



Elizabeth Green

My quilt square is of a Medicine Wheel inside an “Ichthus”. An Ichthus is the most ancient of all the Christian Symbols, including the Cross. In the first century it was illegal to be a Christian. If the Roman authorities learned that you were a Christian, you were arrested, tortured and executed by way of Capital Punishment. The first Christians had no choice but to worship in secret. The Ichthus was the secret symbol of Christianity, and was used to indicate where Christians were secretly gathering for worship. The Ichthus represents a time in the history of Christianity when Christians were oppressed and forbidden to speak their language about Jesus; they were forbidden to sing their songs of praise and worship; and they were forbidden to participate in the Holy Eucharist, which is the most sacred ritual practiced by Christian people.

As an Anglican Priest serving in Canada, it has always made me feel sad, angry and frustrated that as Christianity progressed to eventually become the most powerful and dominant of all the world's religions, Christians living in the last few centuries seemed to have forgotten, or have chosen to ignore, their own history of oppression as the Church forcefully implemented Residential Schools for Aboriginal children living in Canada. The horrendous legacy of violence, abuse, neglect and intolerance inflicted upon Aboriginal people by members of the Church in no way reflects the ways and teachings of Jesus Christ. The violent and abusive treatment that Aboriginal children suffered at the hands of the church was criminal and it was sinful. If members of the Church had been willing to examine, and to remember, the story of their own history, perhaps Aboriginal children and families would not have been subjected to such oppression, violence, abuse, and death; all of which was experienced by Aboriginal children who were forced to live in these church-run schools.

As I personally live with the heavy burden of the sins of the Church, I know that none of us can go back in time to right all the wrongs; we can only move forward.

Among the infinite teachings of the Medicine Wheel, the Medicine Wheel represents the Four Human Aspects that all of humanity holds in common – Physical (black), Mental or intellectual (white), Emotional (red), and Spiritual (yellow). Every single human being has been created with these four Human Aspects. As the Church moves forward in its effort to bring truth, healing and reconciliation to its relationship with Aboriginal People, and especially with Residential School survivors, it is important that Christians remember the past, so to never repeat it; and in doing so, give honour to one another's spirit with which we have all been uniquely created.

Traditionally, the Ichthus was drawn so that the head of the fish would have been facing toward Physical, or black portion of the Medicine Wheel. The Ichthus that I created on my quilt square faces the other way, with its head facing the Spiritual, or yellow portion of the Medicine Wheel. This is to symbolize a new future and a new way forward in which the Church honours and acknowledges the spirit of Aboriginal People, and the true beauty of Aboriginal Cultures, Languages and Traditions. For the sins of my Fathers and fellow church members, I am truly and profoundly sorry.