

# Black History Month

## Children's Time – The Freedom Quilt

Those of us who have heritage linked to the transatlantic slave trade come from a variety of peoples, most of whom taught through oral tradition, where the customs of people are taught through the spoken word. Much in the history of Black peoples connected to the transatlantic slave trade was never written down; one such piece of history is related to quilting.

Today, a person can go to a church in almost any part of this country and usually find one or more quilting groups, primarily consisting of women. However, the tradition that came with slaves from Africa was that men were primarily responsible for creating quilts. Once on North American soil the tradition continued, this time predominantly stewarded by women.

It is told that some of the quilts created during the era of the Underground Railroad included secret codes to help runaway slaves find safe houses. Some say that this is not true, while others say that the idea is rooted in the oral history of Black peoples and will not be found recorded anywhere. One book that popularizes the idea of the secret code is Deborah Hopkinson's *Sweet Clara and the Freedom Quilt* (Dragonfly Books, 1995). One January, I took the book to the UCW of my church and asked them to create such a quilt. Not only did they make a quilt, but they presented it to me in February in time for Black History Month!

Whatever you believe about secret quilt codes, quilting is a part of the history of Black peoples across North America—whether their ancestors came here centuries ago or even last week.

Adam Kilner

For more on Black History Month see  
[www.united-church.ca/worship](http://www.united-church.ca/worship)



The United Church of Canada  
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