



Bear Clan Patrol, St. Catharines

Karen Orlandi is both a minister with Silver Spire United and a CCS student. Last fall as she walked with Winnipeg's Bear Clan Patrol as part of a class on Ministry as Community Building she recognized its potential for her own community. When she returned to St. Catharines she used the capacity her position in the church gave her to seed the way for this grassroots initiative.

Bear Clan Patrol is an Indigenous and community program, despite gathering in a church. While externally the project appears to be about picking up drug paraphernalia, the mission and value of the Bear Clan is much deeper; it is about restoring and maintaining harmony in the community, through connection. "The most important part about the Bear Clan is building relationships," Karen noted. "Yes, we clean up needles and yes, we collect knives and stuff. We hand out protein bars. But that's not the true core value of what we do. We build relationships. Our job is to meet people where they are. It's about accompaniment."

Relationship building happens at many levels — between church and other community organizations such as the Niagara Regional Native Centre, with people from all walks of life in the community, both volunteers and people they encounter on the street who experience being "seen and valued. They know that somebody cares enough to stop and talk and, more importantly, listen to them tell their story."

Karen holds both leadership and supportive roles in the Bear Clan, "happy to do the grunt work." She credits skills and lessons learned at the Centre for Christian Studies for providing her with the tools and the gumption to bring the idea of the Bear Clan Patrol to her community in an invitational manner that is respectful of the grassroots and Indigenous nature of the program. *Congregational support of CCS helps students like Karen open doors of partnership and healing in her community.*



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