

“LET US TELL OUR STORIES”

**The humble beginnings of the Province VIII Indigenous People’s Network
Wintertalk**

By

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The concept of gathering during winter to talk, to tell stories, to share and to learn while the earth is resting is an ancient tradition typical of many indigenous cultures throughout the world. It has been a tradition as well for indigenous members in the Episcopal Church, who set about to organize the first national Wintertalk in 1993. The first gatherings were held near Seminole, Oklahoma when native peoples across the nation, including Alaska and Hawai`i, came together. It has evolved to include educational and leadership training, workshops, special celebrations and it remains a place where the native and native at heart can continue to talk and share and expand on successes and challenges for the future.

Province VIII is one of nine provinces established by the Episcopal Church, and has a long history of dedicated commitment to serving indigenous peoples within its own province. Leadership within the Province is organized around several “clusters,” with Cluster Two concentrated on improving and supporting multicultural ministries. One of these multicultural ministries serves Native American and Native Hawaiian communities, and is known as the “Indigenous People’s Network.” In January of 2010, the Network launched its first provincial Wintertalk to extend the benefits of Wintertalk to those indigenous members residing within the Province who could not afford to attend the national Wintertalk, by holding their own gatherings in their local/regional communities.

The first provincial Wintertalk was held January 8-10, 2010 at St. Matthew’s Episcopal Church in Auburn, Seattle, Washington with a handful of attendees from Washington, Idaho, California, Hawai`i, and Canada. That gathering, entitled

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"From Pinecones to Pineapples," included members of the First Nations Committee from the Diocese of Olympia and focused on important topics in native ministry, such as the implications for the Church with the recent passage of DO 35 at the 2009 general convention, which formally repudiated the Doctrine of (European) Discovery as it applies to the Church. The gathering also sought to discuss the national church's approach to fighting domestic poverty in native communities. The featured guest speaker for the conference was The Rev. Dr. Martin Brokenleg, retired Director of the Native Studies Program at the Vancouver School of Theology, who gave a moving and impassioned look at how the Doctrine of Discovery has permeated the lives of natives, including those who are members of the Church, and offered strategies and solutions for dealing with the negative consequences stemming from the Doctrine. Also present was the Rev. Debbie Royals, then Coordinator for the Network, who explained the national Church's initiative to combat domestic poverty in Native American communities, such as the Pine Ridge reservation in South Dakota.

The second annual provincial Wintertalk was held January 7-9, 2011 at Harrah's Reno in Reno, Nevada, with a large gathering of representatives from Washington, Oregon, California, Nevada, Hawai`i, and Minnesota. That gathering included tribal church members from the Paiute Indian Nation in Nixon, Nevada, and focused on ongoing topics important to native ministry, such as preparing indigenous leadership for the 2012 General Convention, looking at indigenous approaches to iconography and religious artwork, and reviewing and discussing "Wintertalk," the 2006 award winning DVD on the subject of Wintertalk filmed at the 2004 national Wintertalk.³ Guest speakers included The Rev. Robert Two Bulls, Missioner, Department of Indian Work from the Diocese of Minnesota, Malcolm Naea Chun, then Secretary General of the Anglican Indigenous Network (AIN), and Buz Wasler of the Schön-Wasler Group, the Director and producer of "Winter Talk."

The third annual provincial Wintertalk was held January 6-8, 2012 at the Spirit Mountain Casino and Lodge in Grand Ronde, Oregon with representatives

³The DVD received many national and international film awards, including three Telly Awards and the best Native American Short at the Southern Winds film festival in Shawnee, Oklahoma.

from Washington, Oregon, California, Nevada, Idaho, Arizona, and Hawai`i. That gathering focused on building on the successful discussions held at the 2011 Wintertalk surrounding DO 35. The event was hosted by the federally recognized Confederated Tribes of the Grand Ronde Community of Oregon and the Rev. Albert Krueger, Missioner for First Nations Ministry for the Diocese of Oregon. The gathering continued to explore and further focus on the historical and legal principles underlying the Doctrine of Discovery, including its continual implications for native and non-native peoples today, and what role the Church can play in reversing the negative effects of the Doctrine. Guest speakers included Professor Robert J. Miller (Eastern Shawnee) of Lewis and Clark Law School and Chief Justice of the Confederated Tribes of Grand Ronde. Other guests were Kenneth Kahn and Rob Greene, attorneys who represented the Grand Ronde Tribe on tribal issues such as repatriation of tribal remains and restoration of the Tribe's federal status, and Dr. Cornell Pewawardy (Comanche/Kiowa), Director and Professor of Indigenous Nations Studies at Portland State University, who treated the participants to a performance of Native flute and Round Dance songs and storytelling.

Like the national Wintertalk, each provincial gathering opened with the building of the Wintertalk altar, which encouraged all participants to bring something representative from their indigenous community that they chose to share with everyone – a celebration, thanksgiving, and/or a memorial with a short story about each item shared. As the altar was built, each participant came forward and placed on the altar items of spiritual significance to them, their families, and/or their communities. At the same time, each participant provided background information on themselves and the objects that they brought with them. This presentation represented the participant's physical and spiritual presence at Wintertalk. Each provincial gathering closed with a Eucharist service, and as the altar was dismantled, altar items were taken home or gifted to others who the presenter felt were in need.

During the first and second Wintertalk, resolutions were also adopted by the participants, and were presented by provincial representatives to the national

Wintertalk. The resolution which passed at the first provincial Wintertalk simply stated:

Jesus said, "Blessed are the poor."

We know God has a preference for the poor.

We, Native people, come from the poor

and we are concerned for the soul of the Episcopal Church.

We pledge to hold out our poor hand in love

to the Episcopal Church, so it will not be lost.

Resolutions at the second Wintertalk addressed several topics of interest to native members of the Episcopalian church community. First, the group commended the Indigenous People's Network of Province VIII for organizing the second annual Wintertalk and urged the Province VIII leadership to continue their commitment and support of this annual gathering as a means for indigenous members of the Church to network, and to have intense discussions and deep learnings. Consistent with indigenous family values, Wintertalk gives the rare opportunity for families, elders and youth to meet communally as indigenous members of the Church. Second, the group urged the Indigenous People's Network of Province VIII to develop a plan and program to increase participation of indigenous families, elders and youth to attend the annual gathering through an application to the Church for a New Opportunities Grants for 2012. Third, the group urged each of the participants in their individual home dioceses, through the office of their Bishops and the diocesan Native American and Hawaiian ministries, to conduct and complete a study of the implications of DO 35, which specifically repudiated the Doctrine of Discovery as it applies to the Church. The group asked that each diocesan study explore the implications of the Resolution upon the group's participation and life in the Episcopal Church, especially in the development of ordained and lay leadership. The group also asked that the study determine and identify findings that would rectify the effects of the Resolution upon the life in the Church. The group urged that the studies be reported to each of the dioceses of the Province, the Executive Council's Committee on Indigenous Ministries (ECCIM) and at the next General Convention in 2012. The resolution also urged attendees who gathered at the 2011 National Wintertalk in New Mexico, to realize the urgency

and opportunity to respond also to the Resolution, finding their own ways to report to their respective dioceses, Provinces and to the 2012 General Convention.

Fourth, the group encouraged the National Church to better utilize and distribute the national and international award winning DVD "Winter Talk" produced in 2006 by the Schön-Wasler Group, which oriented the world to Wintertalk as a valuable means of communicating the spirit of indigenous ministry, as well as other video programs produced by the Indigenous Ministries of the Province. And finally, the adopted resolution offered congratulations to Paiute elder Mrs. Reynelda James of the Paiute Nation, upon her ordination to the permanent diaconate in the Diocese of Nevada. The Resolution recognized that her long journey in her ministry is finally being officially recognized by her diocese and the group expressed their thanks to her family, friends and church community for their support of her lifelong ministry.

These three provincial Wintertalk gatherings demonstrate that indigenous peoples and those who support indigenous ministries in the Church can gather not only nationally but locally as well to share their stories, their lives, and their ministry in the short time that they have with each other in the dead of winter. In these gatherings, participants brought themselves, their people, their culture, language, and traditions that they shared with each other along with prayer, reflection, laughter, food, and drink, as Jesus did wherever he traveled on his ministry, as on the road to Emmaus. It is hoped that each gathering brings participants a little bit of that experience and inspires proponents of native ministry to help further expand their ministry and develop annual Wintertalks in their own communities.