



Smudging

The Presbyterian Church in Canada has made a commitment to continue listening and learning from Indigenous people, leaders, Elders and Knowledge Keepers, welcoming and engaging voices from both within and beyond The Presbyterian Church in Canada. Together, we now listen and learn about smudging.

Alana Manybears taught us during the Smudge Kit Making event at St. Andrew's that smudging strengthens prayer. When we stand before the smudge, we wave our hands from the smoke to our head, arms, legs, etc. ending with the heart and we pray in our own language. We pray for ourselves, for our community and those who are on our mind. Smudge is both personal and communal, and just as smoke cannot be contained, the Spirit of the prayer cannot be controlled, only invited.

The burning of sage helps to release any negative or heavy thoughts and energy while burning sweetgrass invites positive energy. The smoke from the burning medicines is seen as a gift from the Creator and from nature. Used privately or for ceremony, smudging has the power to turn our thoughts (and therefore our emotion and spirit) to connection with the Source of Life. It is appropriate for anyone to use, not just Indigenous people. The Smudge Kit includes a seashell to hold the plant being burned, sage (or sweetgrass, or cedar/pine), matches, a stone for strength, and a feather to keep the smudge going. We learned one does not blow on or fan the flame to keep the smudge alive, but rather just relight it with a match. Lighters are not used to start a smudge.

Tobacco - another medicine - is not used in smudge. Tobacco is offered in pure form to the earth as an offering. It is also smoked in a ceremonial pipe by pipe carriers. To be a pipe carrier is a high honour bestowed or passed onto chosen relatives who have gained the knowledge and proven sensitivity.

I have confirmed with a number of knowledge carriers that smudging is similar to the Biblical and ancient practice of burning incense to purify and sanctify both the space and those participating in prayer to enhance our prayers and connection with God.

~ Rev. Laurie and our Indigenous Relations Team