



THE JOURNEY OF “HOLE IN THE CLOUDS”

Casey Church (Hole in the Clouds), Pokagon Band of Potawatomi

My journey began in the spring of 1988 while working with the Indian Workers Conference of the United Methodist Church in Michigan. Here I accepted God’s call to help lead a new approach to evangelize Native Americans. I learned all I could about the spiritual and religious ways of the Native peoples while pursuing a Bachelors degree in Cultural Anthropology. God made known to me His desire to see Native people find faith and freedom in Jesus within their own culture. Now I truly felt God accepting me as a Native American Christian. Before this time I strived to please God from another culture’s religious expectations.

A forerunner in contextual ministry, the late Rev. Jim McKenny, a Prairie Band of Potawatomi of Kansas, was my spiritual mentor and guide. With his encouragement, my wife Lora and I began a meeting in our home in Grand Rapids, Michigan called “The Open Door.”

songs. Musical groups like Rainsong, Cheryl Bear and Broken Walls are leading the way.

In 1997, little did we know that we would be establishing one of the first contextualized worship services in the country. In a rented facility, 50 Native people met to experience worshipping Jesus Christ from cultural expressions familiar to them in our new contextual ministry called “All Tribes Gathering.” Not only were songs adapted to our Native way, we also used a familiar preaching approach with story-telling. We further used contextual Native Christian cultural methods to conduct weddings, funerals, blessings, puberty rights of passage, prayers, the Lord’s Supper and baptisms with unique Native American expressions. We began to use our traditional sweat lodge ceremonies as prayer meetings for special occasions. It was during this time we met Richard Twiss, who was busy promoting contextual approaches to Native ministry in his “Many Nations, One Voice” conferences throughout the country.



Pastor Fern Cloud Sharing About Jesus and the Sacred Hoop (See page 16)

Pastor Casey Church of Thunderbird Ministries

We started to praise and worship Jesus Christ from within our “own” Native American cultural forms and expressions. We would begin our services by preparing ourselves for worship time by smudging, which is done by fanning sage smoke over ourselves as a symbolic way of cleansing. Further, we also used our traditional spiritual songs with the hand drum and flute. Today there are now several Native musicians creating Native praise and worship

Upon meeting and befriending Richard, we were invited to participate in these conferences and also to join the North American Institute for Indigenous Theological Studies, where I contribute to their symposiums and their academic journal.

In Michigan I was taught to use the sacred pipe for prayer by Rev. Jim McKenny. I still use the pipe as an authentic expression of my Christian life both in community and personal prayer times. While in