

**BEYOND SOUP, SOAP, AND SALVATION:**  
AMERICAN INDIAN MINISTRY OF THE EVANGELICAL  
LUTHERAN CHURCH IN AMERICA  
1988-2001

A dissertation submitted to the  
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## Foreword

A very important understanding among the Lumbee Indian Tribe is that one is part of the community. Our identity and purpose in life is shaped and discerned by the tribe. As individuals we are asked how we can help the tribe. As a Lumbee Indian who is also a Lutheran, my community encompasses not only my tribe but that of the many American Indian nations represented in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America.

This dissertation is an attempt to bring about understanding of concerns and possibilities for American Indians to fully participate in the ELCA. It will take us from the year 1988, an historical milestone for 5.3 million Lutherans. On January first of that momentous year, the Association of Evangelical Churches (AELC) joined with the Lutheran Church in America (LCA) and the American Lutheran Church (ALC) to become the largest Lutheran denomination in the United State history: the Evangelical Lutheran Church in American (ELCA). Often lost within this 5.3 million membership are the 6,517 American Indians of the ELCA.

The ELCA has attempted to welcome American Indians to be a part of this new church. This paper is an examination of that attempt. Has the ELCA gotten behind the

*old* missionary ploy of “soup, soap, and salvation” when it comes to supporting and training the American Indian pastors and lay leaders who serve in American Indian communities? Has the ELCA understood its own need to be educated about the American Indian communities in which these leaders serve?

The scope of this dissertation will cover the first fourteen years of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America’s efforts in working with American Indian pastors and lay leaders. I will be using the disciplines of oral history documentation, statistical documentation, and historical research.

I believe that this dissertation will add needed information and understanding to those departments of the ELCA who are responsible for:

- a. Development of Indian Missions
- b. Training of non-Indian Lutheran pastors who serve in Indian communities
- c. Support systems for Indian Lutheran pastors
- d. Understanding the unique needs and gifts of the American Indian community
- e. Understanding the crisis nature of this ministry.

To the best of my knowledge and research no work has been done in the field of American Indian Lutheran pastors and lay leadership in the ELCA. This will be an original work in this particular field of study.

By use of historical documentation, strategic planning documents and oral histories, the reader will gain a general awareness of American Indian Lutheran pastors’ and leaders’ field of ministry. For critical change to occur within this particular field of ministry, research and documentation are essential. Various divisions of the church,

including seminaries and synods, require research before change can be made. I hope, therefore, that this dissertation will contribute to their knowledge and understanding of this unique ministry.

The ELCA needs to come to an understanding that American Indian communities are unique both psychologically as well as culturally. In understanding this, the ELCA will be in a much better position to train and equip American Indian leaders. At the time of the writing of this dissertation, there is still no program in place within the LCA that is prepared to teach, support or develop an understanding of this unique ministry to the American Indian community. Hopefully, this will be a small step toward that preparation.

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## *Introduction*

# Soup, Soap, and Salvation

I come from North Carolina. I was born in what is called the sand hills, a section of North Carolina full of towering pines with their roots deep in the sandy soil. My mother was full blood Lumbee Indian and my father was half Catawba: a good mixture of wisdom and stubbornness.

I am an Indian and I am a Lutheran. Being both has not always been easy. This paper is a result of many prayers; prayers being offered up by friends and family, both Indian and non-Indian, and prayers to God that through this effort our church, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, will gain a new vision of ministry with American Indians. Seeing this vision fulfilled will require patience and openness to new possibilities. The ELCA will be challenged, as other denominations have been, to live up to what they promise.

In the last two decades American Indians have protested the paternalism so evident in Protestant missionary enterprises, claiming they have been treated as inferiors and given subordinate places in administrative decisions and controls (Raush and Sherpp, 136). By the 1990s, Catholics were insisting that American Indian religions could be

reconciled with Christianity but at the same time, some Catholic missionaries made it clear that Euro-American interpretations of Christianity were implicitly superior to American Indian spirituality (Stolzman, 2006).

The ELCA has a unique opportunity to walk a new path in American Indian ministries. I hope this paper will give a better understanding of where we started and where we are called to be.

# **PART I**

## **The ELCA Called Out of its Comfort Zone**

## **One**

### The Evangelical Lutheran Church in America's Theology of Mission: God's Mission to Create and Sustain Life

The first national assembly of the ELCA was convened in August of 1988. The ELCA, at this assembly, approved a motion that they would have as a priority: the mission to be an inclusive church. Setting a goal to have 10% of its membership be people of color and language other than English by the year 2001.

With this goal in mind, the National Church directed its various ministry offices to focus on inviting indigenous people (American Indians), to become a part of the ELCA.

To begin this new partnership with American Indians in the ELCA we must first ask why the ELCA feels that it should be involved in ministry with American Indian people. The mission statement of the ELCA says, "Marked with the cross of Christ forever we are claimed, gathered, and sent for the sake of the world". The ELCA as a denomination places extreme importance to being sent as the movement that brings to fulfillment the work begun by the spirit in claiming us.

For ELCA Lutherans, a theology of mission requires that Christians carry forth the good news of salvation through Jesus Christ to all people. To understand this concept

of mission theology we must understand that for the ELCA the triune God is a missionary God. As the author of all life, God, through his grace, continually works to redeem the world. The biblical story presents a picture of the church as being missionary by its very nature. There are Lutheran confessional traditions that call us to participate in this understanding of the nature and purpose of the church.

Selected themes from the Lutheran confessional tradition can be seen in the ELCA's understanding of its theology of mission. The following confessional positions are seen as key to reaching out to American Indians and other peoples:

I. God is on a mission to create and sustain life.

#### Creation and the Bible

“He is the image of the invisible God the firstborn of all creation.” (Colossians 1:15).

Life that is created by God is meant to be lived in relationship to the creator (God), and all of his creation. God is on a mission to create and sustain life, and that all of life should flourish. Humanity created in God's image is intended to live in harmony with God and his whole creation. (Genesis 1:27) Created in his image, humanity is called to actively live out one's life protecting and loving one another and God's creation. (Romans, 2:15).

The norm for understanding the Christian faith is the Bible, consisting of Old and New Testaments. In this canon, that which provides the interpretative basis is the gospel centered in history, although that history is not divorced from creation. (McCurley, p. 5)

In the Old Testament we hear of the exodus event. It is a story of human liberation from slavery to a man-made God (pharaoh). This is the marker for us to base our understanding of the faith, the Bible.

Within certain passages of scripture we hear the Lord of Israel promise to fulfill his desires for his people throughout our history. The following passages show examples of the acts of God from the Exodus out of Egypt into the Promised Land. Law, sacrifice, and covenant all show that our God is the true God. From the book of Deuteronomy 6:20-25 we hear these words:

20 When your children ask you in time to come, “what is the meaning of the decrees and statutes and the ordinances that Lord our God has commanded you?” 21 then you shall say to your children, “We were Pharaoh’s slaves in Egypt, but the Lord brought us out of Egypt with a mighty hand. 22 The Lord displayed before our eyes great and awesome signs and wonders against Egypt, against Pharaoh and all his household. 23 He brought us out from there in order to bring us in, to give us the land that he promised on oath to our ancestors. 24 Then the Lord commanded us to observe all these statutes, to fear the Lord our God, for our lasting good, so as to keep us alive, as is now the case. 25 If we diligently observe this entire commandment before the Lord our God, as he has commanded us, we will be in the right.” (Deuteronomy, 6:20-25)

And from the book of Exodus:

3 Moses said to the people, “Remember this day on which you came out of Egypt, out of the house of slavery, because the Lord brought you out from there by strength of hand; no leavened bread shall be eaten. 4 Today, in the month of Abib, you are going out. 5 When the Lord brings you into the land of the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Amorites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites, which he swore to your ancestors to give you, a land flowing with milk and honey, you shall keep this observance in this month. 6 Seven days you shall eat unleavened bread, and on the seventh day there shall be a festival to the Lord. 7 Unleavened bread shall be eaten for

seven days; no leavened bread shall be seen in your possession, and no leaven shall be seen among you in all your territory. 8 You shall tell your child on that that day, ‘It is because of what the Lord did for me when I came out of Egypt.’ 9 It shall serve for you as a sign on your hand and as a reminder on your forehead, so that the teaching of the Lord may be on your lips; for with a strong hand the Lord brought you out of Egypt. 10 You shall keep this ordinance at its proper time from year to year.  
(Exodus, 13:3-10)

And yet again in Deuteronomy:

1 When you have come into the land that the Lord your God is giving you as an inheritance to possess, and you possess it, and settle in it, 2 you shall take some of the first of all the fruit of the ground, which you harvest from the land that the Lord your God is giving you, and you shall put it in a basket and go to the place that the Lord your God will choose as a dwelling for his name. 3 You shall go to the priest who is in office at that time, and say to him, “Today I declare to the Lord your God that I have come into the land that the Lord swore to our ancestors to give you.” 4 When the priest takes the basket from your hand and sets it down before the altar of the Lord your God, 5 you shall make this response before the Lord your God: “A wandering Aramean was my ancestor; he went down into Egypt and lived there as an alien, few in number, and there he became a great nation, mighty and populous. 6 When the Egyptians treated us harshly and afflicted us, by imposing hard labor on us, 7 we cried to the Lord, the God of our ancestors; the Lord heard our voice and saw our affliction, our toil and our oppression. 8 The Lord brought us out of Egypt with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm, with a terrifying display of power, and with signs and wonders; 9 and he brought us into this place and gave us this land, a land flowing with milk and honey. (Deuteronomy, 26:1-9)

This is reinforced by the book of Joshua:

1 Then Joshua gathered all the tribes of Israel to Shechem, and summoned the elders, the heads, the judges, and the officers of Israel; and they presented themselves before God. 2 And Joshua said to all the people, “Thus says the Lord, the God of Israel: Long ago your ancestors—Terah and his sons Abraham and Nahor—lived beyond the Euphrates and served other gods. 3 Then I took your father Abraham from beyond the River and led him through all the land of Canaan and made his offspring many. I gave him Isaac, 4 and to Isaac I gave Jacob and Esau. I gave Esau the hill country of Seir to possess, but Jacob and his children went down to Egypt. 5 Then I sent Moses and Aaron, and I plagued Egypt with what I did in its midst; and afterwards I brought you out. 6 When I brought your ancestors out of Egypt, you came to the sea; and the Egyptians pursued your ancestors with chariots and horsemen to the Red Sea.” 7 When they cried out to the Lord, he put darkness between you and the Egyptians, and made the sea come upon them and cover them; and your eyes saw what I did to Egypt. Afterwards you lived in the wilderness a long time. 8 Then I brought you to the land of the Amorites, who lived on the other side of the Jordan; they fought with you, and I handed them over to you, and you took possession of their land, and I destroyed them before you. 9 Then King Balak son of Zippor of Moab, set out to fight against Israel. He sent and invited Balaam son of Beor to curse you, 10 but I would not listen to Balaam; therefore he blessed you; so I rescued you out of his hand. 11 When you went over the Jordan and came to Jericho, the citizens of Jericho fought against you, and also the Amorites, the Perizzites, the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Girgashites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites; and I handed them over to you. 12 I sent the hornet ahead of you, which drove out before you the two kings of the Amorites; it was not by your sword or by your bow, 13 I gave you a land on which you had not labored, and

towns that you had not built, and you live in them; you eat the fruit of vineyards and olive yards that you did not plant. (Joshua, 24:1-13)

And dramatically we hear from the book of Isaiah:

Thus says the Lord, the King of Israel, and his redeemer, the Lord of Hosts: I am the first and I am the last; besides me there is no god. Who is like me? Let them proclaim it, let them declare and set it forth before me. Who has announced from of old the things to come? Let them tell us what is yet to be. 8 Do not fear, or be afraid; have I not told you from of old and declared it? You are my witnesses! Is there any god besides me? There is no other rock; I know not one. (Isaiah 44:6-8)

The theme of an emphasis on history in creation is carried on in the New Testament. One only needs to read to see that which defines Christian is that confession, the historical Jesus crucified on Golgotha is the Risen Christ; “And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father’s only son full of grace and truth” (John 1:14).

Jesus was born in a specific place and time: “This was the first registration while Quirinius was governor of Syria.” (Luke, 2:2)

Jesus was raised from the dead: “he was raised on the third day. (Corinthians, 15:4). Christians are defined as those who confess that the historical Jesus is the Risen Christ.

The core of biblical faith in the Gospel is located in the time line of history. Creation is of key importance in the biblical story. Throughout this story be it in psalms, prophetic sayings, creeds, and poems we can see Christ connected to creation.

The Bible places the world in the context of God's history. That harmony now broken will one day be returned in God's love, "afternoon of the first day" (Luther).

The beginning of that kingdom to come has occurred in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ, a person immersed both in the creation and in history.

Beyond that, Christ is said to be involved in the creating event itself. (McCurly, p. 18).

"All things were created through him and for him." (Colossians, 1:16)

Thus, Lutherans see from a biblical understanding that God is the Creator. We as Lutherans see the wholeness and harmony of a created world that comes from our God (Creator). Due to this truth, for a life to be fruitful, humanity must be active in the orderliness of God's desire for us; not to do so would cause separation and despair.

Genesis Chapter One reminds us of the responsibilities we as humans have in the care and stewardship in the care of God's creation. This responsibility includes the nurture of all creatures made by God.

Humanity, male and female, is created in the image of God (genesis 1:27) and is intended to live in community with God and one another and in relationship to the whole creation. Each human being is of infinite worth and is to be honored and respected as a bearer of the image of God. As bearers of this image, humanity is called to participate in God's creative and life-sustaining work. Every human heart bears the imprint of the law

and wisdom of God (Romans 2:15) and all people are called to protect and preserve creation.

God's life-endowed creation is marred and destroyed by human irresponsibility and rebelliousness, and by the powers of sin, evil, and death. Yet God continues to accompany, renew, and liberate the creation that groans in its bondage to decay. God reclaims us for life-giving relationships with God, each other, and all creation. God works in the hearts of all people, preparing them for the Good News of God's re-creation of life in Jesus Christ who "is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation" (Colossians 1:15). (Global Missions in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, p.5).

#### Position II:

God's Mission is to heal, restore, redeem and liberate life through his son Jesus. Jesus' ministry is God's mission to overcome the brokenness of creation and restore life as God meant for it to be. Jesus, the embodiment of God, announces his mission while preaching in Nazareth. Reading from the book of Isaiah: "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor." (Luke 4:18-19)

Jesus expresses God's desire for us that we "might have life and have it abundantly" (John 10:10).

Jesus' radical message puts him at odds with those opposed to the life God wishes for us. Jesus expresses God's ultimate love for all humanity in his willingness to die in his ministry of compassion and redemption.

The resurrection of Jesus is God's reaffirmation of life and a sign of hope in a world marked by sin and death. It declares that God's salvation, the restoration of life for all people and all creation, is rooted in God's compassionate and vulnerable love embodied in Jesus' ministry and death. For those who die seeking and trusting in the God who was incarnate in Jesus of Nazareth, his resurrection is the promise of life in the eternal presence of the living God. The proclamation of Jesus' resurrection calls forth faith in God "who gives life to the dead and calls into existence the things that do not exist" (Romans 4:17).

The resurrection of Jesus is also God's affirmation of Jesus' way of mission in the world, a way of servant hood and commitment to struggle to bring life for others. Jesus calls his followers to mission in his way: "If any want to become followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake, and for the sake of the gospel, will save it" (Mark 8:34-35). Jesus promises to meet us as a living presence today in those who suffer hunger, thirst, nakedness, sickness, and imprisonment (Matthew 25:35-36).

(Global Mission of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, p. 8)

Jesus promises his disciples and us that the Holy Spirit will continue God's mission through his people, the church. "...you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth" (Acts 1:8).

Position III:

God's mission by the Holy Spirit in the Holy Spirit, God is on a mission to create new life giving communities (Bliese, p. 55).

Empowered by the spirit this new community was led into the world and empowered to carry forth God's mission which Jesus identifies beginning with the forgiveness of sins (John 20:21-23). The message of Jesus is heard and understood in many foreign tongues, a sign that God's Love (mission) is intended to reach people of all tribes and nations.

The Kingdom of God, redeemed by his son Jesus, gives birth to the Church through the work of the Holy Spirit.

The Body of Christ lives in a rhythm of gathering and sending. The church gathers for nurture and equipping. Thus empowered, the members of the Body are sent out to be God's incarnate mission of life in the world. In this respect, all Christians are ministers, called and equipped to embody God's life-giving word and deed in their daily lives. All Christians are called into ministry in their daily lives. However, the church calls some to the ministry of leadership and equipping of the other members. As a new community, the Church receives God's life through Word and Sacrament, is empowered by the Holy Spirit, and lives as God's sacrament of grace in the words and deeds of life in the world. (Ruben Doran Interview)

Luther speaks to this in his exposition of Deuteronomy in the year 1529:

29 From there you will seek the Lord your God, and you will find him if you search after him with all your heart and soul. 30 In your distress, when all these things have happened to you in time to come, you will return to the Lord your God and heed him. 31 Because the Lord your God

is a merciful God, he will neither abandon you nor destroy you; he will not forget the covenant with your ancestors that he swore to them. (Deuteronomy 4:29-31).

Luther says: “ Who is in the Church? God’s people and the church are those who rely on nothing else than God’s grace and mercy. Luther writes in 1531 on an exposition of John:

When they heard these words, some in the crowd said, “This is really the prophet.” 41 Others said, “This is the Messiah.” But some asked, “Surely the Messiah does not come from Galilee, does he? 42 Has not the scripture said that the Messiah is descended from David and comes from Bethlehem, the village where David lived?” 43 So there was a division in the crowd because of him. 44 Some of them wanted to arrest him, but no one laid hands on him.

Luther further elaborates on the true church:

Those are called the Christian Church who believe in Christ and who want to be saved through Him, not through their works or merit. And what the Holy Spirit tells them He tells all Christians, wherever they are...It is true, then, that outside the church there is no prophet, Christian, or teacher and preacher. For the church is an organism, like the union of body and soul, and has members. A hand that has been cut off does not live, does not adhere to the body. Just so a heretic is also cut off from the Christian Church through false doctrine and unbelief and is dead.

The Christian Church does not consist of a pile of bishops' or cardinals' hats. These may be called a council or may become one, but they are not the Christian Church. It is impossible to bring the Christian Church together at one place; rather it is scattered throughout the world. It believes as I believe, and I believe as it believes. No difference or inequality of faith exists between us. All of us believe in Christian Church. Outside this church everything amounts to nothing. So I believe. About this faith the controversy arises. (Edward M. Plass, pg. 256-57)

Lutherans understand that a theology of mission is from the beginning a reflection of God's passion for the world. The entire biblical story shares this passion for the world and his great desire to bring salvation to it. The church is the past and now is to bring the good news that this salvation has come through Jesus the Son of God. This salvation message is to be shared with all the peoples of the world.

Luther summarizes his teachings in 1522 in his response to Charles III, Duke of Savoy:

First, we are taught and we teach that the beginning of salvation, nay, the whole burden of it, is faith in Christ, who alone wipes away sins through His blood, not through our works; who does away with the reign of death and, as the prophet puts it, "takes captivity captive" (Ps. 68:19) For so says Paul: "if righteousness comes by the Law, then Christ is dead in vain" (Gal. 2:21); and (Rom. 3:28): "We conclude that a man is justified by faith, without the deeds of the Law." But we teach that this faith is a gift of God, created in our heart by the Holy Spirit, not fashioned or formed by our own acts, as they put it. This faith our opponents call an "acquired faith" (*fidem acquisitam*), that is, the figment of a dream. Faith is rather a living thing which changes the whole person, not by any merit of ours but

solely through the Word of God, as Rom. 10:17 states: “Faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God.”

The second chief part is that, justified through faith in the Word, incorporated into the association with Christ, and having in Christ already overcome all sins and ills, nothing remains for us but to do good works and to lead a pious life. Not that we want to become good thereby or wipe out our sins (which is the work of faith alone), but that as good trees we testify by our good works that we are already free from sins. A good tree does not become good through its fruits, but it is indeed recognized as good by these most certain proofs. (E. Plass, p. 860)

In conclusion to this chapter, I would remind the reader that for Lutherans of the ELCA our summation of a mission theology would be—that mission refers to the mission of God to the entire world (*missio Dei*) this occurs in the redemptive action of the Kingdom of God as proclaimed by Jesus in all creation. The church is an active participant in this holy mission of redemption in all aspects of life.

## **Two**

### **The Evangelical Lutheran Church in America's Theology of Evangelism:**

#### **The Use of Five Doctrinal Principles to Guide a Ministry of Evangelism**

The Use of Five ELCA Doctrinal Principles to Guide Evangelism Ministry  
God calls for the church to announce the good news of Jesus the Christ throughout creation. This announcing actively we call evangelizing. Through our deeds and actions we help proclaim this, but always at the core is the message that salvation is through the living Christ.

*May God bestow on us His grace,  
With blessings rich provide us,  
And may the brightness of His face  
To life eternal guide us  
That we His saving health may know,*

*His gracious will and pleasure,  
And also to the heathen show  
Christ's riches without measure  
And unto God convert them.*

*Thine over all shall be the praise  
And thanks of ev'ry nation,  
And all the world with joy shall raise  
The voice of exaltation;  
For Thou shalt judge the earth, O Lord,  
Nor suffer sin to flourish;  
Thy people's pasture is Thy Word  
Their souls to feed and nourish,  
In righteous paths to keep them.  
Oh, let the people praise Thy worth,  
In all good works increasing;  
The land shall plenteous fruit bring forth,  
Thy Word is rich in blessing.  
May God the Father, God the Son,  
And God the Spirit bless us!  
Let all the world praise Him alone,  
Let solemn awe possess us.  
Now let our hearts say amen.*

Crucial to the very name of being the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America is the term “evangelical”. In the heritage of the reformation, we are a church that is always to be in process of reforming (*ecclesia semper reformanda*) (Bleise and Gelder, pg. 137). As the ELCA begins to reach out to American Indians, what are its Evangelizing principles?

To begin with, Lutheran theology of evangelism is about the gospel of Jesus Christ and God’s gift of forgiveness, love, and grace. Since we as Lutherans understand the gospel is a person moved by Jesus Christ, who received his love. We are also required to share that love with others.

Christ says to his people, the church, “Come follow me”. The response to the gift of Christ is to evangelize and share the good news.

This is the principle of the emphasis of “new obedience” and “good works” found in our confessional statement in article VI of the Augsburg Confession:

It is also taught among us that such faith should produce good fruits and good works and that we must do all such good works as God has commanded, but we should do them for God’s sake and not place our trust in them as if thereby to merit favor before God. For we receive forgiveness of sin and righteousness through faith in Christ, as Christ himself says, “So you also, when you have done all that is commanded you, say, ‘We are unworthy servants’” (Luke 17:10). The Fathers also teach thus, for Ambrose says, “It is ordained of God that whoever believes

in Christ shall be saved, and he shall have forgiveness of sins, not through works but through faith alone, without merit.”

The ELCA having stated its desire to proclaim the love of Christ to American Indian people I would like to present to you the foundational teaching that will guide this endeavor of evangelism.

Luther preached this sermon in 1523 on John 20:19-31:

The Lord wants to say: You have received enough from Me—peace and joy and everything you ought to have; personally you need no more. Therefore work now, look at what I have done, and imitate it. My Father has sent Me into the world for your sake alone, in order to help you, not to benefit Myself. This I have done; I have died for you and have given you all I am and have. Therefore you should think and act in like manner. Henceforth spend your lives serving and helping everyone; otherwise you would have nothing to do on earth, for through faith you have enough of everything. Therefore I send you into the world as My Father has sent Me, that is, that every Christian may instruct and teach his fellow man also to come to Christ.

(Plass, p. 960)

The first guiding principle of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America’s theology of evangelism to American Indians is justification by grace. The Lutheran theology of evangelism is based on one specific doctrinal teaching. The central Lutheran conviction is that we are saved by grace alone; through faith alone; in Christ alone: the doctrine of justification by grace through faith.

Luther writes in 1537:

The article of justification is the master and prince, the lord, the ruler, and the judge over all kinds of doctrines; it preserves and governs all church doctrine and raises up our conscience before God. Without this article the world is utter death and darkness. No error is so mean, so clumsy, and so outworn as not to be supremely pleasing to human reason and to seduce us if we are without the knowledge and the contemplation of this. (Plass, p.703).

In the New Testament we have the effect of the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus Christ and its meaning for the relationship between God and his people (humanity). Both the Gospels and the Pauline letters state that all people need God's act of love (Life of Christ) to make a new relationship which is broken continually by people. Human sin causes this broken relationship to God. We as human beings are not capable of restoring this relationship. The Evangelical Lutheran Church in America's theology of evangelism carries forth the good news that God's gracious act of love on the cross of Christ heals the brokenness that has existed from the time of Adam and Eve.

Lutheran Theology of Evangelism proclaims God in Christ is the actor, the missionary and the evangelizer who gifts us with forgiveness, love and grace even though we do not deserve it Jesus Christ died and was raised for you! You are made God's child in Baptism. For Christ's sake you will inherit eternal life. (Belise and Gelder, pp. 134-135)

Gasman and Hendrix summarize this central message of the ELCA evangelism:

*Christ—our righteousness.* Christ is the mediator. Through the vicarious and sacrificial obedience in his suffering, cross, and resurrection, Christ, who is both human and divine, has taken our sins upon himself so that they no longer separate us from God. His righteousness becomes our righteousness and we are reconciled to God.

The human response to justification and reconciliation is enabled solely by the Holy Spirit. This response takes the form of faith. Faith is primarily described as an attitude: trust in the promise of mercy in Christ; the firm acceptance and appropriation of God's offer of justification and forgiveness; the readiness that grasps the gift of grace and righteousness. Believers are justified by faith alone because justification is extended to us as a free gift of God, received by faith, a faith trusting that we are forgiven for Christ's sake. *By faith alone* means also that our own efforts, religious and other good works, cannot merit God's justification. Such faith and the glorious gift of grace it receives bring peace to the mind, consolation to the conscience, and new life to the heart.

Justification *is* forgiveness of sins for Christ's sake and reconciliation with God through Christ. Justification happens when people, moved to faith by the Holy Spirit, are turned around and are brought back to a right relationship with God and to a life of sanctification and renewal. In this sense they are made just or righteous (i.e., effective or transformative justification) as well as accounted, reconciled, or pronounced just or righteous (i.e., forensic justification). Both belong together in one life-changing action of God.

*The consequence: free and servant.* Being justified means to be liberated from the focus on oneself, one's good works, one's failures, one's burdened or guilty conscience, and being reoriented toward God. This implies: "A Christian is a perfectly free lord of all, subject to none."

Being justified means also being reoriented in love and responsibility toward one's neighbors near and far. This implies: "A Christian is a perfectly dutiful servant of all, subject to all." (Gassman and Hendrix, pp. 83-85).

For Luther and now for the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America in its call to Evangelism this key teaching leaves us no choice but to carry this good news to the world. Luther wrote and preached about this wonderful assurance of God's love and salvation, it even brought him to song. The following hymns of 1523 reflect his own personal experience of God's care.

Dear Christians, one and all, rejoice,  
With exultation springing,  
And, with united heart and voice  
And holy rapture singing,  
Proclaim the wonders God hath done,  
How His right arm the vict'ry won;  
Right dearly it hath cost Him.

Fast bound in Satan's chains I lay,  
Death brooded darkly o'er me,  
Sin was my torment night and day,  
In sin my mother bore me;  
Yea, deep and deeper still I fell,  
Life had become a living hell,  
So firmly sin possessed me.

My own good works availed me naught,  
No merit they attaining;

Free will against God's judgment fought,  
Dead to all good remaining.  
My fears increased till sheer despair  
Left naught but death to be my share;  
The pangs of hell I suffered.

But God held my wretched state  
Before the world's foundation,  
And mindful of His mercies great,  
He planned my soul's salvation.  
A Father's heart He turned to me,  
Ought my redemption fervently:  
He gave His dearest Treasure.

He spoke to His beloved Son:  
'Tis time to have compassion.  
Then go, bright Jewel of My crown,  
And bring to man salvation;  
From sin and sorrow set him free,  
Slay bitter death for him that he  
May live with Thee forever.

The Son obeyed His Father's will,  
Was born of virgin mother,  
And God's good pleasure to fulfill,  
He came to be my Brother.  
Nor garb of pomp or power He wore,  
A servant's form, like mine, He bore,  
To lead the devil captive.

To me He spake: Hold fast to Me,

I am thy Rock and Castle;  
Thy Ransom I myself will be,  
For thee I strive and wrestle;  
For I am with thee, I am thin,  
And evermore thou shalt be Mind;  
The Foe shall not divide us.

The Foe shall shed My precious blood,  
Me of My life bereaving.  
All this I suffer for thy good;  
Be steadfast and believing.  
Life shall from death the victory win,  
My innocence shall bear thy sin;  
So spare thou blest forever.

Now to My Father I depart,  
The Holy Spirit sending  
And, heavenly wisdom to impart,  
My help to thee extending.  
He shall in trouble comfort thee,  
Teach thee to know and follow Me,  
And in all truth shall guide thee.

What I have done and taught, teach thou,  
My ways forsake thou never;  
So shall My kingdom flourish now  
And God be praised forever.  
Take heed lest men with base alloy  
The heavenly treasure should destroy;  
This counsel I bequeath thee.

(Plass, p. 719)

The next guiding principle of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America's theology of evangelism is that of Law and Gospel.

Western Christian theology uses the term the "Word of God" in three different ways. Number one, it is used to speak of Jesus Christ: "the Word which was the beginning, was with God, was God, and which became flesh and dwelt among us" (John 1:1-3, 14). We must remember however that the Word of God is also used to speak of the Bible, the written testimony about Jesus Christ and the promises of God leading to Christ. But perhaps most common in the Bible itself and in Lutheran theology, the Word of God is a spoken message by which God confronts people with the divine presence. (Foster, p. 13)

The Holy Scriptures portray Christ through the message of law and gospel. In Luther's time, law weighed heavily on the people of Europe in the middle ages. While the Church proclaimed God's grace the facts were that people's lives were governed more by law than by Christ's love. Clergy used the Ten Commandments as a tool in the interrogation of their parishioners. Gassman and Hendrix give a prime example of the use of the commandments in this passage:

Priests interrogated their parishioners by going through the Commandments one by one and asking if they had been broken. Penance was imposed on contrite parishioners according to manuals that matched the penalty to the severity of the sin. The Ten Commandments were also presented as a way to merit grace. By keeping the Commandments, with the aid of grace, people accumulated merit that qualified them to receive

was enough, but their use as a basis for punishment and as a supplement to grace placed the law at the forefront of Christian life. (p. 55)

At the center of Luther's Reformation message was the idea of "freedom from the demands of the law". Luther came to emphasize this understanding in the discovery of freedom for his own life.

As a student, Luther, like the vast majority of people, understood that righteousness of God was the measuring stick by which God judged and punished sinners. Since the law revealed these requirements, Luther, like other Christians of his day, struggled to obey the law in order to become righteous in the eyes of God. However, Luther came to discern from his study of Romans 1:17, "Through faith the righteousness of God is revealed in the gospels", that he became righteous through faith in Christ, not through the law. Thus he was freed from the burden of having to fulfill the law.

Like Paul, he experienced the freedom that comes with knowing that in Christ the righteousness of God had been revealed apart from the law.

But now, apart from law, the righteousness of God has been disclosed, and is attested by the law and the prophets, the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe. (Romans: 1:22)

By 1518 Luther seeks to clarify his concept of Law and Gospel in his elucidation of his 95 theses of the previous year:

According to the apostle, Rom. 1:1-3, the Gospel is the message about the incarnate Son of God, who was given us without our merits for salvation and peace. It is the Word of salvation, the Word of grace, the Word of comfort, the Word of joy, the voice of the Bridegroom and the bride, the good Word, the Word of peace, as Isaiah says: “How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him that bringeth good tidings, that publisheth peace; that bringeth good tidings of good” (52:7). But the Law is the Word of perdition, the Word of wrath, the Word of sadness, the Word of pain, the voice of the Judge and the accused, the Word of unrest, the Word of malediction; for, according to the apostle, the Law is the strength of sin (1 Cor. 15:56), the Law works wrath (Rom. 4:15), and it is a Law of death (Rom. 7:13).

Luther spread this message of the freedom of the Gospel through his sermons, lectures, and pamphlets. In each vehicle of delivery he explained how the law should be correctly used in relationship to the Gospel.

By the year 1520, Luther would emphasize the structure of law and gospel in this manner, as expressed by Gassman and Hendrix:

The division of Scripture into Commandments and promises:

1. Commandments express the law of God and lead to repentance and the need for God’s forgiveness.
2. The promises of God, the other parts of scripture, are where forgiveness is declared. They express the Gospel because they bring remission of sin through faith in Christ and make the believer free. (p. 56)

Luther sought to help the common person understand this meaning of Law and Gospel. The following is from a sermon preached on New Year’s Day of 1532 on Gal. 3:23-24:

This difference between the Law and the Gospel is the height of knowledge in Christendom. Every person and all persons who assume or glory in the name of Christian should know and be able to state this difference. If this ability is lacking, one cannot tell a Christian from a heathen or a Jew; of such supreme importance is this differentiation.

This is why St. Paul so strongly insists on a clean-cut and proper differentiation among Christians of these two doctrines, the Law and the Gospel. To be sure, both are God's Word: the Law, or the Ten Commandments, and the Gospel; the latter first given by God in Paradise, the former on Mount Sinai. But everything depends on the proper differentiation of these two messages and on not mixing them together; otherwise one will know and retain the proper understanding of neither the one nor the other; nay, while under the impression of having both, one will have neither...

Therefore place the man who is able nicely to divorce the Law from the Gospel at the head of the list and call him a Doctor of Holy Scripture, for without the Holy Spirit the attainment of this differentiating is impossible. (Plass, p. 732)

According to Luther, the hearing of God's message brings us to a place of judgment and mercy, or as he would say, "Law and Gospel". Luther believed that no one can experience this encounter with God without it having some type of effect. "Luther understood that effect to be either one of consolation of the afflicted or affliction of the all too comfortable" (Foster, p. 13). Law then, for Luther, is God accusing us of our sin and the gospel is God forgiving us.

Luther saw law and gospel are part of scripture, and both repentance and faith are necessary for a person seeking to be a Christian.

This important feature of Lutheran theology and practice can be seen in the early confessional documents: Luther's catechism, Augsburg Confession, and the Apology. Each document in its own way points us to this understanding of Law and Gospel.

In 1529 Luther at the close of his explanation of the Apostle's Creed points this out:

From what has been said you now perceive that the Creed is a doctrine very different from the Ten Commandments; for while the latter teach what we are to do, the former tells us what God does for us and gives to us. Moreover, the Ten Commandments are written in the hearts of all men; but the Creed no human wisdom can comprehend; it must be taught by the Holy Spirit alone. Hence the former doctrine makes no Christian, of the wrath and displeasure of God continue to rest on us because we cannot keep what God demands of us; but the latter doctrine brings pure grace, sanctifies us, and makes us acceptable to God. For through this knowledge we come to love and like all commandments of God, since we see that God gives Himself to us entirely, with all that He has and is able to do, in order to aid and guide us in keeping the Ten Commandments. The Father gives us all His creatures, the Son all works He performed for our redemption, the Holy Spirit all His sanctifying gifts. (Plass, p. 733)

To summarize then, ELCA evangelizing notes the human condition, and recognizes that through God's wisdom he has given us law and gospel. Luther saw law and gospel primarily as a way of interpreting Scripture so as to make the redeeming work of God in Jesus Christ the focus of its story, and thus the purpose of the reformation. Due to the importance of preaching in spreading this message, law and gospel became a guiding principle of the Lutheran Proclamations. The importance of balancing the gift of

faith in Christ (gospel) with God's requirement for repentance (Law) is of utmost importance.

For the purpose of Evangelism the ELCA believes that law and gospel must be held together if we are to share our Christian beliefs in teaching about the faith and in the living of our own lives in a Christ-like manner.

Luther, through the confessions, warns that one without the other can lead to a skewed understanding of Christianity. As Gassmann and Hendrix state:

To base Christian identity on the law alone teaches people they can please God by their goodness and therefore do not need Christ. To deny that the law has any place in Christianity can mislead people into thinking that freedom of the gospel is the license to behave any way they wish or that God's will for humanity is not manifest in the commandments that define God's covenant with Israel. (p. 63)

Then, for the purpose of Lutheran Evangelism Theology, the principle of Law and Gospel must be kept in balance. The temptation is to lose that balance, and as a result we can have a distorted understanding that the law is the essence of our Christian faith. This is dangerous and has caused great hardship when we have reduced our faith to a set of rules of morality that we impose on other cultures. Yet, on the other side, our Christian freedom can be so intoxicating that we can overlook the ongoing sinful behavior or turn a blind eye to the need for justice. We need to be careful that our faith not be so pie in the sky that we neglect the needs of God's people and creation.

In our desire to proclaim the good news (Evangelize) we are to keep law and gospel in balance in order to protect the faith from legalism and **antinomianism**. (Glassman and Hendrix, p. 63)

The next guiding principle of the ELCA's Theology of Evangelism is that of the ministry of all the baptized. According to the ELCA, the primary messengers of God's evangelizing mission to American Indians today are the baptized of God's Church, referred to as the Priesthood of Believers.

Luther saw the Church not as an institution but as a living community of people who proclaim Jesus Christ as their savior. These believers are gathered by the Holy Spirit through Word and sacrament. For Luther, these are people joined by a communion of faith, shared suffering, and love that lives by God's grace. Luther speaks of these believers in an exposition on John 7:40-44 in 1531:

Those are called the Christian Church who believe in Christ and who want to be saved through Him, not through their works or merit. And what the Holy Spirit tells them He tells all Christians, wherever they are. . . It is true, then, that outside the church there is no prophet, Christian, or teacher and preacher. For the church is an organism, like the union of body and soul, and has members. A hand that has been cut off does not live, does not adhere to the body. Just so a heretic is also cut off from the Christian Church through false doctrine and unbelief and is dead.

The Christian Church does not consist of a pile of bishops' or cardinals' hats. These may be called a council or may become one, but they are not the Christian Church. It is impossible to bring the Christian Church together at one place; rather it is scattered throughout the world. It believes as I believe, and I believe as it believes. No difference or inequality of faith exists between us. All of us believe in the Christian

Church. Outside this church everything amounts to nothing. So I believe.  
About this faith the controversy arises. (Plass, p. 270)

Lutherans of the ELCA follow the teaching of Article VII of the Augsburg confession when defining what the church is:

#### VII [The Church]

It is also taught among us that one holy Christian church will be and remain forever. This is the assembly of all believers among whom the Gospel is preached in its purity and the holy sacraments are administered according to the Gospel. For it is sufficient for the true unity of the Christian church that the Gospel be preached in conformity with a pure understanding of it and that the sacraments be administered in accordance with the divine Word. It is not necessary for the true unity of the Christian church that ceremonies, instated by men, should be observed uniformly in all places. It is as Paul says in Eph. 4:4,5, “There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call, one Lord, one faith, one baptism.” (Tappert, p. 32)

Article VII is the foundation for Lutheran understanding of the Church. The content states this belief, “Christ suffered for us and that for his sake our sin is forgiven”.

Luther elaborates more on the meaning of the Church in his discussion of the third Article of the Large Catechism in 1529. He writes:

The Creed calls the holy Christian Church *communio sanctorum*, a communion (*Gemeinschaft*) of saints; the meaning of both is the same. In former times the latter phrase was not used, and it has been poorly and

unintelligibly translated into German, a “communion of saints”. If it is to be rendered plainly, it must be expressed very differently in the German idiom, for the Greek word *ecclesia* really means an assembly, *eine Versammlung*, in German. But we are accustomed to use the word *church*, which to plain people does not mean an assembled congregation but the consecrated house or building. But the house would not be called a church if the congregation did not assemble there; for we who come together there make and select a particular place and name the house after the assembly.

Thus the word “church” (*Kirche*) really means nothing else than a common assembly. Etymologically it is not German, but Greek (as is also the word *ecclesia*), for in their own language the Greeks call it *kyria*, as it is called *curia* in Latin. In good German, in our mother tongue, it should therefore be called *eine chrisliche Gemeinde oder Versammlung*, a Christian congregation or assembly, or, best of all and most clearly, *eine heilige Christenheit*, holy Christendom. So, too, the word *communio*, which is added, should not be rendered *Gemeinschaft*, communion, but *Gemeinde*, congregation. It is nothing else than a comment or explanation by which someone meant to explain what the Christian Church is. This term some of our people, who understand neither Latin nor German, have rendered *Gemeinschaft der Heiligen*, communion of saints, although no German tongue so uses or understands this expression. To speak correct German it should be *eine Gemeinde der Heiligen*, a congregation of saints, that is, a congregation composed exclusively of saints, or to speak still more plainly, *eine heilige Gemeinde*, a holy congregation. I say this so that the words *Gemeinschaft der Heiligen*, communion of saints, may be understood. The expression has become so firmly established by custom that it is difficult to eliminate it from usage, and it almost seems heresy to alter a word.

But the meaning and substance of the clause is: I believe that there is on earth a holy flock and congregation of pure saints under one Head, Christ, called together by the Holy Spirit in one faith, one mind and understanding, with manifold gifts, yet in love, without sects and schisms. (Plass, p. 260)

The concept of assembly of believers calls to our attention Luther's strong emphasis on the priesthood in which every baptized believer shares no matter where they are located, Luther writes:

Scripture speaks of the church (*Chrtenheit*) very simply and uses the expression in one sense only...According to Scripture, the church is the assembly of all those on earth who believe in Christ, just as we pray in the Creed: "I believe in the Holy Ghost...a communion of saints." This community or assembly consists of all who live in true faith, hope, and love, so that the essence, life, and nature of the church is not a bodily, but a spiritual assembly of hearts in one faith, as St. Paul says, Eph. 4:5: "one Baptism, one faith, one Lord." Hence, although they be a thousand miles apart in body, they are yet an assembly in spirit because each one preaches, believes, hopes, loves, and lives like the other. So we sing of the Holy Ghost: "Thou, who through diverse tongues gatherest together the nations in the unity of the faith". Now that is what is properly called a spiritual unity, because of which men are called a "communion of saints". And only this unity is sufficient to make a church; without it no unity—be it of place, of time, of person, of work, or of whatever it may be—makes a church. (Plass, p. 260)

Having heard and believed in the gospel message of salvation, Luther committed his life to bringing this good news to the average person. This transforming gospel

message required each person to become a messenger for Christ, a priesthood of believers. This priesthood meant then, and means now that we “stand before God on behalf of others to pray, to intercede, to sacrifice ourselves, and to proclaim the Word to one another” (McCurly, p. 16). Each person of the priesthood understands that service and witness is to be a part of our every day life. Luther’s teaching would call on each Christian to be responsible for the welfare of others, and to share in this care with others of the priesthood.

For ELCA Lutherans, this priesthood of believers means that each member shares his or her gifts and talents for the benefit and health of the community of God. Through this spirit of love each member becomes an integral part of the ministry within and by the congregation (community). Luther, due to his writings and insights, has often been called the father of Genuine Church—centered evangelical mission work based on the gospel. One must remember that it was because of the good news that he encountered in the gospel of Christ’s love and salvation, that Luther was driven to share Christ with the people.

Luther would remind us that we the priesthood of believers are still the messengers of God’s evangelizing mission to his creation and to American Indians. The ELCA seeks to put into practice what it has professed: All the baptized are God’s messengers sent into the world to bring the good news. The other piece of the Lutheran principles in regard to Evangelism is that of the Theology of the cross. This principle permeates all of Luther’s theological thinking. For Luther the basic understanding is that evangelism is to be focused on the way of the cross, not on glory. The basic text of Luther’s theology of the cross is 1Cor. 1:18-25:

18 For the message about the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. 19 For it is written, "I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and the discernment of the discerning I will thwart." 20 Where is the one who is wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the debater of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? 21 For since, in the wisdom of God, the world did not know God through wisdom, God decided, through the foolishness of our proclamation, to save those who believe. 22 For Jews demand signs and Greeks desire wisdom, 23 but we proclaim Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, 24 but to those who are the called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. 25 For God's foolishness is wiser than human wisdom, and God's weakness is stronger than human strength.

Luther interpreted that Paul in this passage is seeking to reach out to both Gentiles and Jews. Where as the Jews saw the cross as an offense and a stumbling block, and to the gentiles it was utter foolishness. Yet in Paul's appeal, to those who will believe it is the power of God's saving grace. The cross shows the power and wisdom of God. Luther recognized that unfortunately the symbol of the cross had been misused and had become a symbol of conquest and subjugation.

Luther seeks to guide us to a true understanding of the cross. The theology of the cross is not that of triumph, oppression, and the crusading type of evangelism. Luther, in his Heidelberg Dispensation of 1518, points out very clearly the difference between "the theology of the Cross" and "the theology of glory". Here Luther, drawing on the insights of St. Paul, insists that "God is not to be found in the great successes of humanity whether intellectual or moral, but instead in the cross of Jesus" (Lull, p.3). Luther points

to the obvious, a theology of glory is a reflection of humanity's pride and self-serving glorification. A theology of the cross, Luther says, points to God in the presence of the lowly and weak, serving among the poor and suffering through the crucified and risen Christ.

The ELCA must learn to use the theology of the cross as a foundation of evangelism in its quest to reach out to God's people. Mark W. Thomsen states, "The only God who exists is the one that is embodied and identified in the Crucified. God's love through the suffering Christ embraces the whole world. This understanding of Christ opens us up to each other and all people" (Thomsen, p. 153).

This then is the message that the ELCA carries into the world through its evangelizing ministry: That God identifies with the human condition, and in his love sent his son to save us. Lutherans expect God to be active today in our world of suffering and death. As believers we through our evangelizing efforts must enter into God's world to bring the Good News, not for the Church's glory, but as an act of servant-hood for God's son, for "Lutheran Evangelism Theology belongs to the very essence of the Triune God who desires to draw all persons into communion" (Bliese, p. 134).

# **PART II**

## **Gifts of Wisdom from American Indian People**

## Three

### An American Indian Response to the Four Doctrinal Principles

*If all the heathen are to praise God, He must first have been made their God. If He is to be their God, they must know Him and believe on Him and let go of all idolatry. For man cannot praise God with idolatrous lips and an unbelieving heart. If they are to believe, they must first hear His Word and thus receive the Holy Spirit, who purifies and enlightens their heart by faith. For one cannot come to faith or receive the Holy Spirit before one has heard the Word, as Paul says (Rom. 10:14): “how shall they believe in Him of whom they have not heard?” (Gal. 3:2): You have received the Spirit by the preaching of faith. If they are to hear His Word, preachers who proclaim the Word of God to them must be sent to them.*

-Luther, Exposition of Psalm 117:1 (Plass p. 958)

A Theology of Mission, and a Theology of Evangelism, requires the ELCA to be intentional go about sharing the message of Christ with American Indians. But how is that message received by American Indian people? As an American Indian Lutheran

Theologian, I would like to respond to these theological foundational principles of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America.

Over the centuries my people have spoken of spiritual matters. Some would sound very familiar to the ELCA. Yet, American Indian people would also have insights and wisdom to share, but is the church ready to listen?

I would strongly encourage the church to not only talk in a new way, but also to learn to listen with an open heart. American Indians have often felt neglected in this new Church. Our ideas are passed over, our ways of wisdom demeaned, our stories and ceremonies abused. The ELCA says it wants to have a Church that follows Paul's vision. That the church should be the body of Christ, where all people are welcomed, where all people are an equal part of a whole. Yet, for this to happen the ELCA must be willing to hear what each community of people is trying to tell us and teach us. No longer can we hear or interest only from a Western European perspective. If the ELCA truly wants American Indians to be a part of the church, the church must learn to listen and to hear us, not only when we agree, but also when we differ in opinion or interpretation of concepts and meaning.

*The theology of the Church would describe this bond between God and his people by using the language of the Covenant. Native American theology would use the language of the Circle.*

*The circle is more than an image; it is an enduring promise made by the Creator to his Native people. Our tradition teaches us that all things were made to live in harmony; all life is contained within the embrace of God. What may seem broken in reality (our own human reality) can never be truly broken. The Creator constantly seeks to restore us to balance, to pull his creatures back to peace and right relationship. Our job is to work with him, to do our best to respect the pattern of life he created.*

-Rev. Steve Charleston,

Choctaw

There are those within the ELCA who contend that when interpreting the Gospel we need to be free from any cultural bias. They would defend a position that culture should be removed from one's theological understanding in the living of a spiritual life. I would challenge this approach, rather, my cultural experience that I bring should be seen as a gift that the Holy Spirit has bestowed on me and my people. I believe this narrow interpretation has some in the ELCA forgetting how they have been highly influenced by their own Western European cultural background. I feel that my American Indian culture needs to be presented in an open and equal manner.

We as native people have parts of our culture that we would wish to bring to this new Church. I recognize and would share with the ELCA that some of my cultural teachings and rituals impact how I see and respond to life's challenges whether as an individual or as a part of a tribal community.

The ELCA has recognized that other cultural communities (Asian, Latino, and African American) have used their cultural and ethnic background when interpreting different concepts and ideas. The ELCA has honored these cultural differences when helping to minister in areas of Biblical interpretation and reaching theological study and teaching. As American Indian people, we request that the ELCA listen to us as we seek to share in the life of the Church. The ELCA has stated that Moravians, Presbyterians, Roman Catholics, United Church of Christ, Episcopalians, and many other faiths, have legitimate spiritual messages for the communities that they serve. The ELCA also needs to understand that American Indians have the same right. The way the message is proclaimed might be different in form, but as American Indian Christians of the ELCA it

will be the same good news of Jesus Christ that is proclaimed. Here then are some key areas for further dialogue between the ELCA and American Indians.

*When he inscribed a circle upon the face of the deep, when he made firm the skies from above, when the fountains of the deep were given their force, when he gave to the sea its bounds, that the waters should not transgress his spoken word, then I [wisdom] was beside him, a master builder.*

-Proverbs 8:28ff, NRSV

The beginning of Theology is found in creation or as American Indians would say, the sacred hoop of life.

In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth”

(Gen. 1:1).

The God we confess is a God of grace, of love, of beauty: the Creator. The hills and mountains themselves and the splendor of all creation shout forth with joy proclaiming the Creator’s goodness

(Psalm 148).

I believe that all Christian theology should begin here.

Within the ELCA we proclaim in the Nicene Creed, “We believe in one God, the Father, the Almighty, maker of heaven and earth, of all that is seen and unseen” and therefore we remember God’s act of creation.

Even as we praise God, the Creator, we also are aware of his creation as being enormous. The same creative power that God exercised in the beginning he continues in Christ, to create; to redeem all of us.

American Indian theologians would point out a significant fact here. Until the name of Jesus is inserted into this theology of creation, we have said nothing that our American Indian ancestors would not have fully understood. American Indians come with an understanding of creation as found in the stories of the Old Testament. American Indian people understand that from the dust we came, where as western Christians seem to have forgotten this.

The land (mother earth) is profoundly religious to American Indian people whereas for white society, land is no longer central to God's creation. Two very different theologies, two different ways of understanding the world and two different ways of prayer and living out of our faith. This contrast can be seen in this Hopi creation story that was shared with me by an elder:

So Spider Woman gathered Earth, this time of four colors, yellow, red, white, and black; mixed with *tuchvala*, the liquid of her mouth; molded them; and covered them with her white substance cape which was the creative wisdom itself...She sang over the creation song, and when she uncovered them these forms were human beings in the image of Sotuknang. Then she created four other beings after her own form. They were *wuti*, female partners for the first four male beings...

So the First People kept multiplying and spreading over the face of the land and were happy. Although they were of different colors and spoke different languages they felt as one and understood one another without talking. It was the same with the birds and animals. They all suckled at the breast of their Mother Earth, who gave them her milk of grass, seeds, fruit and corn, and they all felt as one, people and animals...

This story sounds very similar to the Old Testament creation story. The first human being is created out of the earth (Genesis 2). Because he is created out of the earth (*adamah*) he is called Adam. Interesting to note, *Adamah* the earth is the feminine form of the word (mother earth!); Adam is the masculine of the same word.

This same emphasis that humankind emerges out of and is made from the earth is found in many American Indian creation stories. All of these stories show how American

Indian people are closely related to the earth. For American Indian people the beginning, center, and end is found in creation. Today American Indians both Christian and non-Christian, still live out of their theology of creation in contrast to the ELCA's over emphasis on a theology of redemption.

This American Indian theology of creation is an understanding that all things are made, are held in balance with one another God (Creator) made all things for a purpose. When our purpose is fulfilled, the goodness of creation is seen. We as American Indian people see ourselves as one of the Creator's (God's) creatures. All of his creatures are to be respected and cared for. Out of this creation-centered theology is found the basis for all of life's decisions. To live in balance with God's creation is the path we seek to travel.

We as American Indian people have a gift that we can share with the ELCA where we are in accord concerning creation:

One, we both assert the wholeness and harmony of a created world by a loving God (Creator) We both realize that for life to be lived fully, human beings must work in harmony with creation. When we work against Gods purpose disconnectedness will occur.

Two, American Indians can help the ELCA be a witness to the world. Once more we can be a prophetic voice to remind the Greater Church how the understanding of the Gospel is enriched by a renewed understanding of the sacredness of Mother Earth. Both the love of God's redemption, and the love of God's creation must be affirmed in our ministry together.

As the noted Lutheran Theologian Foster McCurley writes,

It might be said, that creation is the beginning, center, and end of Native American spirituality; for Christian theology, creation is the beginning and the end, but the center is history. The Bible does not set space (creation) and time (history) as opposites, but prioritizes history as the arena in which the particular revelation of God as Creator, Redeemer, and Sanctifier is experienced by faith. (McCurley, p. 8)

Along side the biblical traditions (that are set in the context of history) stands another ancient tradition. The ancient tradition practiced over the centuries by American Indians is that of wisdom. This traditional wisdom is a way of living life. The Bible speaks of wisdom as a universal way of interpreting life and creation.

Wisdom has been understood as a way of keeping the world and humans in harmony. Wisdom is to bring us to a full life and to keep us from going down the wrong road that leads us to sorrow and death. One only need look at the Book of Proverbs to see an abundance of wisdom teachings. The prophets of the Bible, when preaching, mentioned wisdom teachings and warning against going down the wrong road of life. The Psalm offers up a number of teachings of God's wisdom in creation. Even Paul in his letter to the Corinthians speaks of the distinction between the two spirits, the spirit of "this world" and "the spirit which is from God" (I Corinthians 2:12, II Corinthians 4:6). Paul in Acts 19:23 refers to Christianity as "the way".

As an American Indian Christian theologian while I can recognize the similarities between the wisdom teachings of the Bible and the traditional American Indian wisdom teachings of the two roads (Good and Bad) I must also recognize Paul's comments from I Corinthians 1:23-24.

Paul in this letter rejects the belief that one can find and know God through our own human wisdoms. Paul says in Corinthians rather that the “wisdom of God” by which humans know God is Christ crucified.

Where then does this leave the ELCA in its evangelism efforts to American Indians? I would recommend that these similarities between the American Indian Traditional Wisdom (the two roads) and Christian biblical wisdom offer a good place for dialogue. From this conversation new ways of understanding and opportunities can arise to help both communities reach out to one another. Building upon this mutual respect we can continue to listen to one another.

*I am not ashamed of the gospel: it is the power of God for salvation to every one who has faith, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. For in it the righteousness of God is revealed through faith for faith: as it is written, "he who through faith is righteous shall live.*

- Romans 1:16 NRSV

We are saved by God's grace. We are made righteous or justified by faith alone. This proclamation by Luther, in the sixteenth century, has become the central doctrine of the Lutheran Church. The ELCA holds to this doctrine in its theology of mission and theology of evangelism.

This basic Lutheran confession understands that all humans stand in need of God's act to heal the brokenness that exists between him and his people. This brokenness is caused by the sins of all humanity. It is a brokenness that only the gracious act of God's love through his son Jesus can heal. This brokenness has existed according to Christian Theologians from the time of the first human's choice. Not only Lutherans, but many other Christian denominations use original sin as their theological starting point. That point: all have sinned all have fallen short of the glory of God. Thus, we can respond in two ways to seek salvation: One, develop a theology of works and argue that if we work hard enough we can win God's favor (forgiveness) by our personal accomplishments, or two, we fall upon God's mercy to receive his grace to forgive our sins through the death and resurrection of his son Jesus Christ.

This basic point among Christians assumes that all humans are evil and sinful and in need of divine salvation. I wish to point out that this basic Christian understanding of forgiveness assumes that American Indians have the same understanding of sin. This is assumption is a major mistake. Tinker, Schultz, and Briggs offer this insight:

Before the missionaries came, the Native Peoples had little theoretical sense of sin, no sense of fallen humanity and no sense of a basic inclination in every human being to do evil. To the contrary, the primary

sense that our peoples had of themselves in those early days was not a sense of individual fallenness but the sense of community belongedness, as a whole group who were in relationship to God as Creator, who together participated in and celebrated the balance and harmony of creation. God created harmony and balance. The people's response was to participate with the Creator in maintaining the harmony and balance of all things. (T. Shultz and Briggs, p 15)

One should, on the other hand, not assume that American Indians thought of themselves as perfect and without fault. My ancestors knew of the existence of evil as a part of everyday life. They too understood their need of a divine salvation as was proclaimed in the Christian faith. What I'm suggesting is that it would behoove the ELCA to approach American Indians with a theological starting point other than original sin.

A better starting point from my perspective would be God's gracious act of creation, which could then lead to the loving redemption of God's son Jesus Christ. For American Indians, both Christian and non-Christian, this would offer a better understanding and respect for the ELCA. I believe that if we begin our conversation about the wholeness of life God has given us, we can understand that we are all part of God's creation. From there we can introduce a theological point, from an American Indian context, that God's other acts of love, especially the gift of his son Jesus Christ, are for all people.

This powerful message of the gospel, that people are set free from the sins of their lives, is one that should be heard in all our communities, but there is a key issue that cannot be avoided when mentioning the American Indian people. The ELCA emphasizes

in its doctrine of justification the unique relationship God has with each of his people. The doctrine proclaims a desire to seek a place of harmony and balance with each individual.

Western thought, inspired by the early Greek philosophers, has steadily endorsed their idea of the individual. The Christian church of Western Europe interpreted justification through the lens of the prevalent idea of individualism. We can see in the course of Euro-American history, where the idea of individualism has reached a ridiculous and harmful place in society.

American Indians would counter that our understanding of justification is an act of the Creator that brings whole communities into a loving relationship with God. Rather the justification of a person is from within the whole community's relationship to God. This understanding has God in a relationship with the whole community, from this, the community must see itself in relationship with one another and with all creation.

As American Indian people of the ELCA we raise the question; what was Saint Paul's meaning? American Indian people would say that Paul's understanding came from a strong background of the community culture in which he lived. This raises the question, has the western church, including the ELCA, overlooked this strong community aspect because of its own cultural prejudice?

As mentioned earlier, American Indians have had *no* doctrine of sin, per se. However we did understand that evil exists in the human experience of life. In the traditional stories of the various tribes, sin (imbalance, disharmony), is treated as a fact of life. American Indian people were never oppressed or coerced into correct behavior by a doctrine of sin. Rather, we understood that evil could cause an imbalance or disharmony

in the community. Through our prayers and ceremonies and rituals our people sought to help bring about the correct harmony and balance. The ELCA must be aware that even today, most American Indian people understand sin in this way, as community imbalance and disharmony.

This emphasis on community rather than the individual is a key to understanding American Indian values and faith. The individual has always been seen a part of the whole community. We honor and cherish the whole community, not the accomplishments and rewards of the individual. The care and needs of the community come before the needs of the individual.

The ELCA doctrine of justification will speak to American Indian people who have become acculturated so that they feel individual guilt and seek to confess and do penitence for their individual sins, but how will it speak to those of us who strongly identify ourselves first with our tribe and as a community whole. If the ELCA can present justification by faith as a message that brings us back into harmony and balance, then we will see this as a “doctrine” that gives us a loving relationship to the Creator God. That God calls us his children and has assured us that we are loved and are capable of loving all others. Then, we as American Indian people can say A-hoe (Amen) to that.

The American Indian community of Lutherans asks that the ELCA be willing to look through our eyes; to look back and reclaim some of original meaning of this doctrine. Our feeling is that the original meaning has been distorted over the centuries as the Western Church (including Lutherans) shifted away from a community concept to one of individual understanding of relationship to God.

When looking through our eyes, our experience may be God's proclamation of grace is a proclamation to the whole community and world and not just to the individual. Perhaps this is the point in John 3:16, "For God so loved the world." This would indicate for American Indians that justification by faith means, that God (Creator) has again through his Son proclaimed the whole world to be whole, balanced, healthy and that the world includes us as a people known by our tribal names.

If the ELCA can help American Indians see that Jesus brings back to them the existence of harmony and balance in their lives, then we as American Indian people can be excited about committing ourselves to him and our Christian faith.

Our next point of response is to that of the doctrine of Law and Gospel. For Lutherans the Word of God is a message in which God encounters and confronts his people with a divine presence. Luther defines this idea of law and gospel in a sermon preached in 1532:

By "law" we should understand nothing but God's Word and command in which He commands us what we are to do and not to do and demands our obedience or service (*Werk*)...

The Gospel is such a doctrine or Word of God as does not demand our works or command us to do anything but bids us simply receive the offered grace of the forgiveness of sins and eternal salvation and be satisfied to have it given as a present. (Plass, p. 732).

And in an earlier explanation in 1518 he carefully explained their meaning:

According to the apostle, Rom. 1:1-3f., the Gospel is the message about the incarnate Son of God, who was given us without our merits for salvation and peace. It is the Word of salvation, the Word of grace, the Word of comfort, the Word of joy, the voice of the Bride-groom and the bride, the good Word, the Word of peace, as Isaiah says: “How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him that bringeth good tidings, that publisheth peace; that bringeth good tidings of good” (52:7), But the Law is the Word of perdition, the Word of wrath, the Word of sadness, the Word of pain, the voice of the Judge and the accused, the Word of unrest, the Word of malediction; for, according to the apostle, the Law is the strength of sin (1 Cor. 15:56), the Law works wrath (Rom. 4:15), and it is a Law of death (Rom. 7:13).

Luther wanted it understood that God meets us with a message of judgment and mercy (law and gospel). Luther says that one cannot come into relationship to God without it having an effect upon you. That affect, according to Luther, peace for the afflicted or affliction for those resting on their own merits. Luther points this out rather bluntly in a sermon preached in 1521 on Luke 5:1-11 with a special reference to verse eight:

Before receiving the comfort of forgiveness, sin must be recognized and the fear of God’s wrath must be experienced through the preaching or apprehension of the Law, that man may be driven to sigh for grace and may be prepared to receive the comfort of the Gospel. Therefore one should by all means most severely admonish and drive to repentance with threats and intimidation those who as yet are without any fear of God’s wrath, are secure, hard, and unbroken. That is, no Gospel but only the Law of Moses should be preached to them.

On the other hand, where there are hearts in which the Law has performed its office, so that they are frightened by the knowledge of their sin, are timid and fugitive, no Law should be preached and proclaimed any more, but pure Gospel and comfort. For this is the proper office of Christ, to perform which He came and commanded the Gospel to be preached to all poor sinners and enjoined on them to believe it, that He might abolish and remove all charges, frightenings, and threatenings of the Law and might give the purest comfort instead. (Plass, 738).

In other words, Luther is telling us Law is God accusing us of our sins and the gospel is God forgiving and loving us.

There have been times when Lutheran evangelism and preaching have used law and gospel in a very harmful way. That it was used to first beat down the persons listening with the law in order that he or she would be open to receive the gospel. To many of my brothers and sisters in the American Indian community this has come across to us as: we must wallow in our mistakes and grovel for forgiveness. This goes against our traditions in which we do not have a concept of sin.

Perhaps the ELCA would be wise to remember Foster R. McCurley's caution about law and gospel and evangelism:

Perhaps the problem theologically is that law and gospel are not quite the once-for-all sequential experiences they are often conveyed to be. Certainly one cannot experience the joy of God's forgiveness of sin unless there is an awareness of and confession of sin. Yet for Luther himself, such a twofold experience of God was a daily matter, in which the Christian was constantly involved. Luther argued that "the old Adam," the sinful nature we share, needed to be drowned daily by repentance and

availing ourselves of the gospel message. It was not simply a one-time confession to be followed by a blissful future. Evangelism should not, therefore, be a matter of battering potential converts theologically with the law, as though one groveling confession at initiation ends the matter of daily repentance and hearing the gospel. (McCurley, p. 14)

As an American Indian person I would point out that in the fullest biblical sense the good news is not just limited to responding to a confessed sin of a person but also to people who suffer from sin. Yes I know the Lutheran theological response “all have sinned and keep falling short of the glory of God” (Rom 3:23), and *all* experience the judgment of God. I ask you to remember that in reality there are times that people need to hear and experience the love and comfort of the gospel. For American Indian people who for generations endured suffering we need the gospel proclaimed and shared—rather than the judging power of law that accuses of sin.

A theology of evangelism to American Indian people must begin with an historical understanding. American Indian people in this country have and continue to experience untold suffering and blatant injustices from the local and federal government and the Christian Churches. The ELCA has an opportunity at this time to be an agent of justice and practitioner of comfort and reconciliation. This can occur with a gospel message of hope and acceptance rather than the laws of accusation of sinners.

One only needs to look to Jesus to see how he spoke to broken people; the “good news to the afflicted” (Luke 4:18). The ELCA needs to begin here then in time they can teach the fullness of the Word’s healing power. Are we not part of the priest hood? “This is the assembly of all believers among whom the Gospel is preached in its purity and the holy sacraments are administered according to the Gospel” (Article VII,

Augsburg Confession). When Luther speaks of an assembly of believers he speaks to the responsibility that each baptized believer shares in relationship to one another. Luther writes:

In this communion of saints we are all brothers and sisters so closely united that a closer relationship cannot be conceived. For here we have one Baptism, one Christ, one Sacrament, one food, one Gospel, one faith, one Spirit, one spiritual body; and each is a member of the other. No other brotherhood is so deeply rooted and so closely knit. For while natural brothers possess one flesh and blood, one heritage and home, they must nonetheless part and merge with another blood and heritage. (Plass, p. 275)

For Luther then, this priesthood calls the Church members to petition God on behalf of others. We as the priesthood are to pray to intercede to give out lives, proclaim the Word to one another. Luther speaks of this in his exposition of John 14:12-14:

When a Christian begins to know Christ as his Lord and Savior, who has redeemed him from death, and is brought into His communion and heritage, his heart is thoroughly permeated by God (*gar durchgottet*); then he would like to help everybody attain this blessedness. For he has no greater joy than the treasured knowledge of Christ. So he begins to teach and exhort others, confesses and commends his blessedness before everybody, and sighs and prays that they, too, may come to this grace. He has a restless spirit while enjoying rest supreme, that is, God's grace and peace. Therefore he cannot be quiet or idle but is forever struggling and striving with all his powers, as one living only to spread God's honor and praise farther among man, to cause others also to receive this spirit of

grace others also to receive this spirit of grace and through it also to help him pray. (Plass, p. 959)

Luther then expects that each Christian should care for others and share in the responsibility for the well being of the community of faith. By being a member of this priesthood one should share their talents, each understanding that they are partners in the ministry of the congregation.

As an American Indian person this understanding of the priesthood of all believers raises the issue of who is a Christian. I contend that to be a Christian it is necessary to claim ones identity that is not based on one's nationality, culture, or occupation. Then to understand our Christian Identity, that identity is based solely on our baptism into Christ. According to Luther then the Church is defined by the gospel alone so also are the priesthood (members) of believers. Luther says we are to live gospel with our neighbors. Luther writes:

Nothing but faith is needed to be saved, to give God the honor due Him and to accept Him as my God, confessing that He is just, true, and merciful. Such faith sets us free from sin and all evil. If I have thus given God His due, I live the rest of my life for the benefit of my neighbor, to serve and to help him. The greatest work that follows from faith is that with my mouth I confess Christ, sealing that confession with my blood and, if it is so to be, laying down my life for it. Not that God needs this work. But I am to do it that my faith may thereby be proved and known, that others may likewise be brought to believe. Then other works follow; they must all be directed toward serving my neighbor. (Plass, p. 960)

Today in the Lutheran Church the priesthood of believers as defined by the gospel is a diverse group of people who bring their respective cultural heritages and traditions. The past 400 years we have seen Western European Christians settle into American Indian country. These early settlers and their descendants today continue to consider American Indian ways, rites, and symbols, as pagan/heathen/savage practices which *must* be given up.

While often eager to denounce our traditions they conveniently have forgotten that their own ancestors' cultural traditions have been grafted into their "Christian" way of expression. One only has to look how the Christians celebrate the birth of Christ by the festival of Christmas. This event was not celebrated until the 4<sup>th</sup> century, and the date December 25<sup>th</sup> coincided with an ancient Roman Festival of Saturnalia a god of agriculture. To further see their cultural adaptations, the date, December 25<sup>th</sup>, was also a time when the people of Persia celebrated a feast day called the Birth of the Unconquered Sun. Lest we forget peoples from Western Europe, the Druids honored their god, Odin, by tying golden apples to tree branches and in another celebration to their son god, Balder, tying lighted candles to the boughs of trees. This same borrowing of traditions can be seen also in other Christian festivals including Easter.

Seeing this inclusion of tradition and culture appropriated from other religions, why then have traditions from American Indian cultures been so harshly rejected by the leaders of the church? As an American Indian theologian I ask the ELCA: Will you allow American Indians to enhance their worship of God by incorporating their traditions into the worship experience? If it is as Luther says, the pantry of the gospel that defines the church, then cannot such symbols as sacred time and sacred space be relativized so

that they themselves do not become criterion for defining the church or what is a Christian but rather instruments of God's Grace.

To truly bring a sense of the Priesthood of believers into the world of American Indian people we must be willing to value each other's traditions and culture noting that they can enhance our faith and love for one another.

*The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor, He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord.*

-Luke 4:18

## **Four**

### **Jesus is my Brother Too!**

#### **Getting Beyond the White Jesus**

*Native Peoples of North America are naturally very spiritual people. So when the missionaries first came to our tribes, many of our ancestors received the missionaries' story with keen spiritual interest. They listened attentively and found it quite easy to embrace the new religion that had been brought to them. For most Native Peoples this did not mean leaving one religion to embrace a new religion. At first it meant living with both sets of stories and embracing both religions. Over the centuries many native Christians have become more conservative in their missionary faith. As a result it becomes more and more difficult for our people to distinguish between respect, love and commitment to Jesus Christ and that part of the missionary faith that asks us to embrace not just Jesus, but a new culture and a new set of values. To change our way of living life.*

-Tinker, Schultz, and Briggs, p. 18

A key question that American Indians ask the church is who is this Jesus you ask us to accept as Lord and Savior? We have so often heard from the ELCA that the gospel is blind to the color of a person's skin and that God makes no distinction among his children, yet the literature, the history, the theology presented by the Church is of a Jesus that comes from Western Europe--white skinned, blue eyed. This raises serious questions for American Indian people, for if Jesus is indeed white, does that mean his message of salvation, wholeness, and health speaks only from a white European based culture with its values and judgment. If this is the Jesus we must accept what becomes of our traditional value systems and culture must they be given up?

As an American Indian theologian I implore the church to remember that Jesus was in historical fact not a white man. Jesus was a Jew, more than likely of olive complexion. We must caution the Church that when dealing with Indian people to remember that Jesus was not even a Christian but that he was Jewish and practiced the rituals of the Jewish faith. He too began among his own Jewish people to proclaim the good news; inviting, calling, restoring, them to a new relationship to the creator, God.

May I suggest to the ELCA this insight into building a foundation for American Indian Christology: American Indian theologians understand that when the ELCA scholars talk of Christ, their understanding of Christianity is based on a western worldview that is time oriented. American Indian people are still planted in Creation where space is the key to understanding history, not time. For time-oriented western ELCA scholars, history must be composed of facts that can be ascertained. For American Indians, a story is important in itself, for in it there is truth. ELCA scholars thus ask the

question: what can we really know about the historical Jesus? Tinker, Schulz and Briggs respond to this approach as American Indian scholars:

This is a strange question for any Native person to begin with, because native Peoples tend to think of the world not in temporal terms but in spatial terms. No self-respecting Lakota would ever raise the question: what can we know about the historical White Buffalo Calf Woman? The question would probably not occur to such a person. No self-respecting Navajo would even think of asking, is this or that story a true a story. For if we tell the story it must convey truth. But the western intellectual tradition deals with truth from a perspective that Native intellectual traditions do not have. The western intellectual tradition (and the church is a part of it) must deal with the level of facts as a way of getting at truth, facts rooted in time as well as in space, especially rooted in time. (p. 20)

While ELCA scholars insist upon a historical Jesus, to determine what we know about him, there is this interesting point. While pointing to the gospels of Mark, Luke, Matthew, and John as points of reference, they readily agree they are not in a strict sense, historical accounts of Jesus. They would rather say that the gospels give us a snapshot of Jesus. Each one of the Gospels gives us a different picture of Jesus as seen through the eyes of the early followers. These scholars of the ELCA would admit that these pictures are full of spiritual meaning. They finally, when pressed, would admit that we must base our faith not on an actual historical Jesus, but rather on the stories proclaimed in sermons of the earliest Christian Communities. These picture stories resulted in becoming the four gospels.

There are historical points of Jesus mentioned throughout these stories, stories that American Indian people can readily identify with and say Jesus was like us and thus holds an important place in our lives. One, Jesus was interested in the poor and outcast of his day. Two, he associated with the needy. Three, Jesus, for American Indian people, is seen bringing not just Salvation at the end of life, but also spiritual and physical liberation and salvation in this world we live in. Jesus offers dignity for every human being, be they American Indian or any other race.

## Chapter Five

### American Indian Prophetic Voice

For the ELCA to share the good news in American Indian communities they need to understand American Indian concepts of sacred time and sacred space (place). Dr. John Macquarrie in a 1997 lecture made this statement; “you can see God in everything”. Many Christian spiritual elders of various tribes would quickly affirm Dr. Macquarrie’s thought that there is a potential for a sacrament in everything. They along with Dr. Macquarrie believe that the simple things of the everyday can be a reflection of the sacredness of life.

An old Cherokee saying goes “The creator made time and he made plenty of it. Do you have time?” This story fits somewhat awkwardly in a Western European concept, where time is judged as a machine ticking away. We count time in minutes, our accomplishments are judged over a forty hour work week. Our lives are confined by the hours of a day, a week, a month, a year. For most American Indians, there are no words or language for seconds, minutes or hours. American Indians understand time in a different way... Time is seen as sacred. We are speaking of American Indian time, (not just being late) an observance of each day as gift, and where American Indians see Western time as arbitrary, irrational and having no purpose. Why?

The Western World views time as historical. Europeans and Americans view time as a linear sequence and unique events unfolding one after another. In this pattern of time nothing repeats itself. Time marches on. Each new day and each person is a

unique individual. Each thing, person, day and object is viewed as unique and having a specificity.

American Indians see time based on rhythm, sound, and movement. These three make the sacred a visible tangible part of life. Time is cyclical and thus there is a nothing new under the sun. Whatever happens has occurred before and will happen again, like the seasons.

American Indians are aware of historical time, of unique events and experiences, but to them that which is unique or special is seen to be meaningless. What is of great significance is what has happened before. For what is important and significant occurred in the beginning of time, the time before there was time. They seek not to be unique or attempt to be different, but to find ways to return to reclaim, re-actualize the time of their ancestors, and to repeat what had been given them by the sacred power in the beginning of time by doing so they relive that time and a sense of eternity in their being.

Examples among the Lumbee Tribe:

Asked why she weaves pine needle baskets the way she does, a Lumbee often responds, "Because that is the way my family's family did". She is creating a timeless time, a mode of being. The same can be said of the Lumbee herbal medicine woman. Why does she prepare the medicine ritual the same way? "My family's family did so." Everything is related to another: nothing ends, it circles. The seasons, life, death, earth, all are there to say that the Creator is time and the Creator is the center of being for us. One thus must observe the rhythms, sounds and movement as part of the Creator's time.

Examples of this can be seen in these rituals:

### Going to Water:

Each morning, but especially during Green Corn Ceremony, Indian people go to preferably a river or stream (moving water). There they wash symbolically washing away bad deeds and starting anew. Restoring spiritual harmony and balance is the purpose. During high festivals this is always accompanied by fasting and prayer and is overseen by the priest.

### The Sweat Lodge:

The sweat lodge itself is not a sauna but a place where prayers are offered and purification occurs. The sweat lodge is typically a small dome-shaped structure between six and twelve feet in diameter constructed of saplings and covered with canvas hides or blankets. An area of the dirt floor is excavated and lined with stones heated by a fire kept outside the sweat lodge. The participants select these stones before the lodge is carried out. The stones absorb heat. During the ceremony water is poured over the stones after the opening is closed, generating steam and heat, then begins the four rounds of prayers. The heat in the lodge is intense, as steam symbolizes the breath of life. The lodge thus represents the entire universe. The center is where the sacred “fire without end” is cared for by an appointed priest. Water, fire and heat are the symbols of the sacrament of cleansing of bad deeds and affirming oneself for service.

These are but a few of the practices that give strength to American Indian people. While each tribe has a way of prayer and ritual all understand the great need for time for a relationship to God. I would encourage the ELCA to respect these ways and give

prayerful consideration to them when in dialogue with American Indian people and understand the importance of time.

One key to being in ministry with American Indians is to understand the meaning of sacred space/place. As we embrace the new millennium and look forward to the future of the twenty-first century church perhaps it would benefit us to claim a commonality between Christian cultures, including American Indian culture. We could start with place as a sacred symbol. Kings College in Cambridge, is noted for its exceptional fifteenth century stained glass windows. These beautiful storybooks of glass illustrate the history of salvation. As one enters the chapel one sees these words; “We exist not only in the world but in an image or picture of the world”. People exist within a system of signs, which identify them and their world. Kings Chapel states loudly and clearly through its colored glass and structural presence its place in the world. Christianity would share that the world has theological significance and holy implications for our lives.

Dr Macquarrie, in his 1997 lecture on symbol and sacrament, said that when we in the Christian faith use the word *symbol*, what we mean is that there is a time in our life when we are driven to silence only the meaning of an object, act, or place can speak what words cannot convey. Symbols are to point us to the world of spirit. We must remember though that one thing stands for another, to throw light and understanding.

The power of the symbol of “place” has a shared powerful and profound meaning for all Christian peoples of the world.

Walter Brugeremann in his work on “The Land” as a central theme of biblical faith distinguishes the difference between space and place: “Place is space which has historical meanings, where some things have happened which are now remembered and

which provide continuity and identify across generations” (The Mount of Transfiguration).

Place (including its sacredness, is internal to us rather than external despite our tendency to objectify the environment. It is a complex network of relationships, connections and continuities of physical, social and cultural conditions that describe my actions, responses, my awareness and that gives shape and content to the very life that is me.

What is it that makes a place sacred, that by its presence in our life can change and influence who we become. Noted religious historian, Mercea Eliade, states that a sacred place was an axis mundi, the center of the world, with boundaries separating it from all surrounding space, which was secular and profane. Such places were thin places, doorways from one place to another, a transcendent world. This kind of understanding can be seen in some religious traditions (Native American and Celtic Christian) but not in all.

Eminent religious anthropologists Victor and Edith Turner further state that the operative paradigm is the creation of a temporary state in which conventional social or other divisions are transcended in favor of a spontaneous sharing of experience. However, more recent understanding notes the plurality of meanings that a place can be given by those who relate to it. For example, Mingo Falls, is a place of prayer for Cherokees, but is only a beautiful waterfall for tourists. Just recently the book, *Contesting the Sacred*, suggested that place and sacred are just as likely to cause division as consensus. The most famous example is the Holy land in which three major world faiths (Christian, Jewish, and Muslim) contest the meaning of sacred sites.

Dr. John Macquarrie, using an historical approach to understanding Christian sacramental practice, asked the question “How does the understanding of *place* fit into the historical Christian tradition?”

In the Old Testament we can see how the Hebrew people tended to locate God, by where God appeared to them (the burning bush of Moses, Jerusalem’s Temple, and Bethel Shiloh). God’s covenant with the Hebrew people promised them a land of their own (Promised Land). Out of this promise came the Davidic tradition, grounded in a specific experience of land and ownership. *Place* became a linking of God’s power.

The early Christians in their emphasis to carry the message of God out to the world considered places sacred only by their association with human holiness.

By the mid fourth century the Christian Church in the Mediterranean world had grown in prestige and power. Along with its new place in society the church’s idea of the location of the sacred changed. The average person then came to see that God’s power was represented by a few special people. The strongest example: the Apostles. The places where these Apostles lived, worked, died and were buried, became sacred. Included in their category of exceptional human beings were red martyrs of the second and third century persecutions and the great ascetics of the fourth century. Their tombs became sacred monuments and shrines, places where pilgrimages were made.

With the crowning of Constantine as Holy Roman Emperor, we witness the tremendous growth in the building of basilica and major church’s. When viewing this growth in the building of basilica and major churches. When viewing this growth of Churches we must remember the sacredness of their purpose. There, churches were built

for the sacraments of baptism and the Eucharist the symbolic incorporation of the believer into the death and resurrection of Christ.

Is sacred place accordingly then found only in a church building or in all creation as American Indian people see it. Is the creator limited to only human made places of brick and mortar? The recently discovered writings of Thomas Traherne give light to Christianity. God is a Trinity relationship to creation. Traherne understood that the whole world was a sacred place. He writes:

The Lord God of Israel the Living and True God, was from all Eternity, and from all Eternity wanted like a God. He wanted the communication of His divine essence, and persons to enjoy it. He wanted Worlds, He wanted Spectators, he wanted Joys, He wanted Treasures. He wanted yet He wanted not, for He had them. (Centuries 1:41).

It is incredible, yet very plain. Want is the fountain of all His fullness. Want in God is treasure to us. For had there been no need He would not have created the World, nor made us, nor manifested His wisdom nor exercised his power, nor beautified Eternity, nor prepared the Joys of Heaven. But He wanted Angels and Men, Images, Companions: And these He had from all Eternity (1: 42).

O Adorable Trinity! What has Thou done for me? Thou hast made me the end of all things, and all the end of me. I in all, and all in me. In every soul whom Thou has created, Thou hast given me the Similitude of Thyself to enjoy! (1:60).

Can you take too much joy in your Father's works? He is Himself in everything (1:25).

You never enjoy the world alight, till you see how a sand exhibiteth the wisdom and power of God (1:27).

Your enjoyment of the world is never nigh, till every morning you awake in Heaven; see yourself in your Father's Palace; and look upon the skies, the earth, and the air as Celestial Joys: having such a reverend esteem of all, as if you were among the Angels (1:28)

You never enjoy the world alight, till the Sea itself floweth in your veins, till you are clothed with the heavens and crowned with the stars (1:29)

'God is here, and I wist it not. How dreadful is this place! This is none other than the House of God, and the Gate of Heaven' (1:31).

Julian of Norwich a mystic as well as a theologian understood this well. Julian understood that no division existed between God in Godself, God incarnate in Jesus and God in relationship to creation and humankind:

For the Trinity is God, God is the Trinity. The Trinity is our maker, the Trinity is our protector, the Trinity is our everlasting lover, the Trinity is our endless joy and our bliss, by our Lord Jesus Christ and in our Lord Jesus Christ...For where Jesus appears the blessed Trinity is understood as I see it (long Test, Chapter 4).

Julian goes on to how she sees people as having an exceptional place in God's love:

For I saw very surely that our substance is in God, and I also saw that God is in our sensuality [i.e. that aspect of ourselves that makes us

distinct persons in time and space], for in the same instant and place in which our soul is made sensual in that same instant and place exists the city of God, ordained for him from without beginning. He comes into this city and will never depart from it, for God is never out of the soul, in which he will dwell blessedly without end (Chapter 55).

I saw the soul as if it were an endless citadel, and also as if it were a blessed Kingdom, and from the state which I saw in it, I understood that it is a fine city. In the midst of that city sits our Lord Jesus, true God and true man...the place which Jesus takes in our soul he will nevermore vacate, for in us is his home of homes and his everlasting dwelling (Chapter 68).

Thus God is pervasive in our life. Sacred place/space then for us is where we are encountered by the love of God. They serve as a sacred oasis. That is places/spaces set aside where we might go and listen for the heart of God. Dr. Macquarrie reminds us of those sacred places/spaces heart of God. Dr. Macquarrie reminds us of those sacred places/spaces which are involved in the sacraments of our faith.

Professor Macquarrie in sharing the historical revelation and movement of sacramental practices of the Christian Church also leaves us to respond to the question: what is the meaning of sacred place/space?

Among American Indians, space has a sacred center. We believe there is a place in our world where the above, the earth, and the below are joined and are one. The Center is the place where all spaces become unified. The Center is the "Space-less space", the space that overcomes space. It is the space where American Indians experience complete unity with the world. At the Center, American Indians no longer

feel separate from the rest of the world. We feel that we are one with the world in which we live.

The Eastern Band Cherokees have such a center in Mingo Falls. This is a place where “the people” can re-connect with the world, a place to find peace and solitude. It is a place to once more understand that we are connected with everything in life. The traditional Cherokee continues to visit Mingo Falls. Here he prays and gives tobacco offering, seeking guidance for his life.

Indian America is a holy land, a sacred space where everything is sacred and to live is to be in a state of perpetual holiness with the Creator.

This understanding of sacred space/place is perhaps a bridge that can be laid between two cultures. Often out of ignorance and pride the dominant peoples refuse to see that. Native peoples perhaps have an understanding of how life can be better lived and shared. One cannot know the answer to this possibility until one is willing to sit down and share wisdom that has been given to both.

American Indian people of the ELCA are acting in a prophetic role for the church. This prophetic role challenges the ELCA’s assumptions about American Indian Culture, and where we are now in relationship to one another as American Indian nations and the institutional church.

Will the Church see that we as American Indian Christians are expressing our faith in the languages, music, and histories that reflect our culture and the context in which we live?

We are asking that the Church listen to our voices. We cry out for the Euro-centric church to give up the idea that they have sole control of what the definition of

Christian faith is. We ask that they honor our expression of faith that comes from our context of life.

## Chapter Six

### Evangelism in Context:

#### The ELCA's New Strategy of Accompaniment Ministry

*In Ancient Times it was prophesied by our forefathers that this land would be occupied by the Indian people and then from somewhere a White Man would come. He will come either with a strong faith and righteous religion which the Great Spirit has also given to him, or he will come after he has abandoned that great Life Plan and fallen to a faith of his own personal ideas which he invented before coming here.. It was known that the White Man is an intelligent person, an inventor of many words, a man who knows how to influence people because of his sweet way of talking and that he will use many of these things upon us when he comes. We knew that this land beneath us was composed of many things that we might want to use later such as mineral resources. We knew that this is the wealthiest part of this continent, because it is here the Great Spirit lives. We knew that the White Man will search for the things that look good to him, that he will use many good ideas in order to obtain his heart's desire, and we knew that if he had strayed from the Great Spirit he would use any means to get what he wants. These things we were warned*

*to watch, and we today know that those prophecies were true because we can see how many new and selfish ideas and plans are being put before us. We know that if we accept these things we will lose our land and give up our very lives.*

*-Dan Katchongva, Hopi*

After years of talking and little movement the ELCA is now starting to become more inclusive and to be more sensitive to the often destructive history that the Church has had with the American Indian people. Learning from these past mistakes will the church now speak not only to the spiritual, but also to the harsh reality that many American Indian people face today. How will the ELCA carry forth Luther's order tell others? Luther writes:

After we have learned to know God in His Son and have received the forgiveness of sins and the Holy Spirit, who endues hearts with joy and with the peace of soul by which we look with contempt on sin and death, what remains to be done? Go, and do not be silent. You are not the only one to be saved; the remaining multitude of men should also be preserved. (Plass, p. 960)

How then will the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ be shared in the American Indian community? The ELCA in its understanding of a theology of Evangelism seeks to use a method called accompaniment within the context of daily life. The ELCA's working definition of what is meant by accompaniment context is :

God's creating word became flesh in Jesus. The word that brought creation into being is the same word that became embodied in Jesus. God is incarnate in the specific human person of Jesus of Nazareth in order that the people of Israel might experience this saving, transforming power of God. It is significant that the New Testament is written in Greek rather than Aramaic, the language in which Jesus carried out his mission. It testifies to the power of God's mission to adapt to new people, cultures and situations in order that God's good news might be known. The history of the Christian church is a history of the gospel taking root in new contexts, new geographical locations.

The mission of God continues to transcend familiar cultural forms and theological formulations in order that Jesus Christ, as the creative Word of God, might be a transforming power in every cultural context of the globe. Workers in mission are committed to the contextualization of the gospel and the indigenization of the church in each context and each culture. (ELCA GM in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, p. 9)

What I understand the ELCA to mean by Contextualization is: The historical, cultural and social realities of the people that the church seeks to be in ministry with, will be shaped and actualized by the reality of the world they live in. This will be done through the ministry of accompaniment. According to the ELCA department of Global Mission, accompaniment

...describes the liveliness of relationships in mission: as a missionary God, God *accompanies* us in Jesus Christ; we *accompany* God's mission in a certain place, among certain peoples; a companion church *accompanies* us in God's mission in the United States and the Caribbean; we *accompany* people of diverse faiths, developing relationships that form the

basis of mutual witness and for walking together in common cause for justice and service to humanity.

The model of *accompaniment* and its resulting terminology can remind us to avoid language that implies mission as conquest, pioneering take-over of frontier territory, making people objects of mission, engaging in a “numbers game” evangelism strategy, and taking inappropriate initiatives as outsiders. *Accompaniment* language continually pulls us back to the image of walking alongside one another. (Global Mission in 21<sup>st</sup> Century, p. 39)

The ELCA, to its credit, is responding to the charges leveled by American Indian people of systemic racism of white privilege in the Church; the continued dominance of Western European contextual theology; and a misguided understanding and use of wealth. The accompaniment model according to the ELCA will address these matters in this way.

The *accompaniment* model holds the potential to create a radical shift in power within today’s global relationships. The mutuality of walking side by side means equal sharing of decision-making and resources. It insists that old assumptions be challenged and that we listen to companions’ interpretation of their vision of mission and reality. It means talking together, listening, and consulting with one another about how we will walk together in God’s mission.

*The Department of Global Mission is committed to developing the concept of accompaniment as the working terminology and pace of its program and relationships in mission.*

*DGM is committed to accompanying local churches as they assume primary responsibility for God’s mission in their contexts, and is*

*committed to inviting companion churches to accompany the ELCA as it takes primary responsibility for God's mission in its context.*

*DGM is committed to re-examine its mission practices and create discussion and reflection about the manner of participating in God's global mission in the next century. It will use the accompaniment model of walking together with other companions as it conducts this examination and reflection. (Global Mission in 21<sup>st</sup> Century, p. 12)*

Following this plan the hope would be that future efforts of the ELCA and American Indians would reflect the following:

<b>Contextualizing the Church (self-articulating)</b>	
<b>Establishing the Church</b>	<b>Accompanying the Churches</b>
Gospel not always differentiated from Western culture; some Western forms such as hymnody or organizational structure seen as feature of Christian identity.	Gospel expressed in many cultures; growing self-consciousness about understanding culture as the vessel, not The Message.
Mission sometimes articulated primarily as evangelism and church expansion with service and education ministries as important additions to the real purpose of mission.	God's mission is one, a whole that includes evangelism, service, justice; Northern churches are challenged to examine their dualistic theology and practice that separates the spiritual and physical realms in its ministries.
Mission past perceived as successful, sacrificial, heroic.	Assessment and critique of mission history by emerging churches and local theologians and historians.
Mission and flow of resources primarily one-directional: North to South, West to East.	Mission-in-reverse, resource sharing many ways; all the gifts of the body of Christ belong to and are needed by all the members of the communion.
Bilateral relationships: mission agency to mission field or emerging church.	Multilateral relationships through cooperating committees, ecumenical bodies.
Mission agencies were not always aware of the reality of "white privilege" and racism in their relationships and practices of mission.	Many contemporary forums and interchanges give opportunity for Northern agencies to become aware of and address issues of "white privilege" and racist attitudes and practices.

The Lutheran Church in the past has made American Indians objects of their evangelism ministries and counted us as numbers in their tally board of conversions to Christianity. This has left many hurts and hard feelings among American Indian people. For the ELCA to have a new beginning among us, they must move toward a true mutuality of respect for one another. That would require the ELCA to seek forgiveness for past abuses in the mission movement.

The ELCA admits that it must overcome its own defensiveness and be open to hearing new ways of serving together. The ELCA through its Department of Global Mission, has made the following commitments to begin this healing process:

1. *DGM is committed to developing a climate of mutual affirmation and admonition in its relationship with companions, in order for all companions to be more effective in Christ's mission.*
2. *DGM is committed to dialogue and consultation in joint planning and decision-making with companions in mission.*
3. *DGM is committed to learning how to listen to those who wish, on behalf of themselves or their church, to express their experiences of pain within mission relationship and to work toward healing and transformation within our relationships.*

(Global Mission in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, p. 18)

Regarding this last commitment I would say to the ELCA that American Indian people have many stories to tell and much pain to reveal. To have this new relationship between us you must walk with us through this needed time of truth-telling about how it

has been, how it continues to be, and what we see as a new beginning that will come when we seek reconciliation through Christ's love. Let our eyes be open by Christ as we accompany one another as friends.

As they came near the village which they were going, he walked ahead as if he were going on. But they urged him strongly, saying, "Stay with us, because it is almost evening and the day is now nearly over." So he went in to stay with them. When he was at the table with them, he took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them. Then their eyes were opened, and they recognized him; and he vanished from their sight. They said to each other, "were not our hearts burning within us while he was talking to us on the road, while he was opening the scriptures to us?" That same hour they got up and returned to Jerusalem; and they found the eleven and their companions gathered together. They were saying, "The Lord has risen indeed, and he has appeared to Simon!" Then they told what had happened on the road, and how he had been made known to them by the breaking of the bread. (Luke 24:28-25).

To use the method of accompaniment the church has made commitments to share the gospel in a way that takes into account the historical, cultural, and social realities of people. This next chapter is to give to the ELCA insights into the American Indian experience in relationship to the church and world in which we live.

## Chapter Seven

### To Walk With us You Must Hear our Story

*In this excerpt from a famous speech delivered in 1828, the Iroquois leader Red Jacket replies to a representative of Boston Missionary Society named Mr. Cram. The missionary had asked for approval to spread his faith among tribes within the Iroquois sphere of influence in northern New York State. When the meeting was over, Cram refused to shake the Indians' outstretched hands. There could be no fellowship between the religion of God and the works of the devil, he announced. The Iroquois are reported to have smiled.*

## Early History

Back in 1987 I visited with a group of Cherokee elders. Through laughter and music we spoke of our families and communities and our hopes and dreams for them. During that soft evening we also spoke of the birthday of the new Lutheran Church, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. What would this new church mean for Indian people? Would it live up to its promises to love all people in Christ's name, or would it fall into the old trap of "soup, soap, and salvation"?

"Soup, soap, and salvation"—these are the words of warning that Indian people give to the so-called missionary outreach of the Christian church. As the elders warn us, in the early days the whites came with their bibles and their ways. They gave us soup for we were starving (yet they had burned the crops and taken our land). They gave us soap to clean ourselves for they saw us as dirty. They brought us salvation, for in their eyes we were heathens who could know nothing of God.

The missionary government approach of soup, soap, and salvation damaged and destroyed hundreds of tribal nations. Little wonder then, that Indian people look at the Christian Church, even the ELCA with suspicion.

Often when I bring this concern to the average church goer or official of the ELCA, I am met with the reply: "Well thank goodness we as Lutherans don't have a very long history with American Indians, so we couldn't have made those kinds of mistakes". This kind of wishful thinking denies the three hundred and fifty years of Lutheran outreach to American Indian people.

Beginning in 1643, the first Lutheran mission to American Indians was established by John Campanius to the Delaware people, Campanius was one of the first of any Protestant denomination. As pastor of the congregation at Fort Christina, Campanius—sought to reach out not only to Swedish members but also to the Delaware People. Part of his efforts was to translate Luther’s small Catechism into the Delaware language. (Keiser, 25-27)

With the capture of Fort Christina by the Dutch in 1655, this early Lutheran effort ended. Other mission attempts were made. The Netherlands in 1669 sent the Reverend Jacob Fabritius who attempted to do outreach to American Indians through his New York Congregation. He became discouraged and halted his efforts when local Indian people did not respond. (Keiser, 33)

The close of the 19<sup>th</sup> century showed an ongoing effort among Lutherans to reach out to the American Indian nations. Though tireless in effort, the results were small in numbers. In 1845 Friedrich August Craemer began a ministry in Michigan. Using an educational approach he began a school for Indian children. This ministry continued until 1853 when it closed as the tribes fled further west to escape continuous white encroachment (Luckhard, 47). By 1857 Ottomer Cloeter, a Missouri Synod Pastor had attempted a mission start in Minnesota. Indian resistance, culminating in a major uprising in 1862, led to the close of this mission by 1868 (Schmutter, 115).

Johann J. Schmidt of the Iowa Synod began mission work among the Crow Indian Nation on the Pourder River in present-day Montana. This mission too was soon abandoned due to too few converts. (Homer, vi).

By the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Lutherans could look at two thriving ministries in the American Indian Nations. One was Oaks Oklahoma, begun by Niels Nielson in 1892 to the Cherokee Indian Nation of Oklahoma. This important ministry continues its work through Ebenezer Lutheran Church at Oaks Indian Center (Sol Byrd Moccasin). Lutheran Church of the Wilderness in Bowler, Wisconsin is the result of the Missouri Synod efforts begun in 1899. Later, becoming a part of the ELCA, the church continues to be a significant part of the Mohican Indian nation. This brief look at early Lutheran history with American Indian nations gives us a sense of the Church's desire to reach out to Indian people. (Commission for Multicultural Ministries, 15-16).

How did American Indian people see Lutherans and other Christians as they came among us? As George Tinker, Paul Schultz, and Jack Briggs state:

American Indian people are naturally very spiritual. So when the black robes (missionaries) came, many of our ancestors received them with hospitality and a spiritual curiosity. Our values taught the people to listen with respect. Listening with their hearts it was quite easy for our ancestors to embrace the new religion. In the beginning, most Indian people did not leave one religion to embrace the new, but rather to live with both sets of stories and beliefs. Over the centuries many Indian churches have become ultra conservative in their missionary zeal. This has resulted in Indian people having a hard time distinguishing between love, respect, and giving over life to Jesus, and that part of the missionary faith that requires us not just to commit to Jesus, but to accept a new culture and set of foreign values. In other words, to change our way of being who we are. (Tinker, Briggs, and Schultz, 18-19)

Also, in his book, *Missionary Conquest*, Tinker states:

The missionaries came to us, but they often came with set doctrines and ideas about spirituality and how Indians fit into their preconceived notion. Little has been noted on how well the church then and now listened to American Indian people and our understanding your relationship to God and his creation. (Tinker, viii)

## Seeing Through Indian Eyes

Tinker, Briggs, and Schultz share these insights:

Those early missionaries who came to work among American Indian nations came with an intent to bring hope and prosperity to peoples they *felt* lacked spiritual substance or motivation for success. Perhaps this is to be expected from a people who were in the midst of the *industrial revolution*. For them, nature and its resources were to be developed and utilized for the success of society. This success was based on the wealth that a nation of individuals could accumulate.

This European understanding goes directly against the set of values American Indians lived by. Indian historians note that Indian communities have had their own unique values and life styles that have evolved over many centuries. Due to this current set of values American Indians have had and continue to have a legitimate preference for their way of life. Indian people out of curiosity and a desire to learn have observed, discussed, and questioned what was motivating these new types of human beings. (p. 2-3)

As the missionaries went about preaching and teaching, how did Indian people respond? Did our ancestors dismiss their message? No, they did not. Our ancestors probably had a difficult time understanding some of those early biblical teachings, but the central message of Jesus was good news and very affirming. This message itself transcended the differences between Indians and the missionaries.

Unfortunately, a prejudice of European culture and training had the early missionaries convinced that it was their duty to ‘convert the heathen’. These ‘heathen’ people, in their judgment, had no sense of spiritual depth or an understanding of a relationship with God.

American Indians strongly condemn these historical assumptions that automatically said that American Indians were a Godless people who needed to be saved from themselves. With this religious bigotry as a starting point it became common practice to discount and invalidate the American Indian spiritual life as totally lacking in value and significance. (Briggs, Schultz, and Tinker, 2)

Our Ancestors had a relationship with God as creator that was healthy and responsible, long before they knew about Jesus. They had a relationship with Creator that was solidified in the stories they told around the campfires in each of our nations, in their prayers and especially in their ceremonies. This relationship began with the recognition of God as Creator, the creative force behind all things that exist. This understanding long pre-dated the coming of the missionaries. In this relationship, the people saw themselves as participants within the whole of creation, and as a part of creation. They celebrated the balance and harmony of the whole of the universe in all that they did together.

That was the point of the stories, the focus of their prayers, and the purpose of the ceremonies. In all that they did our ancestors acknowledged the goodness of the Creator and all creation including themselves. They recognized the balance and harmony that characterized all of the created universe. God saw all that God had made and God said, “It is good”. (Tinker, Schultz, and Briggs, 14)

The ability to maintain our identity and beliefs was constantly under pressure from the missionaries. It became standard operational procedure for a variety of church missionaries to purify Indian people and bring them into a new and “better” lifestyle. They felt it their Christian duty and right to redesign Indian people and their communities. They felt justified in doing whatever was necessary to achieve their goals.

While we as Lutherans can claim an early mission history with American Indians we must realize this history can impair the way Indian people see the Christian Church.

American Indians who know their own history have seen how the federal government has used mainline churches to rob and degrade American Indian cultures. Integrity and trust are key issues that the Christian Church will need to address and rebuild with American Indians.

American Indian people have experienced how the government and Christian Churches have not labored in the interest of Indian nations or individuals. Many of today’s American Indians mistrust organized religion, therefore, be it Christian or New Age. This mistrust began with the early history of the Christian Church in North America. With fire and sword the church attempted salvation through cultural destruction.

A Delaware chief complained about the Gnadenhutten massacre in 1782 when ninety Christian Indians had been killed by whites because two Indians, not of the group, had injured a white man some miles away from the settlement.

*And yet these white men would be always telling us of their great Book which God had given them. They would*

*persuade us every man was bad who did not believe in it. They told us a great many things which they said were written in the Book; and wanted us to believe it. We would likely have done so, if we had seen them practice what they pretended to believe—and acted according to the good words which they told us. But no! While they held the big Book in one hand, in the other they held murderous weapons—guns and swords—wherewith to kill us poor Indians. Ah! And they did too. They killed those who believed in their Book as well as those who did not. They made no distinctions. (Deloria, 198-199)*

In their book, *Indian Mission: A Critical Biography*, James P. Ronda and James Axtell share these insights:

In 1869 Quakers succeeded in persuading [President] Grant to appoint missionaries as Indian agents. This new policy transferred the control of Indian affairs from the secular (often military) sphere to the religious and gave thirteen different denominations a free hand on their respective reservations. (p. 29)

They go on to say:

From the beginning of the mission enterprise until well into the present century, missionary rhetoric—Catholic and Protestant—proclaimed one goal: to save the immortal souls of lost Indians from eternal damnation. But even the most otherworldly missionaries quickly recognized that conversion of the Indian soul was insufficient. The conquest had to be

more complete. A radical change in the Indian body—in all aspects of appearance and conduct—was required.

In missionary perspective, Indians could not be Christian until they first abandoned native habits and accepted “civilized” customs. Conversion meant both the invasion of the Indian body and conquest of the Indian soul...Indians were urged to abandon their “wild” ways and become sanitized Euro-Americans. ‘Civilization and salvation’ was the credo of nearly every North American missionary, which often proved to be a euphemism for cultural invasion and tribal decline...The insistence on radical social change as an essential mission goal can be traced through the writings of prominent mission workers...Nineteenth-century missionaries, products of an intensely nationalistic culture, defined civilization as a mixture of sedentary agriculture, individualism, capitalism, and routine labor...Missionaries set higher standards for conduct for their Indian converts than for their fellow Americans.

“Missionaries showed little regard for Indian culture while advancing the cultural values and, often, the political goals of the conquerors” (Salisbury, p. 167).

In the name of civilization, Christian reformers gave support to the Dawes Act of 1887 and similar legislation aimed at furthering the expansionist policies of the federal government...Indians could not take on the substance of Christian faith until they had accepted the forms of American civilization

Not only did Christian missionaries use the infamous, and better known, boarding schools to accomplish their goals, but built and utilized “mission towns”, as well. These towns, built for and occupied only by Native converts to Christianity, demanded all the familiar Euro-American

institutions: monogamous family, sedentary agriculture, civil government, formal education, and organized churches.

Missionaries, from the sixteenth century on, believed that the [boarding] school, like the town and the church, should be employed as a major weapon in the struggle for Indian minds, souls, and bodies. They were convinced that what was needed was a learning environment that would cut Indians off from their tribal values and redirect their minds along Euro-American paths. Students were often prohibited from, and sometimes punished for, speaking tribal languages, because the missionaries realized that Indian languages perpetuated Indian cultures. Both missionaries and government agents favored the boarding-school method since it gave more control over the lives of Indian students...Indian mission education existed wholly to remake Indians in the civilized image. (Ronda and Axtell, pp. 32-36)

American Indians realized that the most sought policy of the United States Government was extermination. If they could not kill all the Indians then kill their cultures, their languages, and their ceremonies. This policy was called *assimilation*. By this policy Indians would be absorbed into the general population and in essence would disappear as a distinctive people. The effects of this forced assimilation policy are still being felt to this day.

The following remarks were made by Kevin Gover, former assistant secretary of Indian affairs in the Department of the Interior, now Director of the National Museum of the American Indian, while celebrating the 175<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Bureau of Indian Affairs. Mr. Gover's remarks shout why then and now Indian people still grieve:

In March of 1824, President James Monroe established The Office of Indian Affairs in the Department of War. Its mission was to conduct the nation's business with regard to Indian affairs. We have come together today to mark the first 175 years of the institution now known as the Bureau of Indian Affairs.

It is appropriate that we do so in the first year of a new century and a new millennium, a time when our leaders are reflecting on what lies ahead and preparing for those challenges. Before looking ahead, though, this institution must first look back and reflect on what it has wrought and, by doing so, come to know that this is no occasion for celebration; rather it is time for reflection and contemplation, a time for sorrowful truths to be spoken, a time for contrition. We must first reconcile ourselves to the fact that the works of this Agency have at various times profoundly harmed the communities it was meant to serve.

From the very beginning, the Office of Indian Affairs was an instrument by which the United States enforced its ambition against the Indian nations and Indian people who stood in its path. And so, the first mission of this institution was to execute the removal of the southeastern tribal nations. By threat, deceit, and force, these great tribal nations were made to march 1,000 miles to the west, leaving thousands of their old, their young and their infirm in hasty graves along the Trail of Tears.

As the nation looked to the West for more land, this agency participated in

the ethnic cleansing that befell the western tribes. War necessarily begets tragedy; the war for the West was no exception. Yet in these more enlightened times, it must be acknowledged that the deliberate spread of disease, the decimation of the mighty bison herds, the use of the poison alcohol to destroy mind and body, and the cowardly killing of women and children made for tragedy on a scale so ghastly that it cannot be dismissed as merely the inevitable consequence of the clash of competing ways of life. This agency and the good people in it failed in the mission to prevent the devastation.

And so, great nations of patriot warriors fell. We will never push aside the memory of unnecessary and violent death at places such as Sand Creek, the banks of the Washita River, and Wounded Knee. Nor did the consequences of war have to include the futile and destructive efforts to annihilate Indian cultures. After the devastation of tribal economies and the deliberate creation of tribal dependence on the services provided by this agency, this agency set out to destroy all things Indian.

This agency forbade the speaking of Indian languages, prohibited the conduct of traditional religious activities, outlawed traditional government, and made Indian people ashamed of who they were. Worst of all, the Bureau of Indian Affairs committed these acts against the children entrusted to its boarding schools, brutalizing them emotionally, psychologically, physically, and spiritually. Even in this era of self-determination, when the Bureau of Indian Affairs is at long last serving as an advocate for Indian people in an atmosphere of mutual respect, the legacy of these misdeeds haunts us. The trauma of shame, fear and anger has passed from one generation to the next, and manifests itself in the rampant alcoholism, drug abuse, and domestic violence that plague Indian country. Many of our people live lives of unrelenting tragedy as Indian families suffer the

ruin of lives by alcoholism, suicides made of shame and despair, and violent death at the hands of one another. So many of the maladies suffered today in Indian country result from the failures of this agency. Poverty, ignorance, and disease have been the product of this agency's work.

And so today I stand before you as the leader of an institution that in the past has committed acts so terrible that they infect, diminish, and destroy the lives of Indian people decades later, generations later. These things occurred despite the efforts of many good people with good hearts who sought to prevent them. These wrongs must be acknowledged if the healing is to begin.

I do not speak today for the United States. That is the province of the nation's elected leaders, and I would not presume to speak on their behalf. I am empowered, however, to speak on behalf of this agency, the Bureau of Indian Affairs, and I am quite certain that the words that follow reflect the hearts of its 10,000 employees.

Let us begin by expressing our profound sorrow for what this agency has done in the past. Just like you, when we think of these misdeeds and their tragic consequences, our hearts break and our grief is as pure and complete as yours. We desperately wish that we could change this history, but of course we cannot.

On behalf of the Bureau of Indian Affairs, I extend this formal apology to Indian people for the historical conduct of this agency.

And while the BIA employees of today did not commit these wrongs, we acknowledge that the institution we serve did. We accept this inheritance, this legacy of

racism and inhumanity. And by accepting this legacy, we accept also the moral responsibility of putting things right.

We therefore begin this important work anew, and make a new commitment to the people and communities that we serve, a commitment born of the dedication we share with you to the cause of renewed hope and prosperity for Indian country.

Never again will this agency stand silent when hate and violence are committed against Indians.

Never again will we allow policy to proceed from the assumption that Indians possess less human genius than the other races.

Never again will we be complicit in the theft of Indian property.

Never again will we appoint false leaders who serve purposes other than those of the tribes.

Never again will we allow unflattering and stereotypical images of Indian people to deface the halls of government or lead the American people to shallow and ignorant beliefs about Indians.

Never again will we attack your religions, your languages, your rituals, or any of your tribal ways.

Never again will we seize your children, nor teach them to be ashamed of who they are.

Never again.

We cannot yet ask your forgiveness, not while the burdens of this agency's

history weigh so heavily on tribal communities. What we do ask is that, together, we allow the healing to begin: As you return to your homes, and as you talk with your people, please tell them that time of dying is at its end.

Tell your children that the time of shame and fear is over. Tell your young men and women to replace their anger with hope and love for their people.

Together, we must wipe the tears of seven generations.

Together, we must allow our broken hearts to mend. Together, we will face a challenging world with confidence and trust.

Together, let us resolve that when our future leaders gather to discuss the history of this institution, it will be time to celebrate the rebirth of joy, freedom, and progress for the Indian Nations.

The Bureau of Indian Affairs was born in 1824 in a time of war on Indian people. May it live in the year 2000 and beyond as an instrument of their prosperity.

The remarks of Mr. Gover neglect to cite the part that the Christian church played in this historical tragedy. Alvin M. Josephy, Jr. writes,

Whatever their personal motives, the missionaries helped the assimilationists. They disrupted Indian societies and sowed seeds of doubt and friction among the native peoples. They caused factions, feuds, and schisms, discredited popular leaders and imposed new ones on the Indians, and in scores of ways (including the inadvertent introduction of European diseases) undermined and weakened the unity of the tribes and their ability

to resist the White man and protect their lands and resources. Wherever the missionary worked, the Indian spiritual system, the heart of tribal life, was his target...Contrary to the Constitution, though nobody seemed to notice it, a power of the state, in this unprecedented development, was delegated to the church...The policy of entrusting reservations to the churches ultimately failed, but not because of opposition by the Indians or the public's concern about what the missionaries were doing to them. The structure of Indian societies was undermined and dismantled, and traditional Indian cultural traits were ridiculed and banned. People were taught to be ashamed of their ancestors (savages), of their heritage (barbarism), and of their own Indianness (inferior to Whites). (Josephy, 82-85)

This early history is important to recall because it gives us a better understanding of the psychological and emotional traumas that have been passed from generation to generation in American Indian society.

One only has to look at this psychological impact to understand the suspicions and mistrust Indigenous people have for White institutions. The Christian church is also viewed as an agent of this hurtful and racist power. Indian pastors are well aware that a great part of their ministry is to help Native people in freeing themselves from historical victimization. (Bushyhead, 14)

## **Eight**

### **We are Part of the ELCA Now!**

#### **The Present Situation of American Indian Lutherans of the ELCA**

*In western culture, individualism is respected. The American heroes are those who stand alone and follow their convictions no matter the consequence or cost. In the same way the Native Americans have, in a sense, bought into the “loner” mentality. We accept the mythical “stoic Indian” given to us by Hollywood. We teach our children not to cry, to always win, and to be modest to the point of being alone. We have changed our culture from one of concern for the community into the “macho” culture where a “man’s gotta do what a man’s gotta do!” Much to the detriment of our children, we have allowed the dominant culture to rob us of our tribalism, our societal instincts of caring for others and our “sharing” heritage. We have been forced to give up our tribal connectedness in favor of seeking educational and job opportunities away from family and culture, and our children are paying the price.*

*-Bushyhead, p. 14*

The beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century finds that there are 600 tribes representing 2.3 million American Indians living in the United States. This number is .08% of the American population (ELCA, Commission for Multicultural Ministries). Approximately 68% of the American Indian population lives off of the reservations. What does this mean to the ELCA in its attempt to reach out to the Indian community?

First of all, American Indian members of the ELCA only number 6571 (CMM). This community is often ignored in the decision making of the church on how to reach out and minister to Indian people.

American Indian people encourage the church to listen to us now!

From the beginning, American Indian traditions were based on a communal commitment. Beginning with the tribe's well being, followed by the family, then comes the individual's needs. This order of value ran counter to that of European systems which valued one's individual needs as primary, followed by family, and then the outside community. To American Indians this type of Euro-American teaching is seen as self-centered and highly selfish. Janice Kekahbah and Rosemary Wood share this insight:

Within the Native American family there was a biological "nuclear" family, but the family included the extended family, which not only included "blood" relatives, but others bound to the family by ties of friendship and community. It never was, and still is not, unusual within Native American communities, to have families raising children who have no blood relationship. The saying that there are no orphans within a Native American community remains true.

The extended family, its role and responsibilities, was misunderstood by White social workers that viewed such interaction as child neglect and

parental indifference. Their solution was to immediately remove the children from their homes and put them in orphanages, White foster homes, and boarding schools. This action by the social workers created problems that led to the destruction of the Native American family and tribal relationships, problems that had devastating effects on the community, the ramifications of which are still felt today. (Kekahbah, 3)

To this day the Euro-American power structure preaches that it will not abide any practices that are different than their own. They fail to consider the traditional value system of the American Indian...

Within the Native American extended families, certain people held roles of respect and were shown all the respect those roles accorded. They were given the privileges and responsibilities of the positions. The roles were known, recognized, and respected by all in the community. As there were those recognized as aunts and uncles, so were there those who were recognized as “grandmother” or “grandfather”. These persons were almost always the elders of the tribe, the teachers, the leaders and advisors.

The definition of family was holistic and inclusive of the traditional concepts of inter-relatedness of all things family, environment, and life. In the Nation and Tribal system, the family often makes up a clan, a subgroup of people, of which several clans form the make up of a tribe. This experience of a child growing up in the Nation and Tribal system was, and is, one of multi-parenting, being mentored by the “family” member who could best teach what the child needed to know to better serve the community, rather than single-parenting which is extremely limiting to the overall development of the child. (Kekahbah, 3)

Reverend Ben Bushyhead helps us to better understand this clash of values, writing,

Each tribe is separate and distinct, having its own language, land base, dances, religious ceremonies, medicine, stories, and values. Cultural patterns vary from tribe to tribe. However, there are areas of commonality in life and living shared by all or most tribes. One commonality is the interaction with the White culture and its resultant effects. A major problem has been created by the White culture's interaction with various other cultures as if they were all the same. The ethnics have been categorized together into a group called "non-White" intentionally robbing the people of their identity and place in society.

The attempts of Native Americans to embrace the demands of assimilation, for purposes of ensuring a continuation of the people, and at the same time stubbornly refusing to relinquish all ties to their culture and heritage, continues to cause problems for them. The extent to which the "old ways" have been replaced by "new ways" and the degree to which individuals and families adhere to their traditional ways, varies from tribe to tribe. Thus, it becomes increasingly important to be aware of the role culture plays in forming an individual, as opposed to trying to simply understand a particular cultural trait within a specific tribal context. (Bushyhead, 16)

### Common European American Values

The individual is all-important. Promote your own welfare.

Support of and from immediate family.

Emphasis is on things, individuals, self.

Success is money, power, and things. Acquire, save. Possessions bring status. Wealth and security sought after.

Be vocal. Must talk. Continuous conversation. Embarrassed by silence. Impatient.

Speak up. Show enthusiasm.

Give instant answers to questions.

Time is very important. Get things done. Watch the clock. Schedules. Priorities. Idleness is bad. Live for the future.

Always look a person in the eye. Looking away means disinterest, dishonesty.

Act according to logic, science, reason.

Criticism is immediate, blunt, to the point.

Show anger, sorrow, affection in public.

Uses light humor. Jokes.

Tradition is viewed with varying importance.

Nature is for man to analyze, control, use.

English is the best, most important language. (Monolingual approach).

Loud speech conveys excitement.

*(Tanton, p. 6)*

### Common Native American Values

The group is all-important. Take a back seat.

Give and accept large extended family support.

Society is people-centered, group-centered.

Success is wisdom; acceptance by group is important. Share, honor in giving, suspect of those with too much.

Be quiet. Say what is necessary. Long pauses. Like quiet companionship

Speak in soft voice. Loud speech indicates anger, aggression.

Allow time for thought.

Time is here. Be patient. Enjoy life. Enjoy today; it is all we have. Live now. Enjoy leisure.

Looking in the eye means aggression, anger. Looking down is a sign of respect.

Act on what feels right, spirituality, myth.

Talk about good things before criticizing.

Show little evidence of emotion in public.

Maintain a deep sense of humor. See humor in life.

Show great respect for ceremonies and tradition.

Respect nature. Live in harmony with it.

Values are expressed best in the language of the culture (bilingual approach).

Speak in soft tones. Speak earnestly but softly, never loudly.

The church must grasp the understanding that with over 600 tribes learning only the cultural traits of a single tribe and assuming that this is the way of all tribes will lead to failure. When the church begins a ministry in an urban area that ministry must be able to relate to many tribal backgrounds not just one.

Emotional and physical support of American Indian ministries is of critical importance. These representatives of the church are often working in communities where unemployment exceeds 65%; alcoholism and chemical abuse/dependency is overwhelming, divorce rates continue to go up, teen pregnancies are increasing, family and sexual abuse remain high, and gang violence is increasing. Most alarming is that American Indian youth and teens have the highest rate of suicides of any other group. (Ellory and Loren, pp. 119-207)

**1997 TRENDS in Indian Health:  
American Indian rates compared to All Races**

- 1) alcoholism- 579% greater
- 2) tuberculosis- 475% greater
- 3) diabetes mellitus- 231% greater
- 4) accidents- 212 percent greater
- 5) suicide- 70% greater
- 6) pneumonia/influenza- 61% greater

D'Angelo, p. 10

These are great needs among American Indian people that will require a great effort by the Church. If the ELCA truly desires to be a messenger of our Lord Jesus Christ, then they must become partners with American Indians in a time of healing and

reconciliation. If the Church is sincere in becoming a friend, then some of the old attitudes must be done away with.

Time will be required for American Indians to get beyond their protective walls. The church too must be willing to let go of the attitude of “Pull yourself up by your bootstraps and get your stuff together”; rather it should offer to help heal emotional and psychological wounds.

How does the ELCA begin to build new bridges to the American Indian community? First, by recognizing that while apologies for past wrongs have been offered by some denominations, none has come from the ELCA or its previous bodies. The perception still remains within American Indian communities, that American Indians must give up their traditional beliefs, and that Indians are only welcome when it benefits the Church or its White members.

How do we get beyond where we are today? The ELCA must turn to the American Indian pastors within its structure to truly move forward. The church must recognize that within the American Indian community these Indian pastors are seen as spiritual advisors, they are looked on the same as were the holy men and women of ages past. They are seen as advisors, teachers, and counselors.

What would present-day American Indian Pastors share with the church if the church would listen? First, they would direct the church to look at how American Indian people are represented in the structure of the church. The following Pages will shed light on the current status of American Indians in the ELCA.

The ELCA has stated that it will be *intentional* in seeking to place American Indian persons in leadership positions to the greater church. There were 6,571 American Indians in the ELCA by 1993. While distributed nationwide, significant portions of this number were found in only a few states, often where the ELCA had placed great mission emphasis or had a strong historical presence of previous Lutheran bodies. Currently Alaska, Montana and East Central Wisconsin synods account for over one third (2,187) of all American Indians in the ELCA. (Phelps, 11)

By the year 1994 there was only one American Indian word and sacrament ministry east of the Mississippi River: Living Waters Lutheran Church in Cherokee, North Carolina. Little has been done to support or increase the development of new missions or ministries for American Indians in the Eastern part of the United States.

Since 1987 the number of American Indian ELCA members have increased by 15.6%. Thirty synods saw American Indian membership increase between the years 1988-1991. The greatest growth in American Indian membership was found in Southwestern Washington (+0.11 %), and Montana (+0.11%). Yet twenty synods reported a loss in American Indian membership for the same time period. The greatest losses were found in Indiana and Kentucky (-0.13%) and Sierra Pacific (-0.10%). (Phelps, 11).

By 1990 American Indians comprised only 0.11% of the total ELCA membership. In no synod did the percentage of American Indian membership match or exceed the local percentage in the general population. The ten synods with the greatest American Indian membership are presented in tables One and Two.

**Table 1. Top ten synods for Native American Membership in 1993**

<b>Synod Members</b>	<b>Native American Membership</b>	<b>Total Baptized Membership</b>	<b>% of Total Synod</b>	<b>% of ELCA Native American Membership*</b>
Alaska	1463	10,320	14	23
East Central Wisconsin	482	101,043	0.48	7.4
Montana	316	50,016	0.63	4.85
Northwestern Minnesota	316	113,896	-0.08	4.85
Grand Canyon	222	65,856	0.34	3.80
Northeastern Minnesota	248	71,965	0.34	3.74
Minneapolis	244	223,226	0.11	3.58
South Dakota	233	117,761	0.30	3.41
Eastern North Dakota	188	101,432	0.34	2.98
Greater Milwaukee	194	101,223	0.19	2.88
<b>TOTALS</b>	<b>6,517</b>	<b>955,109</b>	<b>0.19</b>	<b>60</b>

(Phelps, p. 12)

**Table 2. ELCA congregations with 10% or greater Native American membership in 1993.**

<b>Congregation</b>	<b>Location</b>	
Brevig Mission	Brevig Mission	Alaska
Dillingham	Dillingham	Alaska
Our Savior's	Nome	Alaska
Shishmaref	Shishmaref	Alaska
Teller Lutheran	Teller	Alaska
Thornton Memorial Lutheran	Wales	Alaska
House of Prayer	Rock Point	Arizona
Faith American	Oakland	California
Faith Lutheran Chapell	Bagley	Minnesota
Immanuel	Brookston	Minnesota
Lund	Detroit Lakes	Minnesota
Trinity	Hovland	Minnesota
Nee-Gon-Nee	Mahnomen	Minnesota
Our Saviour	Box Elder	Montana
American	Harlem	Montana
St. Paul's Ojibwa	Belcourt	North Dakota
Dacotah Oyate	Tokio	North Dakota
Eben Ezer	Oaks	Oklahoma
Lutheran Church of the Wilderness	Bowler	Wisconsin
Lutheran Church of the Great Spirit	Milwaukee	Wisconsin

One of the key promises made to American Indian people joining the ELCA was the promise of representation in leadership positions in both the local and national church. Little has been done to fulfill this promise. In 1994 only two American Indians served in ELCA church wide positions. Neither of these were executive staff positions (see table Three). Additionally, only nine American Indians served on ELCA committees as of 1994. There were no American Indian members on synodical staffs during this period.

**Table 3. Native Americans in Synod and Church Wide leadership positions**

Gender	Synod Council	Synod Staff	Churchwide Executive Staff	Churchwide Support Staff
Female	6	0	0	2
Male	8	0	0	0
TOTALS	14 (1.1%)	0 (0%)	0	2(1.8%)

(Phelps, p. 16)

Lutherans have always encouraged education, yet the ELCA colleges and universities to recruit and retain American Indian students have done little. The ELCA has a total of 29 colleges and universities; eleven were without a single American Indian student. Augustana with 42, Paific Lutheran, 33, and Concordia with 27 American Indian students are to be commended for their efforts. Twenty-three of the ELCA colleges had no American Indian faculty and only four American Indian people were

members of boards of trustees, while many of these colleges are located in areas with high American Indian populations. (Division for Ministry, ELCA 1994)

Our ELCA Seminaries are still trying to figure how to encourage and retain seminary students. As of 1993, there was a total of 0 American Indian students in the seven seminaries of the ELCA. (Division for Ministry, ELCA 1994).

What all of these facts and figures show us is that the ELCA efforts to reach American Indian people need to be changed. The ELCA, in order to fulfill its goal of including American Indians in the ministry of the church, must look to American Indian people themselves to show them how to do so. A good place to start would be to listen to American Indian pastors now serving Indian congregations.

## Voices of Wisdom

Currently there are fourteen ordained American Indian Pastors in the ELCA. Out of that fourteen, only five are in active service in American Indian Lutheran churches. The following pages come from interviews with three of those active pastors: Rev. Joe Donn Conroy, Rev. Jack Russel, and Rev. Mary Louise Frenchman.

Deep psychological trauma and emotional wounds due to historical attempts of extermination or assimilation still plague present-day American Indians. Our American Indian clergy live in these communities and deal with the devastation that has been wrought over the centuries. Carrying out their shepherding role they often find no relief from the emotional and physical stress of this crucial ministry.

For these pastors, not only must they deal with the problems of the community, but also their own, and their family's emotional reactions to the same traumatic past. This writer recalls an evening when my wife, Beth, had just finished reading *The Earth Shall Weep* by James Wilson, a book about the invasion of the Americas by Europeans. With tears in her eyes she said, "You're lucky to be here aren't you?" She had come to realize, as we all do, that because of years of genocide, those of us who survived are truly blessed to be who we are, American Indians.

Some American Indians dream about what could have been; know the history of this country, and see what might have been—they see our people as they are now and know what should have been.

Listen then to my relatives as they share teachings from their ministries.

Rev. Mary Louise Frenchman is from Oglala Lakota Sioux Nation. She has been pastor at Living Waters Lutheran Church for seven years. Living Waters, begun in 1985, serves the Eastern Band of the Cherokee Indian Nation of North Carolina. When asked what she would share about ministry in Indian Country, whether it be rural or urban setting, Pastor Frenchman stated that two major issues continue to plague American Indian communities. You won't find them listed in some Anglo study, but they truly exist in our communities. They are the issues of jealousy and familial nepotism. Pastor Frenchman stated how energy draining it was for her to be constantly dealing with these never-ending issues.

Pastor Frenchman shared that jealousy is found throughout American Indian communities. The fear that someone may get more can often lead to ongoing verbal abuse of another. According to Pastor Frenchman, this is a learned behavior, not a traditional one. She speculates that it came about for the survival of one's tribe. Because of this behavior, many become victims of vicious rumors and character attacks.

Frenchman believes this learned behavior comes from a historical source. Often pitted against one another by the U.S. Government and in constant fear of assimilation and termination, tribes took on a "we first" attitude.

She believes another likely source of this behavior is the result of the paranoid personality, a trait of an alcoholic. Recall that some communities have an alcoholism rate as high as 84%. The result of this ongoing jealousy leads to an Indian saying among the Cherokee: "We can't get ahead for getting even", meaning that "we will attack and bring

down *anyone* who, for whatever reason, seems to get more than me, or who because of their improving themselves, makes me doubt my self worth. We will pull them down with our words or our fists”.

My second great time consuming energy zapping issue is family. In many American Indian communities, those who have the power strive to keep it all to themselves. The purpose is to exclude anyone outside the immediate family or close acquaintances. This is tragically seen when Indian gaming comes to fruition for tribes. Tribal Enrollment lists are purged often for the sake of the “fewer of you, the more for me”. This attitude never leads to tribal growth, but rather to financial or power gain. The prevailing view is: Take care of your own.

Pastor Frenchman believes that this too is a learned trait. She, in her closing comments, was very clear that if the Lutheran Church really wants to help Indian Pastors, they would do so starting at the Seminary: Courses in counseling and reconciliation should be offered but with not only a Euro-American perspective. Bring in Native Pastors and allow them to help teach not only the Indian students, but also the faculty.

“This training must be sensitive to Native traditions and beliefs,” Frenchman says. The training must be structured to relate to the tribal traditions and lifestyle of the tribe or tribes the pastor is working with.

“I’m Lakota. I had very little understanding of the Cherokee; it would have been of great help if someone would have mentored me. The Church needs to be flexible in its training.” (Frenchman Interview)

The Rev. Jack Russel is an enrolled member of the Cherokee Nation of Oklahoma. Rev. Russel, like the majority of American Indian Lutheran pastors is a second career pastor. At the time of this interview, Rev. Russel was serving as Pastor Lutheran Church of the Great Spirit in Milwaukee, Wisconsin.

When asked what teaching he would share about ministry in Indian Country, whether it be a rural or an urban setting, Pastor Russel shared these insights:

He began with talking about the great demand upon time and energy, not just for him, but also his wife and family. As is typical of the American Indian Pastor serving in an American Indian Church, they are woefully under-paid. Finances cause extreme hardship. Pastor Russel suggested that all second career pastors (Indian and non-Indian) and their spouses should have an orientation so that all may realize the type of ministry they are being called into.

He expressed that he often felt like he was caught between two groups of people who won't listen to one another. From the American Indian community he must be aware not to get caught up in the anti-church bashing, but rather try to bring understanding. One of the great frustrations of his ministry is that he, like other American Indian pastors, must spend an inordinate amount of time dealing with individual and institutional racism found in the ELCA.

The second group of people he deals with is those who practice a subtle racism. Often Rev. Russel points out these are the people who don't see it or *feel* it because historically they have not suffered or had racism impact them personally.

I asked Pastor Russel to explain further. He shared the following, written by Rev. Ben Bushyhead:

With the extra stress placed on the Native American pastor due to the extreme nature of the problems found in Native American communities, the pressure is felt even more. If a Native American pastor is successful it is general viewed as that specific pastor being special and different, thus offering a tolerable explanation of his/her success within the larger confines of a White, male, Anglo-Saxon institution. But, let the Native American pastor fail and it is seen by the general church as evidence ethnic pastors are less qualified than pastors of the dominant society, no matter their training or formal degrees. The failure of a Native American pastor is seen within the confines of a stereotypical racist institution as failure of all Native American pastors. (Bushyhead, viii)

Of this, Russel iterated, “This is what I constantly feel in a large part of my call to educate the church, to look at itself through the eyes of the outsider and see what we see and what we feel.” He went on to assert, “My purpose is to help the greater church see the richness of American Indian Culture and spirituality”. (Russel Interview)

The Rev. Jo Ann Conroy, a member of the Lakota Sioux of North Dakota, serves as pastor of Woyatan Lutheran Church in Rapid City, South Dakota.

When I asked Pastor Conroy what teaching she would like to share about ministry in Indian communities, this was her offering:

I would hope that the Church would do a better job in training and recruiting people, Indian and non-Indian, who are competent. I mean those who come to serve among our people should have the skills required

to address the many crises that we deal with. We as American Indian Pastors have a responsibility to understand those issues that impact American Indian communities. This requires that we be well versed in the historical, social, and psychological issues of our unique communities.

I would like for the Division of Outreach (the unit responsible for developing new congregations) to understand that each tribe is unique and distinct. Each tribe has its own language (if it is still in existence) its own place of being (the land), its prayers expressed by dance and other religious ceremonies, medicine, stories, and values. While there are areas of commonality among tribes, the Division of Outreach must not be tempted to use a cookie cutter approach in developing ministries in Indian Country. One size does not fit all.

Rev. Conroy also expressed her desire to let the greater church know that American Indian people have much to offer the ELCA:

Tell them that American Indian people know that they are children of God. That as children created by God they have refused to become a mere afterthought by the dominant culture; that as American Indians they can take the best of both cultures, and use these gifts as a guide for life.

Our people are to be teachers to the Greater Church by word and deed. They know they were created in God's image for a purpose. They were not made to be recreated in the image of the dominant society. God asks us to be who we are. The church has a wonderful opportunity if it will only learn to listen with its heart. (Conroy Interview)

I have responsibility as a spiritual Elder of the Metrolina Native American Association (consists of Natives living in the Charlotte area who come from twelve different tribes) to help my people hold onto and embrace their culture and traditions. As an ordained American Indian Pastor of the ELCA, I realize that I have a responsibility to share our culture, tradition, and spirituality with the whole church.

American Indian pastors of the ELCA have a crucial role to play in the ministry of the church to the American Indian community.

First, as American Indian pastors we must believe in preserving our cultures. We must be willing to be the bridge between the Christian Church and our Indian communities, realizing that some American Indians will see us as traitors for being members and pastors of a Christian church. We as Pastors must be willing to sometimes go against the dogma of the Church when our people seek to use traditional rituals and ceremonies to express their relationship with God. We must, as Pastor Russel explained, confront the racism of our Church when it seeks to continue spreading erroneous myths that traditional religions are pagan or animistic. American Indian pastors of the ELCA must help the Church realize that participating in traditional ceremonies is *not* worshipping Satan.

The American Indian Lutheran pastor is one of the major resources to bring help and healing to the American Indian community—but *we* need help!

From the viewpoint of Native American people and other peoples who were object of mission activity, things were very confusing most of the time. General they were not involved in the preliminary discussions and

planning sessions that took place prior to the deployment of missionaries to mission assignments. Their lot was to respond to the implementation of strategies that they had nothing to do with in the planning stages. They were not party to the assessments of their needs and the consequent decision making about how to go about meeting those needs. They were not involved in interdenominational field agreements about who could work among which people. It is no wonder that they often became incredulous spectators of events that drastically affected their lives and reflected on their status as intelligent human beings. (Noley, 205)

American Indian Lutherans challenged this past history.

During the 1997 ELCA National Church-wide Assembly, a strategic plan for ministry to American Indians and Alaska Natives was received. The Commission for Multicultural Ministries submitted this strategic plan. The plan was a bold call for the ELCA to begin a forward approach to reaching out to Native peoples. This strategic plan, to be implemented over the next five years, focused on four specific areas: congregational development, leadership development, public policy advocacy, and social ministry.

Congregation development involves supporting existing congregations and establishing new congregations that serve American Indian and Alaska Native peoples. These congregations would offer dynamic worship and teaching communities, serve as centers of mission where the Word is

preached and Sacraments are administered, and provide support and caring for the communities they serve. The task force identified four goals.

1. An American Indian and Alaska Native Advisory Council will be convened to monitor and guide congregation development activities that affect American Indians and Alaska Natives.
2. All clergy and laypersons called to serve American Indian Alaska Native congregations will participate in a culturally relevant orientation program within three months of accepting the call.
3. The Division for Outreach, in cooperation with synods, will establish four new American Indian and Alaska Native congregations.
4. The director of the department for American Indian and Alaska Native ministries, in partnership with the Division for Congregational Ministries, will provide a resource development plan for new and existing American Indian and Alaska Native ministries.

Leadership development means cultivating lay and rostered American Indians and Alaska Natives in the church to share their gifts in both the church and society. The task force identified five goals.

1. The department for American Indian to develop an overall framework that seminaries can use in their curriculum to affirm the traditional teachings and gifts of Native people in the context of Christian theology and doctrine.
2. The synod multicultural ministry committees will recognize American Indian and Alaska Native leaders in the church and acknowledge the spiritual gifts of tribal traditions.

3. The department for American Indian and Alaska Native ministries will develop a mentoring program for American Indian and Alaska Native people that will equip them to provide spiritual and administrative leadership to congregations, members, and communities.
4. The 1999 Church wide Assembly will be presented with a resolution that affirms the church's commitment to American Indian and Alaska Native people.
5. Each year the department for American Indian and Alaska Native ministries in the Lutheran Youth Organization will develop a list of American Indian and Alaska Native people from ages 15 to 18, enabling LYO to encourage youth participation at events that will provide leadership development opportunities for Native young people.

Public Policy Advocacy seeks social change by promoting justice and full participation by American Indians and Alaskan Natives in determining their destiny. The task force identified four goals.

1. The Division for Church in Society will advocate for issues related to American Indian and Alaska Native social justice concerns, including religious freedom, protection of sacred sites, land, language, sovereignty, self-determination, treaty rights, arts, stewardship of the earth, and Alaska Native subsistence issues.
2. The Department for Communication will be responsible for communicating the ELCA's advocacy for American Indian and Alaska Native people to ELCA congregations and the general public.
3. The department for American Indian and Alaska Native ministries will be responsible for communicating accurate

information to the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America for initiating advocacy for American Indian and Alaska Native issues.

4. The Commission for Multicultural Ministries will request the Multicultural Mission Staff Team to provide a status report on the implementation of the issues contained in the 1991 “Report on Multicultural Mission Strategy” related to American Indian and Alaska Native people.

Social ministry manifests Christ’s love through a partnership with existing human service agencies and ecumenical community networks that promote the spiritual and physical health and well being of all God’s creation. The task force identified three goals.

1. The director of the department for American Indian and Alaska Native ministries and the American Indian and Alaska Native Advisory Council will sponsor and facilitate culturally sensitive learning experiences for the ELCA and related social ministry organizations.

2. The department for American Indian and Alaska Native ministries will develop an informational data system that will specify opportunities for enriching social ministry efforts between congregations.

3. The Multicultural Mission Strategy Staff Team will provide the department for American Indian and Alaska Native ministries a status report on the actions affecting American Indian and Alaska Native peoples identified in the 1991 “Report on Multicultural Mission Strategy”. (CMM, pp 2-9)

Ms. Ramona Soto Rank, president of the American Indian and Alaska Native Lutheran Association addressed the assembly with these words:

Each of these areas is important to uplift in our joint ministry. WE need the ELCA to maintain its support for our historic existing congregations. We need to support our new ministries, especially those urban areas where 65 percent of all Indian people live.

After Ms. Rank's remarks, the National Church Council recommended the following,

To receive with appreciation the American Indian and Alaska Native Strategic Plan developed by the American Indian and Alaska Native community;

To express support and deep appreciation for existing ministries of the ELCA with American Indian and Alaska Native people, and

To recommit the ELCA to partnership with existing American Indian and Alaska Native congregations and to intensified outreach with the Gospel among the wider American Indian and Alaska Native communities.

The strategic plan was adopted by the fifth biennial Churchwide Assembly of the ELCA on August 18<sup>th</sup>, 1997. (1997 Churchwide Assembly Reports and Records, 514-517)

Adopting a plan and implementing are two different things. And implementation is often hard to do. The year 2002 saw little if any progress in the four areas of need. Bureaucracy, turf guarding, and leadership squabbles have left many in the American Indian community questioning the sincerity of the Church and its various institutions.

As this author looks back over the past five years, it has become clear that key spiritual questions were not addressed in this strategic plan. For Indian people as well as the ELCA we must look beyond just creating and doing new things. We as Christians of all races must ask the spiritual questions about repentance, racism, and reconciliation. To deny that there are wounds that need to be healed prevents us from being the community that God wants us to be.

The ELCA needs to remember that in the minds of many Indians, Christianity still treats them as a conquered people (Irwin, 27). The church institutions still seek to tell them how to worship, study, and serve. The Church must recognize its past history. The ELCA could make a major statement to American Indian people by not denying this tragic past history of the Christian Church, but instead repudiate those past behaviors and actions. This act of repentance would be well received by American Indians and seen as an action of true friendship.

After repentance we must then reexamine not only our lives, but also the Church institutions we serve. The Rev. Foster McCurly speaks of racism within the ELCA. White racism or white superiority pervades American society and white persons in society, whether Church members or not. Such racism is a sin against God that results in injustice within the human community. The ELCA, committed as it is to inclusiveness, is predominately an institution comprised of Whites. The ELCA, its pastors and members, must work constantly to dismantle racism in all of its behavior. Ministries with and among Native American Persons will assist the rest of the Church in undertaking this task. (McCurly, 2).

At the core of American Indian theology is the desire for all parts of creation to come together in harmony and balance. Truly this is a place where our church's teaching of how God, through his son, Jesus Christ, was about reconciling the world unto God. The emphasis on reconciliation I believe is the foundation for whatever ministry we seek to undertake in the future. Recall, we begin in prayer by listening to where God would lead us.

The American Indian members of the ELCA seek reconciliation and Harmony with the Church. We believe the Lord is leading us in a new understanding and a new way of ministry. Heart to heart conversations must continue around the need of reconciliation and healing. Building trust is the first step on the road to a true community.

## **Chapter Nine**

### **An Elder's Vision:**

#### **Recommendations for the Future**

*Human Kind has not woven the web of life. We are but one thread within it. Whatever we do to the web, we do to ourselves. All things are bound together. All things connect.*

*-Chief Seattle*

The ELCA as it embraces the 21<sup>st</sup> century must be willing to be truly committed to an accompaniment model of evangelism. The ELCA church leadership will need to intensify its efforts in dialogue and in cultural education.

We must be quite honest when we look at the present relationship between American Indians (both in the Church and those who are not) and the Christian Church in the United States. Because of a traumatic history with the church, many American Indians have a negative view of the Church as a representative of God. To many the cross has been seen as representation of subjugation and oppression.

The ELCA in its approach must be aware to avoid the temptation to say to American Indian people “why can't you get over it? All that stuff happened a long time

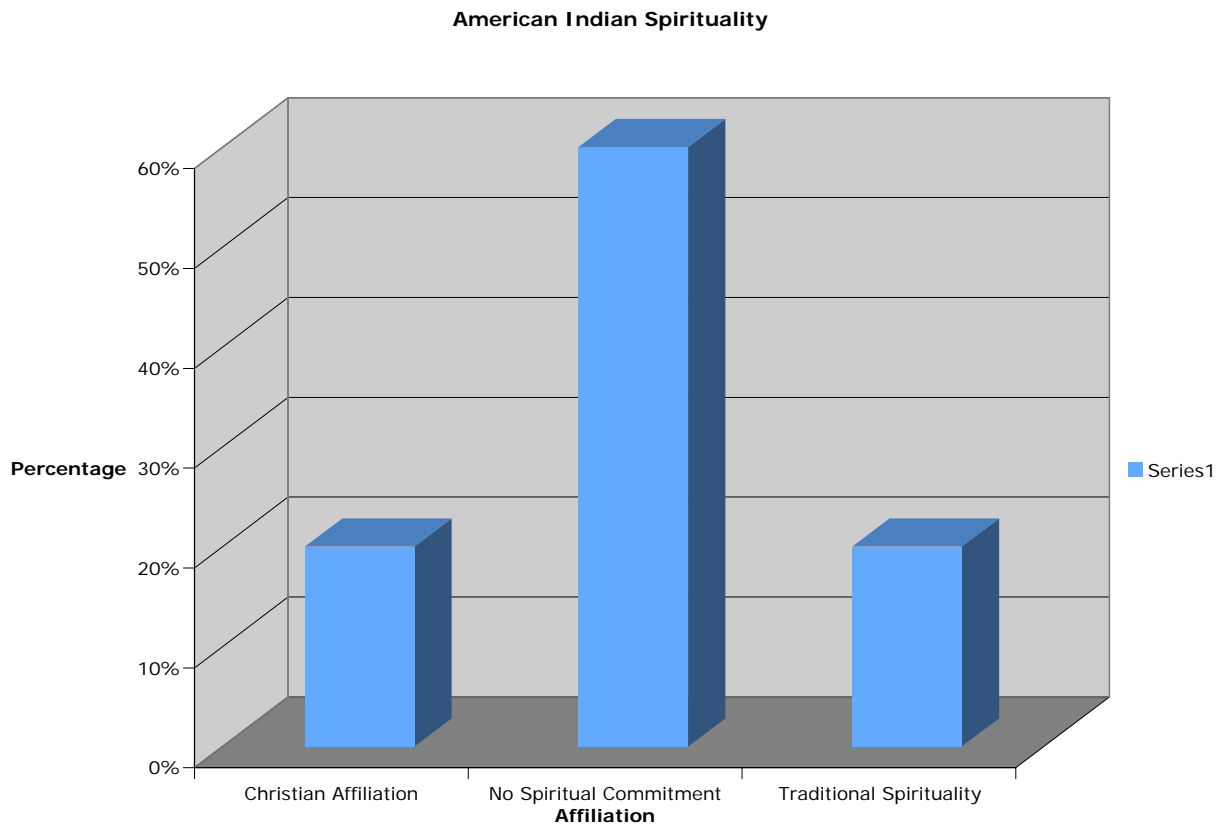
ago, let's move on". To maintain such an attitude is to dismiss the pain and to ignore the unresolved grief that American Indian people struggle with every day.

I would remind the ELCA that while the Church and the government are not the same in this country, it is the view of many American Indians that the church bears much of the guilt for the wrongs done to American Indian tribes in the history of the colonization and nation building of America. Recognizing that two hundred years of government policies were carried out by Christian people, the church was also complicit in these policies. From educating American Indians located on reservations, the Church's often ran the infamous boarding school program. Part of their education process was to deliberately exclude anything Indian including language, this would make the children give up their "savage" ways. The church's influence made traditional Indian spiritual practices to be seen as heathen. This religious bigotry was challenged by the passage of the 1978 Indian Religious Freedom Act.

Now is the time for the ELCA to begin a new relationship with American Indian people. Together American Indians and the ELCA can form a credible partnership that can address not only the spiritual needs of our people, but also to address the issues of justice. This will require the ELCA be honest in its ministry and treatment of the issues and histories that continue to affect the lives of indigenous people.

I would remind the ELCA, that when anyone raises the question is it worth the church's resources, to pursue American Indian ministries, that in light of our past endeavors and history it is truly remarkable that American Indian people will would invite us into their communities.

The following graph shows that 60% of the American Indian population do not identify with any exposition of faith:



The ELCA in its efforts of evangelism needs to be reminded that the gospel is relevant to ELCA Lutherans in different and important ways. I would ask that the Church remember this should be a message for all people. When this message is shared in a manner of context the American Indian people will also realize that they matter as much to the Holy

Spirit as anyone else. The ELCA must be willing to eliminate the judgmental tendencies in our churches and institutions. This new attitude will provide opportunities for American Indians to enter into a life-giving relationship with our Lord Jesus Christ. This relationship with Christ's church will provide a place of safety for all God's people where American Indian people will be treated equally and with integrity.

As the graph on the previous page shows an estimated 60% of American Indian people are not having their spiritual life nurtured, whether from a Christian ministry or traditional ceremonies of their tribes. As we can see the needs of American Indian people are great. Now how will the ELCA address their great need?

The inclusive church that the ELCA proclaims will truly be inclusive when it is culturally open to American Indian creativity. When this happens the opportunity for a joint effort can occur, one that will, through the living gospel, address the issues of life and health and salvation in American Indian communities.

How then does the ELCA move to bring the Word of Christ to American Indian country in the next century? The mode of accompaniment evangelism should address what I believe to be the critical areas in American Indian country.

In 1987 Foster McCurly, at the request of the Lutheran Church in America, prepared a paper called "Principles to Guide and Undergird Word and Sacrament Ministries of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America with Native American People". This document, while giving the church direction, was wise in asking for American Indian reaction. This then would be a suggested path for the ELCA to follow in evangelism for American Indian people:

### 1. God's Mission and the Church's Ministry

There is one mission and it is God's mission. God's mission is carried out in those ways that are suitable to God. Not God's entire mission is carried out through the church. The ways in which God works through human communities and natural orders are all part of God's mission. The ministry of the church is to reflect the way in which God's mission was carried out through the life and teachings of Jesus, the Christ—for the church is the body of Christ in our time and places. The ministry of the church therefore should reflect the fullness of the ministry seen in the Christ—a ministry that reflects service to persons with needs, a ministry that includes advocating of justice for the oppressed. Any ministry of Word and Sacrament with Native American people will embody all of these dimensions of this church's ministry as it participates in God's mission.

This statement of mission is one gladly received by American Indian people. This statement not only is one of Inclusion for all God's people, but pledges to address Indian people in all the places of their lives.

I would strongly encourage the ELCA to do something that has been neglected by the majority of Christian denominations. That is to apologize for past mistakes and harm the church visited upon American Indian people. Dr. McCurley recommends this in his paper as well:

#### Repentance

In the minds of many, Christianity and conquest of Indian peoples have been intertwined. Not only was the land taken from native peoples by foreign invaders, but the dominant religion was enforced upon native persons, treating them as pagans. Albeit a distortion of the gospel of Jesus

Christ, the church that bears his name must show signs of repentance for the behavior of its forbearers in this land. The ELCA will therefore not deny this history but will repent by repudiating the behavior of the past as it develops ministries with and among Native American persons.

By this statement of contrition the ELCA would give a new level of trust and respect. American Indians have in our traditions the way of forgiveness. A new beginning could happen for the ELCA and American Indian people.

To repent is to confess one's mistake—the ELCA in order to move forward in its ministry must also come to grips with the sin of racism. Once more from his paper, McCurley states:

#### Racism

White racism or white superiority pervades American society and white persons in society whether church members or not. Such racism is a sin against God that results in injustice within the human community. The ELCA, committed as it is to inclusiveness, is predominately an institution comprised of white persons. The ELCA, its pastors and members, must work constantly to dismantle racism in all of its behavior. Ministries with and among Native American persons will assist the rest of the church in undertaking this task.

American Indian people would encourage the ELCA to look not only with and among American Indians, but in all the areas of the church from its local congregation, to its institutional bodies to discover where racism exists. Also, we must look at gender and sexuality issues. The American Indian community must also be accountable in our own

sense of prejudice. To move forward is to remember the old Indian saying, “We go as fast as the slowest”. We all must help each other.

The ministry of the church will need to recognize what American Indians bring in the way of spirituality and its meaning for reconciliation. McCurley has recognized this and encourages the church in this way.

The suffering and pain of broken promises, broken relationships, and a broken world are epitomized in the God who suffered and died on a cross in order to make creation whole. At the heart of the Native American’s spirituality is the desire for all parts of creation to come together in harmony. As the church teaches and confesses that “God was in Christ reconciling the world unto God”, that this emphasis upon reconciliation will have very specific meaning in light of the history of relationships between white Christians and Native American persons in this land.

A major component in the years to come is for the ELCA to become more active in the ministry of justice for American Indian tribes and individuals. McCurley encourages the church this way:

An essential component of God’s mission is that there be justice for all peoples, especially those that are oppressed. The history of Native American persons in this country is a history of political, military, and economic oppression. These are still live issues for Native American persons within the United States to varying degrees. The ability of Indian nations or persons to redress their grievances is often thwarted by lack of political and economic power. The ELCA, along with others who share its

concern for justice will work with Native American persons locally, regionally, nationally, and internationally through appropriate structures to seek change in systems that oppress Native American persons and restrict their own expressions of freedom. In this respect, the ELCA will continue to examine its own life as well. (McCurly, p. 1-3)

Too often the church is swayed by political pressure instead of action on account of the gospel. Along with this issue of justice is how American Indian ministries are seen. American Indian ministries have too often been labeled “Special Ministries”. This has often been interpreted as meaning low priority, understaffed low expectations and woefully underfunded.

The ELCA must by its actions make American Indians a high priority for ministry. Not to do so would be to continue a process making American Indians victims, and denies them the full participation in the communion of Christ’s church. This new emphasis for American Indian ministries is especially important in the urban areas of our country. We as the ELCA must begin to focus more of our resources on developing new ministries in American Indian urban areas. Demographic studies show that 65-75% of American Indian populations now reside off the reservation. These reservation areas should not be forgotten.

The work that needs to be done by the church in the ministries with American Indians is daunting. We should not be discouraged, but should remember that it is the mandate of the gospel that in Christ all persons are made one. We must remember that the Church is to be a model of God’s kingdom. God’s church is made up of people of all languages and colors, bound together in a community of love and justice. The acceptance of American Indians as a part of that kingdom has been absent from the church agenda

for too long. The American Indian Christians of the ELCA church will now step forward to walk with our brothers and sisters to bring God's love to all. We will walk as fast as the slowest for we are on the same path. We are all family.

I believe the following pages could serve as a guide in bringing about a new vision for American Indian ministry by the ELCA.

## An Elder's Vision

*Each one possessed a stick of wood. Their dying fire was in need of logs.*

*It was a freezing night.*

*The first held his back, for in the faces around the fire, he noticed one was black.*

*The next one saw that one of the groups was not of his church. He couldn't bring himself to throw in his and warm that man.*

*The third, a poor man, his clothes in tatters, held his thin coat close to his body. Why should he put his only log to use to warm the idle rich?*

*The rich man sat quietly, thinking of how to keep the wealth he accumulated from the shiftless poor.*

*The face of the next among them spoke of revenge. The fire was dying away. Why should he throw on his log when the others would not? He wanted to spite them.*

*The sixth man in the forlorn group did nothing except for gain. He too would not throw his log on the fire until another did.*

*The seventh log, you hold. The choice is now yours. The others, their logs held tight in death's still grasp, were proof of human sin. They didn't die from the cold without. They died from the cold within.*

*—Cherokee Folktale.*

The years that lie before us can be ones that offer great opportunity and hope between American Indians and the ELCA. Certain changes will have to be made in the way we listen and educate and equip the leadership, both American Indian and non-Indian, of the ELCA.

Blair Schlepp, a member of the Lakota Nation, expresses the excitement and challenge before us:

...the Native American community in the United States today is a dynamic community that has survived and awesome onslaught. Time and time again we have been reminded of the great potential bubbling below and gushing to the surface in over 500 tribal entities in the United States. Native Americans must take their future into their own hands, but non-Native Americans should be educated to understand their history, their plight, and their current situation. Myths and misinterpretations must be dispelled, for in the end, only a change of opinion and a clear insight by the majority of this land will end the debilitating prejudice that senselessly contributes to the Native American's modern history of pain. (Raush and Schlepp, 164)

The American Indian community historically and to this very day has looked to its spiritual Elders to articulate the story of the tribe. They are to listen with the heart and seek a vision to lead the people in serving the Creator. The following represents my interpretation of a vision that could help the ELCA more effectively welcome American Indian people into the Church.

## Indian Clergy

*Looking back, I realized it took me over ten years to complete the ordination process. Was that because people were against me and were placing obstacles in my way? Was the process itself difficult? Whatever the answers, it shouldn't be like this. No wonder there are hardly any Native American ministers available for Indian Churches. The process fights against who they are as Native people and puts them in a very vulnerable state that belittles their very essence as human beings. (Weaver, 175)*

*When the Christians took the Indian children off to boarding schools, the minister used to lead the children into the chapel and point up to the picture of Jesus, with long flowing hair, and tell the Indian children that they were going to learn how to be just like that man, Jesus. After this statement, the minister would send all the Indian boys off to get their hair cut short. (Rupert Costo; ibid Weaver, 124)*

The ELCA in working with American Indian candidates and ordained clergy would be wise to develop a nurturing system of support in the following areas of the Greater Church.

## Seminaries

Starting with the seminary let me propose:

1. That seminaries intentionally recruit American Indian faculty as vacancies become available at the seminary, going outside the ELCA if necessary for qualified American Indian candidates.
2. Establish supportive mentoring programs for seminarians and when possible find local American Indian families to host these students.
3. Listen to American Indian seminarians as they seek guidance through the rostering process. I would encourage each American Indian candidate to have an advocate appointed by his local bishop. The advocate should be an American Indian clergy when possible.
4. Review and add curricula to provide courses that will equip all seminarians to serve in American Indian congregations.
5. Provide internships that are contextually relevant for American Indian communities.

6. Appointment of American Indians to boards of trustees at each seminary when vacancies occur.
  
7. Closely monitor any alternate routes for ordination.
  
8. Develop a theological institution that is culturally sensitive toward American Indians on both the east and west coast. I would also suggest that it be modeled on the Lutheran Theological School in Atlanta.
  
9. In consultation between spiritual Elders and the Division for Ministry, covenant for the next three years to discern, identify and support American Indian Clergy Candidates.

## Clergy Support

For the care and nourishment and support of our active American Indian pastors I suggest the following:

Affirm them and support their present ministry by:

1. Provide a livable compensation package through the local and national church.

Do not put clergy families at economic and health risk.

2. Provide American Indian pastors the opportunity to have regional gatherings that offer support and educational events.

3. Provide sabbatical leave with full compensation for pastors and family. The majority of American Indian ministry in the ELCA should be viewed as crisis-oriented ministry, which implies an even greater need for sabbatical leave for these pastors.

4. Provide for continuing education leave with full compensation.

5. Provide and ensure that communication exists with local synodical bishop, regional, and church wide offices.

## American Indians and Local Synods

For the clergy and the ministries they serve to grow, the synod must play an integral role as advocate. I suggest that synods:

1. Create a call process that is culturally grounded in the American Indian Lutheran communities that will fully participate in the established ELCA process.
2. Insist that all synods
  - a. Review how internalized racism keeps American Indian clergy and lay leaders from full participation in the ministry of the synod.
  - b. Ensure that financial resources are equally shared in regard to American Indian leadership development and support.
  - c. Work in conjunction with American Indian congregations to lift up American Indian men and women as ministry candidates.
3. Continue to reach out and support American Indian Lutheran ministries in the U.S.

## Re-education of Non-American Indians

To have a greater understanding of and appreciation for American Indian people I recommend:

1. A renewed effort to educate ELCA members and congregations about American Indians. This could be done by requiring Sunday school and vacation bible school materials to include units on American Indian Christians, written by or in close consultation with American Indian educators.
2. Develop a regional American Indian speakers list, and make sure that this list is distributed to synods and local congregations.
3. Declare an American Indian Sunday where emphasis is placed on the contributions and gifts of American Indian Lutherans (Perhaps in November which is National American Indian Heritage Month).
4. Develop new resources on the ELCA website for American Indian ministries.
5. Develop funding sources for American Indians to participate in conferences, workshops, and seminars.
6. Develop five new American Indian ministries on the East coast, a hugely underserved area.

7. Encourage ELCA campus ministry programs at Lutheran colleges and non-Lutheran schools to invite American Indian leaders to participate in the annual meetings and national student gatherings. Especially encourage ministries in those areas where there are high concentrations of American Indian youth. This can build tremendous bridges to mutual understanding.

Additionally, I recommend the use of the ELCA divisions and agencies to engage American Indian ministry communities to be a leading advocate for justice issues such as land rights, treaty rights, tribal sovereignty, and burial rights. These are critical issues that have tremendous impact on local Indian communities. Jace Weaver passionately shares with us one place American Indians need the church's help;

Systematic disturbances of non-Indian graves, on the one hand, are abhorred and avoided at all costs, while Indian people are actively searched out, dug up, and placed in museum storage. Criminal statutes in all fifty states very strictly prohibit grave desecration, grave robbing, and mutilation of the dead—yet they are not applied to protect Indian dead. Instead, the laws and social policy, to the extent they affect native dead, do not treat this class of decedents as human, but rather define them as “non-renewable archaeological resources” to be treated like dinosaurs or snails, “federal property” to be used as chattels in the academic marketplace, “pathological specimens” to be studied by those interested in racial biology, or simple “trophies or booty” to enrich private collectors. The huge collections of dead Indians are compelling testimony that Indians have been singled out for markedly disparate treatment. (Weaver, 101)

In the above areas of social justice and advocacy it is imperative that social ministry organizations and personnel be offered training in cultural sensitivity.

When possible, I encourage an ongoing-shared ministry with other Ecumenical Indian pastors. The ELCA could provide a great service by sponsoring an Ecumenical American Indian conference in 2010. This conference would provide us an opportunity for community, resource sharing, and strategic planning.

*Can we talk of integration until there is integration of hearts and minds?*

*Unless you have this, you have only a physical presence, and the walls between us are as high as the mountain range. —Chief Dan George*

Reverend Joan Conroy's ministry in Rapid City is a style of ministry that claims who we are as American Indian Lutherans. The ministry is intentional in reaching out to those American Indians whose spirituality is primarily traditional. It honors these people in their worship and service to God. This new worship community is history being made in a new way.

*My friends, how desperately do we need to be loved and to love...Love is something you and I must have. We must have it because our spirit feeds upon it. We must have it because without it we become weak and faint. Without love our self-esteem weakens. Without it our courage fails. Without love we can no longer look out confidently at the world. ...With*

*love we are creative. With love we march tirelessly. With love, and with  
love alone, we are able to sacrifice for others. —Chief Dan George*

# Epilogue

I have no way of knowing what the thoughts and reflections of the forgoing chapters may mean for the leaders of the ELCA. I can only hope that they may have led us to a place of new understanding of ministry to and with American Indian people. Truly, the good news of Jesus Christ is meant for all the world's people. While a study of foundational Lutheran doctrine can be the guiding foundation of ministry, we must be careful not to get caught up in the law of doctrine and lose sight of God's love for all of creation through Christ. Many of our current mission failures in populations of people of language and color come from an inadequate understanding of traditional, cultural and historical perspectives of those we seek to reach. Corresponding to this lack of knowledge there is an inadequate vision of how God asks us to carry out his mission. The church refuses to leave Jerusalem! We, as Lutherans of the ELCA, need to revisit our theology of mission and our theology of evangelism. Without a clear understanding of these foundation stones the church will continue to flounder in its ministry to American Indian people.

Our theology of mission and theology of evangelism are the keys in seeking to develop any future strategies and tools to proclaim the good news of salvation.

In the beginning of this dissertation I attempted to examine how we as the ELCA define a theology of mission. Using the teachings of Luther we as a church have a

commitment to carry forth the good news beyond ourselves. However, breaking away from, just those who are familiar to us, has been difficult. Lutherans have traditionally found comfort within our own cultural niches: Swede, German, and Norwegian. Yet to fulfill the great commandment we must leave our comfort zone.

To reach out to the American Indian community with this good news requires a ministry of evangelism. What does it mean to evangelize in an Evangelical Lutheran Church way? Is there an evangelism theology of the ELCA? This poor author soon discovered that the ELCA is still in the process of developing a theology of evangelism. Numerous calls to directors of missions at ELCA seminaries, bishops of synods and the Department for Global Mission of the ELCA, all echoed the same answer when asked what the ELCA Theology of Evangelism is. That answer was “We’re still working on it”. Thus as the ELCA seeks to do evangelism they are not comfortable in saying this is the reason we do it.

Drawing upon various sources including historical writings of Luther, I sought to best express the general approaches to evangelism as practiced by the ELCA at this time.

I strongly feel that this particular topic, a theology of evangelism for the ELCA, is one that needs continued research in the next five years.

The center of this still-in-process-evangelism is that Jesus Christ is the one that brings wholeness and reconciliation to God’s creation. What applies to creation especially applies to the individual.

Using the traditional teachings of the Lutheran Church on creation and the Bible, justification by faith, priesthood of believers, law and gospel and I sought to lay out the why, and how ELCA Lutherans use in their present approach to evangelism among

American Indian people. I sought to also give to the leadership of the church an understanding of how American Indian people would respond from our culture and spiritual understanding to these doctrines. I would like to strongly encourage that this type of dialogue would continue.

I did find in my research a beginning effort by the Department of Global Missions of the ELCA to do evangelism within the context of a people's environment (accompaniment). Strongly desiring to understand the historical and cultural background of American Indian people this department was very receptive to my insights and historical background information.

I also found a strong response from American Indian Christian community in their willingness to share their faith in Jesus Christ. Traditional spiritual leaders were open for further dialogue. American Indian clergy were very open in expressing their hopes, fears, and frustration. I would strongly encourage the ELCA to do a more in depth study of the care of American Indian Pastors and families. I have attempted to take their insights and to offer up a vision of how American Indian ministries can be supported and improved.

The ELCA now finds itself at a crossroads. The 21<sup>st</sup> century lies before us and humanity groans for peace and justice. Standing at the crossroads is Jesus, asking us to walk a path we have not walked before. He asks us to walk the path with American Indian people who ask who is Jesus Christ for us today!

We as the Church will be asked to carry a cross that will be hard. For this cross will mean for us as a church a time of repentance for past wrongs, and a willingness to change. To trust Jesus is to be courageous in our love for one another.

The future will require the American Indian Lutheran community to help the ELCA to continue to promote training of American Indian leaders and to advocate for justice for indigenous peoples. We have been called as American Indian and non-Indian people to work together to lift up Christ's message of reconciliation among all his people. The history of American Indian and Lutherans covers more than 350 years. These years have been ones filled with broken promises, injustice, inaction, and paternalism. These same years have also given us times of hope, affirmation, and solidarity.

Have Lutherans broken the missionary strategy of Soup, Soap, and Salvation? This American Indian writer comes to the conclusion: not yet.

A new generation of young American Indian leaders is coming of age. Insightful, well educated and wise to the ways of the Church, they are our hope. May God bless them as they seek to give full voice to American Indians in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America.

Perhaps this then is the place to stop and pray. The Lord has called out to us in his own way. May we as his people open our hearts to listen to where he calls us.

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