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Ministry Among Native Americans

"A friend of ours says that Native peoples are not unreached peoples; they're miss-reached peoples. We pray that the PCA will be a conduit through which the Gospel will flow among the more than 500 indigenous tribes in North America."

-Bruce Farrant

Bruce Farrant was a plumber by trade when he answered God's call to ministry. He prayed for a role that would keep using his practical hands-on skills. Bruce and his wife, Linda, saw that prayer answered first by serving on the Cherokee Indian Reservation in North Carolina, coordinating short-term work for Mission to the World.



Bruce Farrant, left, with Brianna Selam.

Although the Farrants had visited as tourists, living among the Cherokee people radically changed their perspective and brought about repentance. "All those years that we visited, we saw you as Indians," Bruce recalls saying. "We never saw you as people." He explains further, "A friend of ours says that Native peoples are not unreached peoples; they're miss-reached peoples. We pray that the PCA will be a conduit through which the Gospel will flow



among the more than 500 indigenous tribes in North America."

In 2006, Bruce began serving as MNA Native American/First Nations Ministries Coordinator, encouraging the PCA to minister among US Native Americans and Canadian First Nations peoples. The goal is to trust God for a growing number of churches led by Native pastors and lay leaders who are self-supporting and self-propagating.

The Native peoples have suffered greatly in both the United States and Canada. For centuries, the respective federal governments wouldn't allow Native people to speak in their Native tongues or practice their Native religion. As a part of faulty evangelism efforts, the few churches committed to Native ministry often promoted the eradication of all unique aspects of Native culture. The negative effects linger.



Mary Granberry, right, with Tsennibah Piel.

On the Reservation

A weeklong missions trip to White Swan on the Yakama Reservation in Washington changed Chris Granberry's life. Then youth director at Oak Mountain Presbyterian Church in Birmingham AL, Chris led a group of about 25 students and parents. "I was completely overwhelmed and devastated by what we saw and heard," Chris recalls now, 15 years later. "It was the most desperate, hopeless place I had ever seen. I didn't know there was anything like that, especially not in the United States."



Chris Granberry, left, with Wes Peterson visiting at Yakama.

Chris was captivated by the children, many of whom were neglected and abused and had never heard of Jesus. They were skittish, but so hungry for love that they stuck around, Chris recalls. Through the week, his group slowly built relationships and saw several children come to Christ. But there was no

Indians and First Nations

church or other group to follow up with the children after the Granberrys returned to Alabama. Chris and Mary Granberry found they could not get the children out of their minds and hearts. In 2003, they returned with their own children to make the Yakama Reservation their home.



Hope Fellowship Sunday lunch on the veranda. Land for sale on the reservation is rare. God provided a beautiful church building through PCA major gifts and countless volunteer renovation hours.

“Many people in Native America think of white folks and the church as enemies. What would happen if we did our best to love our first neighbors like family in the same way that Jesus loves us like family? What would happen if we served them and met their needs in practical ways? Maybe that would help us start to break down these barriers,” Chris says. “That’s really been our philosophy since day one.” They received a positive reception, beginning their first Bible study within four weeks of arrival.

When Chris came to the reservation he launched Sacred Road Ministries (www.sacredroadministries.org). Soon he began preparing for ordination as a PCA minister. In 2012, Hope Fellowship became a mission church of Pacific Northwest Presbytery. Chris currently serves as pastor and continues to lead Sacred Road. Today, the staff of the ministry includes six households, made up of both families and singles. Everyone involved began with a short-term visit, then heard God’s call to commit long-term.

Across North America, only three percent of Native Americans are Christians. Yakama Nation leader Wendell Hannigan, a friend of Sacred Road since the Granberry’s arrival, explains the value of the ministry: “The Yakama Reservation is typical of Native American reservations. It is the worst place



East Talking Circle meeting October 2014 at Westminster Presbyterian in Lancaster PA. Front right: Wendell Hannigan; middle back: Joshua Tsavatewa, visting from Yakama.



Sacred Road staff with some members of Hope Fellowship Church.

to live in North America thanks to the crime, poverty and educational needs. Sacred Road works hand in hand with



West Talking Circle meeting Sept 2014 at Yakama.

Indian people to make their lives better. Before, there was only despair, but now there is hope. The church needs to do this on every reservation.”

Joshua Tsavatewa, part Hopi, came to Sacred Road through a summer internship. Like many children on the reservation, he was raised by a single mom affected by drugs

“Sacred Road works hand in hand with Indian people to make their lives better. Before, there was only despair, but now there is hope. The church needs to do this on every reservation.”

-Yakama Nation leader Wendell Hannigan



and alcohol. When Joshua was two, his mom became a Christian. If not for that, he says he would likely face many of the same challenges as other children on reservations. “A lot of Native people feel that you can’t be both Indian and Christian,” Joshua says. “But loving people and emphasizing the Gospel is the key to building bridges.” Joshua has been licensed to preach by the Presbytery and is pursuing ordination as a PCA pastor.

In Cities

Contrary to common perception, most Native peoples live in rural or urban areas outside of reservations. Great Plains Gathering in Billings MT serves the large Native population in the city. Pastor Joshua Charette, whose Native heritage is Chippewa, launched the mission church to create a worship community for Native people that will be led by those people.



Katie and Josh Charette, with their children Ella, Aidan, and Alex.

“While Natives may be attending churches sporadically in the area, not many of them are really part of the life of the church,” he



One of the great kids at Great Plains Gathering.

says. “Not many of them are really influencing and giving shape to the church as well.” Most Native people who attend church are accustomed to being served, to not be an integral part of the worship community. Great Plains Gathering works toward a different outcome. “Our identity is in Christ. God is transforming and reshaping us into a new identity. While still Native Americans, we are also united with other believers locally and with the church all over the world,” Josh says.

RiverOaks Presbyterian Church in Tulsa OK is working to connect with local tribes through MNA Leadership and Ministry Preparation (LAMP) courses. “We partnered with LAMP to provide a base to begin Native ministries and to establish a place to train future pastors,” explains Jason Averill, church administrator and a LAMP student. Jason, who is Cherokee and whose parents-in-law are missionaries to Native peoples, recognizes that this requires long-term commitment. They trust God for growth in small steps.

Advancing the Gospel

Ministry among Native Americans is a challenge for the PCA because of the demographic reality: most Native Americans live on reservations or in cities in the Western US and in Canada, while the PCA is strongest in the Eastern US. Bridging the gap is essential. Great Plains Gathering is able to look forward to steady growth over time because of support from Billings’ Rocky Mountain Community Church (RMCC), a PCA church. In God’s providence, RMCC is in an ideal location to support Great Plains.

Bruce’s prayer is that many more PCA churches “back East” will make commitments in the way Westminster Presbyterian in Lancaster PA, Oak Mountain in Birmingham AL and others have, by sending volunteers and supporting church planters and other ministry leaders among Native Americans. The commitment of the presbyteries is also crucial, since the best training for Native pastors often needs to be provided where they currently live, through distance seminary programs such as LAMP.



Westminster Presbyterian in Lancaster PA.

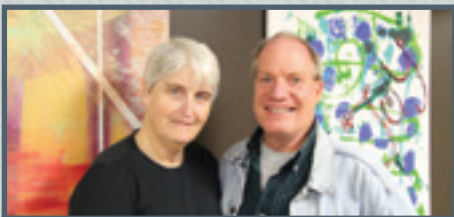
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Personal Short-Term Commitments

Native ministry is crosscultural for most PCA members. An established ministry like Sacred Road provides a home base. “Anyone who comes to work with us, even if it is for a week, they are family too,” explains Sacred Road’s Chris Granberry. “All the one-week teams are building on what other teams have done in the past, and each adds to the foundation for the future.”



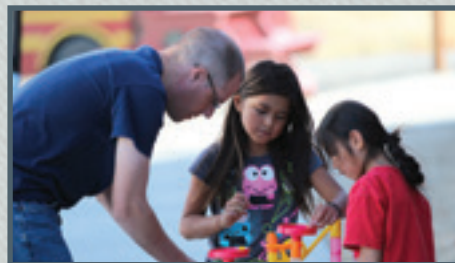
Rob & Deb Priestley.

But sporadic visits are not enough; it’s important to maintain connections. Since 2007, Rob and Deb Priestley have concentrated their time on the Warm Springs Reservation in Oregon, visiting as many as five weeks a year. “When you’re building a ministry and a relationship with Native Americans, it takes commitment. You have to return. They have to know you’re genuine in what you’re trying to do, that you’re not just checking a box. We’ve been welcomed and incorporated into that community as family. We recognize faces, names, kids,” says Rob.



“Begin by doing those things no one wants to do. Then you have to return,” advises Wes Peterson, an elder at Trinity Presbyterian in Rochester MN. Wes regularly leads church groups to serve on the Crow Creek Reservation, nearly 400 miles to the west. When the church asked how they could serve, the tribe asked them to clean out their neglected cemetery. This humble service won the hearts of the tribal leadership, and the relationship has grown steadily since.

MNA ShortTerm Missions helps connect PCA churches with opportunities to serve, including opportunities in Native American and First Nations communities. “MNA provides those connections at no cost to the participants. Travel and other arrangements



are worked out between the sending and receiving churches,” explains MNA Short-Term Missions Director Arklie Hooten” At Amazing Grace Community Church in Lethbridge, Alberta, Canada, which is led by Pastor Rohan Crown, short-term teams help with the church’s VBS and backyard Bible clubs, where the participants are predominantly First Nations people. As a result, Amazing Grace’s ministry to that population grows.



Hope Fellowship.

Chris Granberry offers a final invitation, “Native Americans know that you individually can’t undo the past. They want to know that you’re willing to listen to them, serve them and love them. We need you to pray, we need you to give, and we need you to come serve with us.”

To learn more about missions opportunities in North America, contact MNA Short-Term Missions Facilitator Sherry Lanier at slanier@pcanet.org or 678-294-3012.

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-Chris Granberry



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MINISTRY AMONG NATIVE AMERICANS & FIRST NATIONS:

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From the Coordinator

By this everyone will know that you are My disciples, if you love one another.

— *John 13:35*



Dear Friend,

Although Native American and First Nations peoples are indigenous to North America, they are a group traditionally underserved by the church as a whole and by the Presbyterian Church in America. In fact, churches have been part of the problem in the past. Many Native people had their culture stripped away by Christians who tried to evangelize them.

In recent years, we have been encouraged to see within the PCA the beginnings of a vision to trust God for a growing number of churches among the Native peoples, churches that will be self-supporting and self-propagating – led by Native pastors and lay leaders.

In this issue of *Multiply*, Native leaders along with leaders out of the PCA's majority culture together speak of God's love through Christ advancing among the Native peoples. You'll also learn how you and others in your church can participate in this work and hold them up in prayer.

Thank you for your prayers and support for these ministries. As you provide resources, the Gospel is advancing across North America.

In His Name,
Jim Bland, MNA Coordinator