

## Finding harmony in Aboriginal spirituality and Catholicism

By Vanessa Mills and Ben Collins

**Like many Aboriginal people in Northern Australia, Erica Bernard has grown up with both traditional Aboriginal spirituality and Christianity.**

They might seem like they are from different worlds, but Broome resident Erica Bernard sees a lot of similarities in her Catholic faith and her Yawuru/Gidja spirituality.

"When I was smoked as a baby there was little rituals that would have been done with me," Erica says. "My Grandmother would have laid her hands on the coals for the warmth and she would touch my limbs so I'd be strong, and she would touch my eyes so I could see good things."

"It would be like getting baptised as well with the water on your head, the holy water welcoming you."

Many religions have similarities but compete against each other by encouraging followers to have exclusive beliefs in one faith. But Erica has found that her beliefs can live side by side fulfilling different roles in her life.

"The penny drops when you could recognise that both run parallel rather than overlap each other and I think it's a powerful thing and I feel really good in my liyan (akin to a soul, feelings or love) when that happens."

Erica questioned both her Catholic faith and her belief in Aboriginal spirituality when her young brother passed away.

"There was an accident that happened at Gantheaume where this is my Grandfather's sacred space and I thought 'Of all places in Broome that was one place that my family could be protected but we had this tragedy.'" says Erica. "At that same time as well that I questioned God. I didn't like God because he put me in this situation where I didn't want to be."

But later in life Erica was able to reconcile her pain with her spiritual beliefs.

"There was this big learning curve that I went through in regards to accepting what has happened. And if it's in that place that this accident happened to my young brother I know and I've come to terms with that now that he is in a good place and if it was anywhere it



Erica Bernard has found a harmonious blend of Catholicism and her traditional Aboriginal spirituality. (26/7/13)  
(Ben Collins - ABC Local)

would have been nice that it was on Country."

Now both her Christian and Aboriginal beliefs form an important part of her daily life.

*Listen to Erica Bernard discuss her dual faiths with Vanessa Mills on Kimberley Mornings.*



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