

## **The Challenge of Ministry in Two Worlds**

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When I returned to Phoenix in January of 2001 I was greeted with 2 very distinct messages. You see this is the presbytery I left in 1982 to attend seminary. One greeting I received was, "Welcome back. We're glad you are here. Take your time." The other greeting was, "We're so glad you are here. Now we can do something!" These two approaches to my presence were reminders to me that I would be working with churches whose members had different understandings of time and who valued silence, the printed word, and majority rule differently. I reflected on the history of Indian ministry in the southwest to get a bigger picture.

Presbyterian ministry in the southwest is rooted in the contact established with Indian peoples on Indian lands. It is grounded in a witness of justice and in a belief that Indian people could and would achieve competence in areas necessary to deal with a changing world. One needs only to look back at the difference made by such places as the Ganado Mission and Cook Christian Training School in Phoenix to see that Indian people succeeded with these opportunities. But the schools of the Ganado mission are no more, and Cook is now an ecumenical institution working to re-establish strong ties with Presbyterian Indian churches in the southwest. (A number of us, Indian church leaders have been teaching as adjunct staff and know there is significant Presbyterian curriculum that is not being tapped through Cook.)

I would propose that Indian congregations in the Presbyterian Church comprise the original cadre of congregational transformation churches or what used to be known as redevelopment churches. I believe this to be so because our churches have been dealing with significant changes from the beginning. Although it may not have been change as addressed in contemporary church literature where the surrounding community changes, it has been the reality that the world around Indian churches, even the denominations of the Indian churches have changed; and Indian people have been expected to deal with the impact of these changes.

I believe that the spirituality of Indian churches, or the faith experience if you prefer, derives its strength from seeking to be faithful to Jesus Christ through changing times. I have heard nonIndians comment time after time on the ease with which Indian people offer public prayer at any time, any place when called on to do so. This is but one manifestation of the spiritual vitality that exists in our Indian churches. There is a growing appreciation among the next generation of the history and an openness to follow God's leading into the future. But Indian churches need to hear that the presbytery believes in their ministries and will stand with them as the next generation of church leaders answers the call to serve the Lord's church. The establishment of a staff position that carries primary responsibility for Indian congregations is significant, but that is only a start at the kind of relationship that is needed to demonstrate "ministry with" rather than "ministry to" American Indian communities.

In 1982 the Synod staff person for Indian ministry, Dr. Roe Lewis, reported on the need to orient nonIndian pastors to the Indian congregation and community life style. Because that orientation was not happening, nonIndian pastors were not staying very long in Indian ministry. In 1988 the Synod Associate, Rev. Cook, reported on activities in Indian churches that included work camps, mission tours, and mission support from churches in the eastern part of the U.S. Where are we today 15 to 20 years later in our communal understanding of Indian ministry or more importantly, our understanding of each other's communities? If an Indian person has held a job off the reservation or served on a committee they have already made their way into the nonIndian world. How have nonIndian persons encountered Indian ways of life? You will be hearing about some aspects of American Indian cultures in future Presbytery meetings.

At the 2002 Big Event the Rev. Martha Sadongei and I gave a team presentation on "American Indian Churches and the Presbytery." First we shared a short historical account about Indian ministry in this part of the southwest. We then proceeded to unpack the reality beyond the brief narrative. This led to a lively discussion among participants in a room of approximately 30 persons. By the end of the hour we were just getting started. If I had been more in a planning mode I would have made sure that an opportunity to continue such a discussion was provided at other times and places within

the life of our presbytery. I would like to believe that it is not too late to continue speaking with one another about Indian ministry. A missionary system that once provided for a majority of pastoral and facility expenses gave way to the inclusion of Indian churches as member congregations of the nearest presbytery. If Indian churches are to be acknowledged as part of the presbytery the new model must be relational. The dynamics of power and historical patterns of paternalism will teach us how to be different with one another.

We in the Presbytery of Grand Canyon share in Indian ministry on behalf of the entire denomination. Only 8 synods currently have such ministry. However, we should not see our presbytery mission as focused or limited to one kind of work or another. Established Indian ministry is important. So is Hispanic ministry and new church development in all types of neighborhoods, towns, and suburbs. In other words, we need to get to know one another better so that we might encourage each other in ministry and witness. Together we can be channels of the Holy Spirit's power declaring our unity in Christ. In a world of filled with the threat of violence, territorialism, insecurity, and greed we can find confidence in Christ as we are led by the Spirit. To that end let us pray together the prayer Jesus taught his disciples to pray saying, "Our Father, art in heaven....."

1. What is one thing your church could share with another church? What is one thing your church could gain from another church?

Please don't feel pressured to speak if you don't feel comfortable doing so. And please be conscious of each person in your group, giving everyone the opportunity to share if they want to.