

INDIGENOUS PEOPLES OF NORTH AMERICA

CULTURE CATALOG

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A SPIRITUAL PEOPLE AND THEIR LEGACY

North America's Native people are very spiritual in their makeup. With their holistic worldview, traditional Native people do not distinguish between the secular and the spiritual – all of life is considered spiritual. Much of Native tribal culture and belief is based in animism. Beginning with the first settlers who came from Europe to colonize the "new world," evangelistic attempts have been made to expose Native peoples to the gospel and convert them to Christianity. Sadly, however, many of these attempts were inclusive of and even overshadowed by efforts to also convert these "uncivilized savages" to European civilization. Thus, Jesus and Christianity began to be perceived as the white man's God and a white man's religion.

Nonetheless, Christianity took hold among pockets of Native people both during the colonial period as well as after the relocation of Native tribes to reservation settings. The impact of these efforts can still be seen today among the Cherokee, the Creek, the Choctaw, and even the Lumbee. However, it must be noted that since the time of earliest exposure to the gospel, Native Americans have never experienced a widespread spiritual awakening to Biblical Christianity. Of the 5 million Native people in North America today, an estimated 95% (4,750,000) do not have a personal relationship with Jesus Christ as Savior, and have yet to experience the purpose, the joy, and the liberation from the weight of sin that only Jesus Christ can bring.

After more than 400 years of missionary efforts, why are there so many that are still without Christ? What are the reasons that have kept Native people from hearing and responding to the gospel?

One reason that might be given is that the idea of Christianity as a white man's religion has been deeply ingrained into Native thought and perspective. Many of the horrific injustices that have been suffered by Native people have been carried out under the banner of Christianity. Thus the negative remembrances and associations of forced assimilation programs and the Christian gospel have been perceived as one and the same. This is further ingrained by the holistic worldview of Native culture which perceives all of life as spiritual, and religion and culture as inseparable. The resulting conclusion for a Native person is that one has to renounce their Native identity to be a believer in Jesus.

Another reason for the limited receptivity to Biblical

Christianity has been non-contextual missionary efforts. Many of those who have come carrying the good news of Jesus have both modeled and communicated that the practice of Christianity must look and feel like it did in the hometown or country from where the missionary came. Relatively little thought was given to how the practice of Biblical Christianity might be structured or function in a way that is unique to the Native culture in which it was taking root. Certain elements in every culture are indeed challenged by the gospel; other cultural realities are simply expressions of our diversity. When a people group must abandon its own culture and embrace a different culture to come to Christ a major obstacle exists!

The third major reason for the limited spread of the gospel is that mission efforts are focused in the wrong geographical direction. Most missionary efforts are focused on Native reservations and other rural Native communities. This has resulted in most Native Christian churches being reservation-based. However, demographic studies have repeatedly communicated that as many as 70% of the United States' Native peoples reside in America's urban centers. While this challenges the romantic notions that many people have about Native people, this reality must be considered and acted upon if urban Native people are ever to be reached with the message of hope that only the gospel can bring. In Canada, this demographic does not ring as true. There, 43% of the First Nations peoples live off of reserve land, accounting for more than 300,000 tribal people. Yet even in Canada, First Nations evangelistic and church planting efforts must be balanced between reserve and non-reserve distribution of efforts lest entire population segments remain untouched with the gospel.

WHAT ARE THEY CALLED?

- *Native American* is the term used in the lower 48 states and refers to 562 federally recognized tribal groups
- In Alaska, the accepted term is *Alaska Native*, and includes 11 distinct cultures who live in 200 different villages.
- In Canada the *First Nations* people – 80 distinct tribal groupings – are spread across Canada.



HOW TO: BEING ON MISSION IN NATIVE AMERICA

If God is calling you to be on mission in Native America here are some key principles to keep in mind as you develop your on mission plan for partnering with God in planting the gospel in Native communities:

Prayer

Prayer is the single-most important factor of church **planting strategy**. It is the key which unleashes the very power of God to energize and to direct the implementation of His redemptive plan. It is the means by which your strategy is conceived and birthed. Through the practice of prayer, believers and churches are made fit vessels through whom God can work to accomplish His redemptive plan. Therefore, every effort must be made to make prayer

a primary activity of every element of your strategy plan.

Abundant Gospel Sowing

A harvest of souls cannot be reaped where gospel seeds have not been sown. Contextual evangelism strategies for broad distribution of the gospel must be a continual activity.

Intentional Church Planting

An evangelistic harvest should not be the end goal of your on mission efforts among Native Americans. The desired result is an evangelistic harvest that results in an ongoing multiplication of indigenous church planting in every Native setting where God leads you. Church planting must be modeled by a catalytic church planting team, and taught as an integral part

of new believer follow up.

Scriptural Authority

The Word of God is the unquestioned, infallible, irrefutable source of all matters of divine revelation, doctrine, Christian living, and church function. Combined with the activity of prayer, this doctrine must be the guiding light of your on mission activity. Reverence and primacy of scripture must be modeled and practiced throughout the implementation of your on mission plan.

Local Leadership

A critical aim of your on mission plan ought to be a church planting movement that is multiplied through

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WHO ARE NORTH AMERICA'S INDIGENOUS PEOPLE?

Depending on where you are, you will receive varying politically correct responses. In the lower 48 states the acceptable term is **Native American**, and refers to 562 federally recognized tribal groups in addition to other state-recognized and non-recognized tribal groups.

In Alaska, the accepted term is **Alaska Native** people, which is inclusive of 11 distinct cultures speaking 20 different languages and living in more than 200 different villages. These distinct Alaska Native people groups are inclusive of the Athabascan of interior and south-central Alaska, the Yup'ik and Cup'ik Eskimo of southwest Alaska, the Inupiaq and St. Lawrence Island Yupik of northwest to northern Alaska, the Aleut and Alutiiq from Prince William Sound to the end of

the Aleutian Island chain, and the Eyak, Tlingit, Haida, and Tsimshian of southeast Alaska. Today's indigenous Alaska Natives live in cities, towns, and villages which are separated by vast distances. Though each group is distinct, they share common goals and values.

In Canada, the accepted term is **First Nations** people, and refers to about 80 distinct tribal groupings spread across all of the provinces and territories of Canada.

In the United States Census, these tribal groupings are referred to as American Indian and Alaska Native. In Canada, the government refers to these tribal groupings as First Nations.

The Native American population in the last 20 years grew from 1,478,523 in 1980 to 1,937,391 in

1990 to 2,475,956 in 2000. That is a growth of 997,433, or 67%, over the last 20 years. The 2000 census furthermore indicates that an additional 1,643,345 people indicated Native American origin in combination with one or more other races. That brings the total Native American population in the United States to 4,119,301.

The last census taken in Canada was in 1997. At that time, the Canadian government reported that there were 799,005 people of Aboriginal origin. This included 204,115 Metis (people of North American Indian origin mixed with one or more other races), 529,040 North American Indians, and 40,220 Inuits. When added to the total Native American population in the United States, the combined total is 4,918,306.

The Native American population in the United States grew 67% over the last 20 years.



WHERE ARE NORTH AMERICA'S INDIGENOUS PEOPLE?

Native people are very diverse and are spread throughout North America's geography. The parable found in the gospels of the shepherd leaving the 99 sheep to go and find the one which was lost

communicates that every soul is eternally significant. If God is calling you to be *on mission* in planting the gospel in contextual ways among Native people, where would you begin? Acts 1:8 describes the believer's

mandate to be on mission right where God has placed you to the very ends of the earth – and everywhere in between! Consider the following information as you pray about *where* God would have you to be *on mission*.

Top five Baptist State/ National Conventions with the largest Native population:	
Canada	569,260
California	333,346
Oklahoma	273,230
Arizona	255,879
New Mexico	173,483

Top five states with the most growth in Native population over the last 10 years:	
California	91,182
Texas	52,485
Arizona	52,352
New Mexico	39,128
Alaska	34,188

Top five Canadian provinces in First Nations populations:	
Ontario	159,107
British Columbia	114,120
Manitoba	112,430
Saskatchewan	111,635
Alberta	89,812

HOW TO: BEING ON MISSION IN NATIVE AMERICA

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indigenous Native leaders. At every phase of implementation, Native tribal members should be the primary planters and leaders of the new churches that are begun. Therefore, non-Native on mission team members need to possess cross-cultural awareness and skills that are intentionally geared toward enlisting, equipping, and empowering local Native people.

Lay Leadership

Enlisting, equipping, and empowering local Native leaders are critical to your effectiveness. By utilizing Native lay leaders, the pool of potential leaders is maximized, and furthermore, the leadership is a mirror reflection of the Native people being reached. Your on mission plan needs to include moving new Native believers into ministry roles from the very beginning of their Christian experience.

House Church Expressions

House churches are a contextual match to the cultural norms and realities that are found in Native communities. When this model of church is utilized in an under-reached Native context, it allows for the rapid spread of the gospel and church planting within that cultural community. Consideration of cultural realities must be given when developing your plan for evangelism and church planting.

Churches Planting Churches

All movements have a beginning point, usually initiated by a catalytic missionary who intentionally models the type of core values and actions described here. The initial church is usually planted by the catalytic missionary. However, the DNA of churches planting churches should be intentionally implanted into this initial cell. Your on mission plan should include intentional steps to

move the initial church plant to multiply with Native lay leaders as early as possible.

Rapid Reproduction

The initial church planting team should be intentional in modeling a passionate burden for the lost, and an urgency for sharing the gospel with them. Rapid reproduction of believers and churches is a symptom of the understanding of urgency in sharing the gospel with the lost. Such rapid reproduction is also a significant evaluation factor, indicating that there are no extra-biblical obstacles that have been introduced that would slow down or prevent multiplication of new believers or churches.

Healthy Churches

In order to sustain the expansion of the rapid reproduction of churches, every church plant must be healthy in its existence. Such health starts with a proper understanding of the functions, offices, and ordinances of the church as described in the New Testament. Therefore, steps should be included in your on mission plan to model and teach Biblical church function.



NORTH AMERICAN CITIES WITH THE HIGHEST POPULATION OF NATIVE AMERICANS, FIRST NATION, AND ALASKA NATIVE PEOPLES

- Los Angeles, CA
- Phoenix, AZ
- Winnipeg, MB
- Vancouver, BC
- Tulsa, OK
- Oklahoma City, OK
- San Francisco, CA
- New York, NY
- Seattle, WA





NORTH AMERICAN MISSION BOARD, SBC
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Additional information may be obtained online at the Church Planting Village website: www.churchplantingvillage.net



THROUGH NATIVE EYES

Native America is not static in its make up. Through more than 400 years of settlement and resettlement and programs of forced assimilation, Native culture has experienced drastic changes. However, Native American, Alaska Native and First Nations people are a proud people that deeply identify with those factors that make them a unique portion of the social fabric of North America.

North America's Native people have a unique perspective of their world as reflected by their values, beliefs, tribal and family structures, as well as their use of tribal language, spiritual beliefs and other factors. Each of these factors have been shaped and influenced by many generations of life experience and interaction with what has come to be a surrounding dominant culture.

There are distinct differences today between traditional and non-traditional Native people. Traditional Native people are distinguished by their retention and use of tribal language, their observance of cultural practices, and the norms, beliefs and teachings that define their outlook on life. Most live on or near reservations or in rural communities with definable Native populations.

Non-traditional Native people are very diverse. Education and contact with the surrounding dominant culture has contributed to the varying degrees of assimilation into that culture. For greater understanding, this group can be broadly described by the following characteristics:

- ◆ *Those who abandon their culture and heritage.*

Tribal language and cultural practices are lost by severing

their ties with the Native community. They usually marry non-Native people and do not teach their children Native heritage.

- ◆ *Those who recognize the need to assimilate into the dominant culture.*

They maintain only those cultural characteristics that are not a barrier to success in the dominant society.

- ◆ *Those who choose to be bilingual and bicultural.*

This group takes advantage of both worlds and tends to be tolerant of past injustices. They prefer to live on or near the reservation, but are not strongly committed to it or its cultural practices.

- ◆ *Those who have a renewed interest in their cultural heritage.*

This group is largely middle class and well-educated. For many, some form of Christian

or other religious background is a motivating factor for the search for a connection to their heritage. They often voice their objections to injustices done in the past to Native people.

- ◆ *Those who openly identify with their cultural heritage.*

They have minimal contact with non-Native people. They maintain close ties with tribal members, participate in Native community activities and support tribal interests.

Such an understanding of non-traditional Native people is extremely important when combined with the knowledge that approximately 70% of Native people live in North America's urban centers, and that most of these are non-traditional. This in no way negates the need to use a people-specific contextual approach to reach this significant population