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Ministry in a Good Way: A New Model for Native American Ministry

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helpful critique of an inherent arrogance that exists within fundamental and liberal theologies. Both these systems assume that they have arrived at a point where they can evaluate the gospel story and 'know' it. The fundamentalist position then reduces the gospel story to proposition so they can control it, and the liberal position reduces the gospel story to myth and makes one a spectator of ancient events, left only with one's personal experience.¹⁸ Leslie Newbiggin points out that the West will not move from evaluating the gospel with a scientific empiricism to having its scientific empiricism evaluated by the gospel until it hears the gospel told back to it from other cultures.¹⁹ Perhaps this is beginning to happen.

¹⁸ Eugene Peterson, *Subversive Spirituality* (Vancouver, British Columbia: Regent College, 1995).

¹⁹ Leslie Newbiggin, *Foolishness to the Greeks; The Gospel and Western Culture*, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986, 22.

MINISTRY IN A GOOD WAY: A New Model for Native American Ministry

Randy Woodley and Edith Woodley

Forward by Ray Aldred:

The following is a wonderful explanation of a cohesive approach to Aboriginal ministry. It is earthy, organic and it distills years of Randy's and Edith's experiences of bringing the witness of Christ to our Aboriginal people. There is so much information recorded here that if one were to add formal documentation, it would take away from the presentation. This is not a paper written about formal theories from the hallowed (and sometimes hollow) American institutions of the learned, rather, this is a conversation of people skilled in life. They invite you into this ongoing dialogue about life together

"The Indian Problem": A Historical Euro-American Collective Perspective

For over 500 years Europeans in this hemisphere have discussed "the Indian problem." Wavering from a policy of Genocide ("nits make lice") to Assimilation ("kill the Indian, save the man"), European Americans have historically tried many ways to rid this nation of a conscience concerning its original inhabitants.

Estimates concerning America's pre-1492 population and civilization.

- Population in the Americas est. 90-112 million
- The Americas in the first 130 years of European contact lost 95% of it's population
- "The worst demographic calamity in recorded history"
E.g. Caddo civilization (East Ark./Tex.) 200,000 to 8,500 to 1,400.
E.g. 90% of coastal New England's natives wiped out from viral hepatitis

Selected examples of Euro-colonizers' comments on the decimation. These quotations demand comparison with the realities of societies such as the Caddoan, Coosa, Giduwa, *et al*, each a City-State—each a complex society managing whole regions, not a "vacant lot":

The good hand of God favoured our beginnings by sweeping away great multitudes of the natives ... that he might make room for us. William Bradford, Puritan Separatist of Mayflower fame, Second Governor of the Plymouth Colony.

And we have now the pleasure, sir, to fatten our dogs with their carcasses, and to display their scalps, neatly ornamented, on top of our bastion. Captain Francis to S.C. Governor Lyttleton, 1760, Fort Ninety Six.

the ground and live as we do? May we not, with equal propriety, ask: Why do not the white people hunt and live as we do? ... The great God of Nature has placed us in different situations. It is true that he has endowed you with many superior advantages; but he has not created us to be your slaves. We are a separate people! [Chief Onistositah (Cherokee), 1777]

The white man knows how to make everything, but he does not know how to distribute it....The love of possessions is a disease with them. They take tithes from the poor and weak to support the rich who rule. They claim this mother of ours, the earth, for their own and fence the neighbors away. [Chief Sitting Bull, 1880]

This religion does not teach me to concern myself of the life that shall be after this, but it does teach me to be concerned with what my everyday life should be. [Redbird Smith, (Keetoowah), on traditional native religion, 1918]

Is there a human being who does not revere his homeland, even though he may not return? ...In the language of my people...there is a word for land: Eloheh. This same word also means history, culture, and religion. We cannot separate our place on earth from our lives on the earth, nor from our vision nor our meaning as a people. We are taught from childhood that the animals and even the trees and plants... are our brothers and sisters. So when we speak of land, we are not speaking of property, territory, or even a piece of ground upon which our houses sit and our crops are grown. We are speaking of something truly sacred. [Jim Durham (Cherokee), Tellico Dam congressional hearings, 1978]

Concerning Native American contact with the church:

The Evangelical Church has not only failed to offer the authentic gospel to America's host people but it has made Jesus Christ an enemy to those who revere and worship His Father. Beyond that, the Church continues to mar her witness by withholding restorative justice and restitution to Native Americans.

Consider these devotional thoughts from a revered Chief:

Our fathers gave us many laws, which they had learned from their fathers. These laws were good. They told us to treat all people as they treated us; that we should never be the first to break a bargain; that it was a disgrace to tell a lie; that we should speak only the truth; that it was a shame for one man to take another for his wife or his property without paying for it....

We were taught to believe that the Great Spirit sees and hears everything, and that he never forgets, that hereafter, he will give every man a spirit home according to his deserts; If he has been a good man, he will have a good home; if he has been a bad man, he will have a bad home. This I believe, and all my people believe the same....

All men were made brothers. The earth is the mother of all people, and all people should have equal rights upon it. You might as well expect the rivers to run backward as that any man who was born free should be contented when penned up and denied liberty to go where he pleases....

Good words do not last long unless they amount to something. Words do not pay for my dead people. They do not pay for my country, now overrun by white men. They do not protect my father's grave. They do not pay for all my horses and cattle. Good words cannot give me back my children. Good words will not give my people good health and stop them from dying. Good words will not get my people a home where they can live in peace and take care of themselves. I am tired of talk that comes to nothing. It makes my heart sick when I remember all the good words and all the broken promises. There has been too much talking by men who had no right to talk. It does not require many words to speak the truth. [Chief Joseph, Nez Perce]

Ministry "in a Good Way": A Model of Dynamic Contextual Holism for the Development of Native American Churches & Ministries

The purpose of this model is to offer a credible witness of Jesus Christ among Native Americans that affirms tribal cultures while ministering in all areas of life.

Some Characteristics:

- Contextual to Native American Spirituality
- Adaptable to Specific Tribal Cultures (Dynamic)
- Foundationally Non-compartmentalized
Relational not Intrinsic Categorization
- Bi-Cultural (Provides a "Stop-Gap" Approach to Living in Two Cultures)
- Whole Life Approach
- Biblically Based
- Respect Oriented (Control is Evil)
- Non/Inter-denominational (Unity Agenda for Indians to meet Jesus & Grow in Him)
- Co-operative Learning Style

Sharing Jesus Fully, One family at a Time: We looked at a typical (reservation, et al.) family. How do we exhibit Jesus to these people? Theologically, the contextual gospel has been developed to the point where it can easily be expressed in Native American ministry. Some areas that need further development include:

- Contextual recovery ministries.
- Contextual models for health and fitness
- Contextual models for economic development
- Contextual models for education
- Contextual model for healing the land
- Contextual models for parenting skills

Because of the foundational symbiotic worldview of Native Americans each of these areas must integrate Native American core values of:

- Relationship with the Creator
- Relationship with the family circle
- Relationship with the land

Each family has its own unique history and set of problems. A model has to be developed for each family, but we can recognize some general principles. There is an interconnection between all family members like the petals of a flower. All the family members are connected in a sacred circle given by the Creator. Regrettably, the tradition model of church has tended to try and pull a member out of that circle and try to minister to them separately. (See Diagram A)

What is needed is for the church to come into the family circle by building relationships with the family as a whole. Then it could offer tools that fit within the framework of that particular family and tribal cultural context. In this way, the whole family is working together to come into a healthy circle. The “Jesus Way” should support the family circle not fragment it further. We are called to support the family in all aspects of life. (See Diagram B)

Individuals cannot do giving support to the whole family circle; it has to be done by a team with some very specific skills. This model also presupposes that we, as the support, need to be mutual learners. The Creator has bought us to others so we can help each other and learn from one another. (See Diagram C)

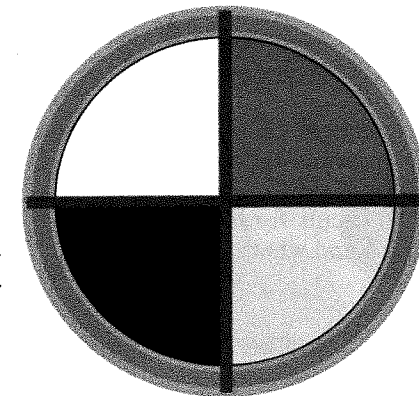
**“HARMONY WAY” SACRED CIRCLE
(A Life Ethic)**

A common way of viewing life in our cultures is through a circle as below — Sacred Circle or Sacred Hoop. A circle has no end nor a beginning and any point on the circle can be reached by any person.

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**NORTH
My Life**

(My Spirituality)
Provider, Life Keeper, Life Learner,
Future Keeper, Recreation



**WEST
The
Community**
Family, Clan,
Tribe, Others-
Same, Others-
Different

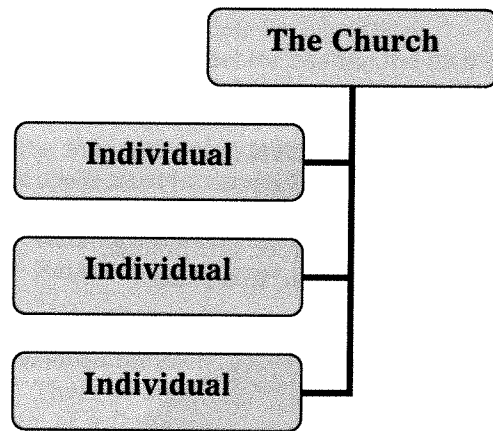
**EAST
The Creator**
(Great Spirit)
Father, Son,
& Sacred
Spirit

**SOUTH
The Creation**

Mother Earth, The Heavens, Human
Beings, Spirits, All Animal & Plant
Life

Diagram A – i & ii © Randy Woodley 2002

Leadership styles are among the many differences in Native American and the majority culture.



The mainstream Evangelical Church typically pulls Native Americans out of their community and introduces them to a new Faith Community. This new community is of a different culture with a different leadership style, so it is often difficult for Aboriginal Americans to distinguish between what is culture and what is faith.

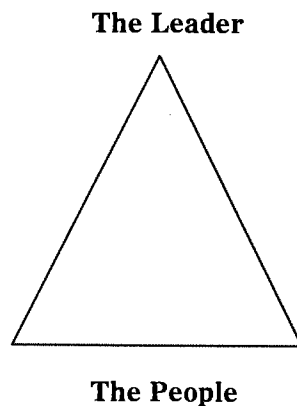


Diagram B: © Randy Woodley 2002

What would be the business of the Church in such a case?

What if we developed a model that brings the Church into the midst of the culture of the native people?

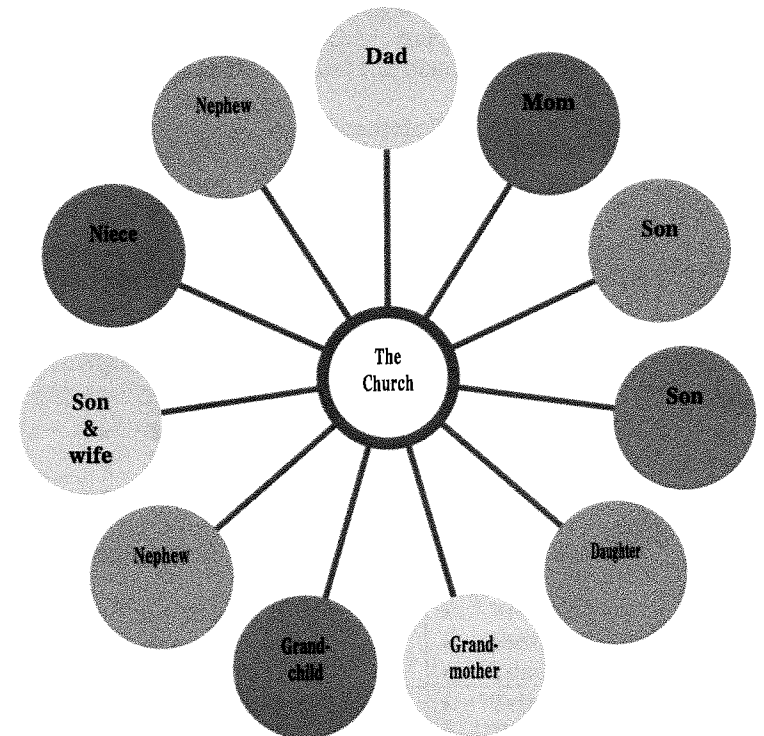
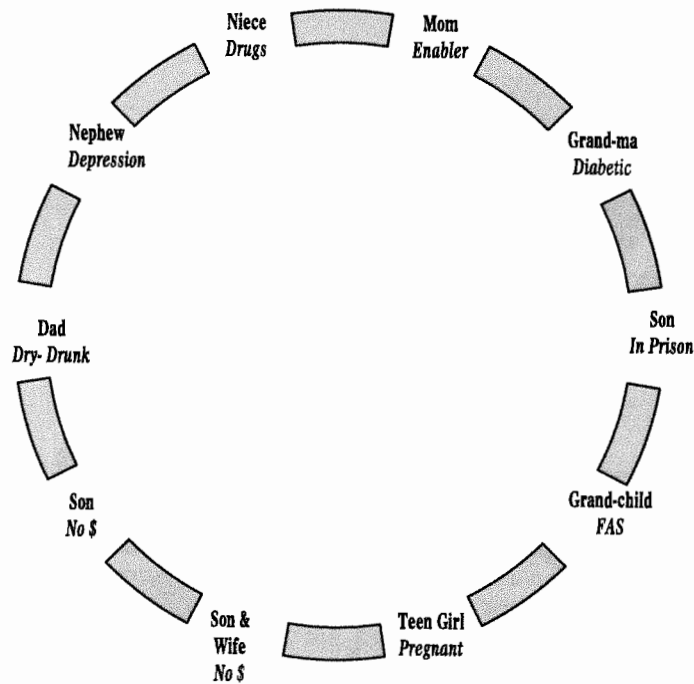


Diagram C: © Randy Woodley 2002

How could the Church possibly help this family?



Past Responses: Ignore the needs by...

- “Just giving them Jesus,” that most often is expressed through preaching and establishing a faith system that does not effectively deal with real life problems. (Platonic Dualism)
- Create a dependency upon someone else to meet the needs that they are told they have. (Paternalism)
- Create a church system that acknowledges the critical needs but neither has an effective strategy nor the resources to meet the needs. (Hopelessness)

Alternative Response: A Concentric Three Circle Team Approach

- Core Team People
- Local Resource People
- Extra-local Resource People

Goal is to provide a Native American Contextual Model of Spirituality

- Spirituality (Theology)
- Earth Keeping (Environment)
- Provision (Economics)
- Life Keeping (Health)
- Life Learning (Education)
- Future Keeping (Marriage & Family)
- Recreation

Defining teams:

Core Team (Center Circle)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Visionary(s) • Pastor(s)/Counselor(s) • Teacher(s)
Local Resource People (Middle Circle)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tribal friends • Tribal Elder(s)
Extra-local Resource People (Outer Circle)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Health Professionals • Apostle/Overseer • Network

The goal is to eventually build one complete circle (community) to minister effectively as a solid witness of Jesus in a community of many families. Building authentic relationships will be the primary determining factor to the circle’s success.

Defining Areas:

Spirituality (Religion): Way of thinking, feeling, doing and being in reaction to the Creator. Manifests in every area of life, including ceremonial life, how I treat others including all of creation. All other

areas are included as a way for me to express my spirituality so; I express my spirituality through:

- *Earth Keeping (Environmental Ethic)*: Way of treating the earth and her creatures.
- *Provision (Economics)*: Way of Providing food, shelter, clothing etc.
- *Life Keeping (Health & Fitness)*: Way of keeping my body ready to live a good, long life. This includes diet, exercise, medicine, recovery, etc.
- *Life Learning (Education)*: Way of keeping my mind and heart ready to learn. This applies to all age groups learning from one another.
- *Future Keeping (Marriage & Family)*: Way of knowing and enjoying myself, my spouse and my children and passing on the good things of life to future generations.
- *Recreation*: Way of enjoying the good things of life.

An Example:

Provision (Economics) has been defined above as the "Way of Providing food, shelter, clothing etc." However, there is a need to maintain the Native American sense of freedom along with provision. By extension, running my own business is viable so I am not controlled by exterior factors. Cottage Industry would likely be the best fit. As I go around the Harmony Circle my work efforts should not conflict with any other areas and should still account for my own traditional methods of provision such as hunting, fishing, planting, harvesting, etc.

Some possibilities:

- arts & crafts co-op
- hand made furniture
- managing a salvage yard
- catalogue sales of certain items like jams, teas
- cultural speaker's bureau
- wood cutting
- snow-plowing
- cattle/hay
- smoked salmon
- salmon eggs
- tipi poles.

Paths to Planting...

- Build Relationships (90% Listening & Encouragement)
- Assess Perceived Needs-Develop Strategy
- Build Team Based on Strategy
- Implement Talking Circle (Continues for Duration)
- Team Assists Family (Unit)

- Discipleship (90% Relationship, Expressed through Life)
- Small Groups (Bible Study, Worship Services & Ceremonies, Recovery, Outreach, etc.)
- Incorporate other Families (Units) Repeating Cycle
- Buildings

Paths to Development: Networks/Resources for Contextual Native American Ministry

The following list is not exhaustive, but is indicative of the Aboriginal relational/ministry networks which are in various stages of development in U.S. and Canada for the sake of gospel of Jesus Christ advancing among Native peoples:

- NAIITS: North American Institute for Indigenous Theological Study
- Contextual Indian Ministry Alliance
- First Nations Institute
- Southeast Native American Ministry Center
- Coalition of First Nations Ministries (in process)