Heart Catholic School, Espanola, Ontario spoke to the Canadian Catholic School Trustees Association 2008 Conference.