



Casey and Lora Church

Michigan we ministered to a city with approximately 2,000 Natives. Now God has called us to start a Native ministry in Albuquerque, New Mexico, a city with more than 35,000 Natives where we moved in July 2000. We are currently starting a new faith community on the west side of Albuquerque called “Thunderbird Ministry.” We have become a part of the Native community and have gained trust and friendship, which are the keys to reaching Native American people. Along with starting Thunderbird Ministry in Albuquerque, we also joined the “Wiconi International” family and have helped Richard and Katherine Twiss as staff with their Living Waters Family camp in Turner, Oregon and as their southwest representatives. God is using Living Waters Family Camp to change the face of Native Christianity in North America.

Throughout all these many years in ministry, Lora (a Navajo from New Mexico) and I (a Potawatomi from Michigan) have also managed to raise a young family of five children, four daughters and one son. Throughout our ministry years our children have become examples of how children can be raised to believe in Jesus Christ while also retaining their cultural and tribal identities as Native Americans. 🌐

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## Healing the Sacred Hoop With Love and Respect

Fern Marie Cloud



*Editor's Note: On July 4, 2010, the 219th General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church USA opened in Minneapolis, MN with a worship service of 7,000 that included Pastor Fern Cloud dressed in her Native regalia, reflecting her commitment to seeing her people have the freedom to worship Jesus in a culturally meaningful way.*

My Dakota name is Aikipawin, which means Branch Woman. I am the great-great granddaughter of Dakota Chief Little Crow. I was full of hatred for white people, the Church and God. I came to be a follower of Jesus on December 8, 1978. Creator used a near-death experience and the testimony of Native believers to finally break down my resistance to His love.

I wanted my people to know Creator's love, too. But I knew that the typical approach to reaching Native people was never going to work. What my people were looking for was genuine love and respect, someone who actually was in touch with their culture and beliefs and acted on it. It has taken me almost 20 years to figure this out. I had to start with myself, to reconnect with the person God created me to be, and then I had to learn to embrace that person with love and acceptance. I understand the intergenerational trauma Native people live with. Most importantly, I know the power of love.

I have been active in contextual ministry since 1990, with our ministry called “Healing the Sacred Hoop” or “Healing the Circle of Life.” I am a cultural consultant traveling all over the U.S., and internationally sharing our experiences as a Native Christian reaching Native people through culturally relevant ministry.

Our faith in Jesus is a way of life; like the circle, it is inclusive. I describe my life as a Native minister, as one who reads the Bible and then expresses that knowledge and teachings in a way that the people I serve can relate to, through our own God-given culture.

The ones who really need to hear the gospel message will never come to church, so we go to them. My family and I are powwow dancers. We dance our prayers with the people. This sends the message that, “Yes, you can be a Christian and still enjoy the culture of your people.” We are also artists in schools, presenting the students with biblical principles through cultural teachings. We use the hoop to tell the story of how our spirit gets broken and that there is only one person who can heal that broken hoop and that is Wakan Tanka, God in our language. My family and I have been language activists, teaching our language through prayer and songs. When I interviewed with the elders for the pastor position here, they said that I have full control, but they will only sing in the Dakota language. Of course I was more than pleased to comply.

We know that our people have lost connection to who they are as a people. I realize that culture will not save them, but God has given us the wisdom to use our culture to start the healing process.

Jesus said that greater love has no person that one who would lay their life down for their friends; I have laid my life down for my people by allowing Creator to use my life to show my people how good He is and express the truth that “Jesus is the answer.” 🌐

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