

Coming in a Good Way

Coming in a good way is a phrase in Native InterVarsity¹ that implies more than an intention to honor cultural protocols. It captures a posture in chapter planting, a dependence both upon God and His wisdom embodied in communities and elders, and a contextualized theology of God's revelation and ministry. Coming in a good way finds a path to the kind of resilient, empowered faith that transforms communities. It is aware of the ways of belonging to time, people, and place that our fragmented age often neglects, and therefore, we hope, is a way that will bless InterVarsity beyond ministry to Native students². On the other side of the coin, it is aware of some ways in which evil has become enculturated into ways of the West, particularly captured in the term colonialism, and calls us all to resistance and repair.

The intended audience for this paper is campus ministry staff, supervisors, and volunteers, both Native or mixed, and non-Native, who feel a call to serve Native students. We hope this will be a resource to help get started.

Tribal Colleges and Universities (TCUs) and Native Serving Institutions (NSIs)³ are places where Native students are found in relatively higher numbers. This "discovery phase test case"⁴ sponsored by the Council for Underserved Campuses involves an application of principles in a trip taken to North Dakota Tribal Colleges.

As a mostly culturally White organization, we need to acknowledge at the onset that such a project starts at a disadvantage: we are attempting to serve a *colonized* people via an institution that has often been a tool of that colonization (higher ed); we often follow on ground "burned over" by traumatizing interactions with Whites and their churches; and our own cultural "auto-pilot" is often blind to the ways we embrace or perpetuate failed or even hurtful practices. At the last Would Jesus Eat Frybread conference, a White participant asked a Native Alaskan elder for advice on an upcoming (and somewhat hastily arranged) mission trip to a "rez." His advice? "Don't go, you'll do more harm than good." And yet we dare to go, in humble dependence on Christ, aware of his call and of the ways he has affirmed that call in open doors and opportunities that have come to us despite our ignorance and mistakes. Awareness of failure is a tipping point for greater wisdom. We dare to go because we have tasted the good fruit of the wider banquet of the King: a banquet that celebrates what is universal as well as what is particular and local.

Overview of Trip

Visiting a reservation is likely to be the closest experience one can have in these United States to visiting a foreign land. This observation is full of irony, or course, because it is we – the mostly European settlers – who are the foreigners to this place. The discomfort is only increased when we start to see the reservation holding up a mirror to our national appetites

¹ The phrase is not original with us – we probably learned it from Richard Twiss.

² InterVarsity and the Indigenous Fourth World: The Natives have a Plan to Save Us All, [internal paper draft](#).

³ Native InterVarsity Department. Colleges & Universities Serving Native Students. [Spreadsheet link](#).

⁴ This references the DIA: Discover, Incubate, Accelerate schema as a method to responsibly build good practices.

and policies, giving lie to some of our cherished national myths, and illustrating the trajectory of the many who either won't or can't keep pace with our national objectives. Yet for those who have eyes to see, there are things and people here of great beauty and power. To my regular distress, I find that my own vision is impeded by the political, socio-economic, and even scientific and theological lenses by which I unreflectively measure the Native world.⁵

Driving through North Dakota gives ample time for such reflection and conversation. Miles and miles of land optimized for large scale agricultural use, occasionally interrupted by farm buildings, towns, or soybeans languishing in large piles, their trip abroad interrupted by a trade war with China in this Trump-supporting area of the country. We visited all of the tribal colleges in North Dakota save for Nueta Hidatsa Sahnish College⁶ further to the west: Turtle Mountain Community College (TMCC) in the far north central, Cankdeska Cikana Community College (CCCC) on the Spirit Lake reservation, United Tribes Technical College (UTTC) in Bismarck, and Sitting Bull College (SBC) in Standing Rock to the south of Bismarck near the border⁷. This is largely Dakota, Lakota, and Nakota territory, with the exception of Turtle Mountain, which is Anishinaabe (also called Ojibwe or Chippewa) and Métis.

Justin Weber (ND AD), Ben Coopland (ND campus staff), Tim Webster (Native InterVarsity Resource Specialist, Oneida from Wisconsin) were the InterVarsity staff, with Bobby GreyEagle (Cru Nations staff, Dakota) joining us in the visit to Sitting Bull and UTTC. The trip was originally to include the entire area team, and some others in Native ministry in the Lakes & Plains were interested in going. After several discussions, however, we decided on a much smaller group for a couple of reasons. First, Justin and Bobby had experienced bringing a large group of InterVarsity leaders to UTTC a few weeks before. While that trip turned out well, it initially aroused concern and suspicion from the school. We didn't want to come in a way that might put anyone on the defensive. Secondly, we wanted to focus primarily on those who were either already building relationships (Bobby) or would be most likely to be the "feet on the ground" to sustain relationships (Justin and Ben).

For preparatory work, Justin had been studying the area as well as leading his area team in book discussions pertinent to Native people and theology⁸. We also met via Zoom call with InterVarsity campus minister Courtland Hopkins (Lakota Sioux from South Dakota) to talk about culture and his experience. Tim's mentor, retired judge, church leader, and Chippewa elder Richard Ackley, had provided us with several contacts, the most important of whom was the Rev. John Floberg, an Episcopal priest with a wonderful reputation in the Standing Rock community, some occasional ministry at Sitting Bull, connections with many students there, and experience with para-church partnerships in his work running a Young Life ministry. We first

⁵ Thomas Berger, in the preface to *A Village Journey* (which chronicles the detrimental effects of ANSCA on Alaskan Natives) wisely summarizes this, writing that some "...are worried by the fact that the Native peoples believe in self-determination and a just settlement to their land claims rather than letting themselves be quietly assimilated. At the other extreme, there are persons who romanticize the Natives, trying to discover in them qualities lost by urban residents, and are dismayed when the Natives do not conform to an idealized image." One can find examples of this sort in most of our binary categories (such as politically left or right): the problem is the categories.

⁶ <https://nhsc.edu/> at Fort Berthold

⁷ <https://sittingbull.edu/>, <http://www.littlehoop.edu/>, <https://uttc.edu/>, <https://www.tm.edu/>

⁸ Their reading included Twiss, Richard. *Rescuing the Gospel from the Cowboys*. IVP.

met with Father John before visiting Sitting Bull, visited some important sites in Standing Rock with Bobby's guidance, and then visited UTTC at the end of the day.

Father John helped us with our second important local contact, Rev. Larry Thiele, a Lakota man who pastors both the Episcopal and Lutheran churches at Spirit Lake. Pastor Larry helped us with some context for CCCC. Since we had no invitation or any specific people to visit at CCCC, we went to the campus security office for permission to get some lunch at the cafeteria (the only unlocked door). God again blessed this visit in unexpected ways. While in the cafeteria and adjoining bookstore, Justin and Ben spoke with the person in charge there, who was interested in our visit and connected us with an administrator. We ended up with a detailed tour of the whole school and had conversations with two Christian faculty members. The visit to Turtle Mountain was similarly serendipitous. Here we had no contacts at all, and set our expectations to a very brief visit in the lobby (after hours of driving). Tim struck up a conversation with the Native woman who was acting as receptionist at the office, who it turned out is a Christian woman from the local Catholic church. After talking for a while, she invited us to tour the campus. As the relationship deepened, she ended up bringing us to the executive wing and we had conversations with top administrators at the school.

As we had hoped, Justin has continued in his relationship with Bobby. At UTTC, the president ended up refurbishing the chapel and inviting Bobby and Justin (Cru and InterVarsity) to partner in providing Sunday afternoon services to students. Justin and Ben have continued visiting and building relationships at CCCC and TMCC, have been offered some opportunity for partnership, and continued to meet Christians who work at those places.

What follows in this reflection is organized by some key ideas or practices and illustrated with experiences and stories. Where the narrative seems to blend practice and principle, it is because our instincts and intentions are generally evident in our actions. We can't just execute the best practice: we must do it in the right way, which in the idiom of many Native tribes involves a good mind and a good heart.

Relationship & Authority

This item is first because it is hard to overstate. In conventional InterVarsity, our first inclination is often to build relationships with students, since it is students that we hope to serve (we might even have a successful ministry with no other relationships on campus). Our credibility, or authority in their lives, comes from the quality of this primary relationship. We could call this a "bottom-up" approach to planting. One deals with parents or various campus entities as occasion warrants. On campus, these other relationships can sometimes seem to interfere (or at least "take our time"). However, it is vitally **important to take a more holistic view of Native students**, considering the various relational dimensions of their lives:

- "Nuclear" family and extended family, often including people that do not have a close blood-relation but still treated like close family. I was surprised one day on the Oneida reservation to learn that a dear lady in our language class that everyone referred to as "auntie" actually was the aunt of someone in the group. In many tribes, grandparents and other extended family have significant roles raising children.

- Tribe is always important, and often clan is, too. It is not unusual for a Native student to have relations in more than one tribe, though they can typically only be enrolled in one.
- Relationships are not just synchronic but diachronic: the importance of ancestors as well as future generations is a lived reality. In *Neither Wolf Nor Dog*, Ken Nerburn's character Dan says "You teach your children that Abraham Lincoln freed the slaves. Why don't you teach them that he made you all slave-freers and that you are now his children and must uphold his honor? That's what we do." ⁹
- Campus faculty and support staff. Tribal colleges are usually small and local and people know each other. NSIs, though often larger, generally have support services and hubs for social connections for Native students, who will find more in common with each other than with the larger student body even if they are from widely separated tribes. In a Center for Community College Student Engagement study¹⁰, students cite the quality of relationships as highly important in Tribal Colleges.

Here is a sampling of why a holistic relational context is important in Native ministry, and often more prominent than in conventional InterVarsity ministry:

- Identity is more communal
- Conversion is more deeply related to family (note the relational aspects of the "Native 5 Thresholds"¹¹)
- Salvation/Renewal often seen in a group context
- Family matters are much more likely to impinge upon school life. For example, a student might suddenly back out of a weekend conference because of a family need back home, be more likely to leave school because of "homesickness" etc.
- The community (including family and school) may see a college student as a "success story," have high hopes for such a student and what this student might ultimately bring back to the community.
- Indigenous "ways of knowing" generally place more trust and weight upon character, role in community, and upon connection to "our ways" as embodied in traditional roles and stories than upon academic pedigrees or other things that grant authority in majority culture.

Why does this matter for an initial "coming in a good way"? One enters a holistically relational ministry with a holistically relational posture. An Oneida elder once told me that he can tell a "fraud" Indian from a "real" one based on whether they can have a conversation about extended family. Coming in a good way is a posture that says, ***"We know we need to build relationship and trust here, and we won't rush anything by building without a relational foundation."***

This is why our ND trip was **deliberately "top-down,"** i.e. starting with leaders and influencers. These are the people who have wisdom to help and the trust of the community.

⁹ Nerburn, Kent. *Neither Wolf nor Dog: On Forgotten Roads with an Indian Elder* (pp. 276-277). New World Library.

¹⁰ Center for Community College Student Engagement. *Preserving Culture and Planning for the Future: An Exploration of Student Experiences at Tribal Colleges.* <https://www.ccsse.org/center/sr2019/>

¹¹ <http://native.intervarsity.org/start-something-native>

Aside from “coming in a good way,” another phrase one hears regularly in Native InterVarsity is “seeing and honoring.” We can only truly honor Native people if we build our capacity to perceive the weight or importance that they place on relationship.

Gift-giving is an important part of relationship building. In ND we traveled with a trunk full of gifts. It is a gesture of thanks to those who gave their time to meet with us, but also relates to a common Native tradition of giving a gift when coming on someone else’s land as part of seeking a welcome or welcoming protocol. We gave gifts especially to those in authority. As far as possible, we try to give gifts that are personally or culturally significant. For example, I brought food from the reservation in Oneida, including apple jam that my wife and I made from apples we picked on the reservation orchard. When in doubt, a gift of a local favorite coffee seems to be a good stand-by for many in Native InterVarsity.

As non-Native men, Justin and Ben have certainly been able to build relationships. Tim’s status as an enrolled Oneida (a tribe not indigenous to ND) on the trip, however, may have made initial connections easier. Having such a person on such trips is likely a good practice. It brings a certain amount of credibility that cultural competence, academic or other credentials do not. One of my relatives died at the boarding school at Fort Totten years ago. Bobby is Dakota. These are meaningful connections. Another is service over time. Father John has over 25 years serving at Standing Rock¹². Ben and his wife foster Native children.

Theologically, coming in a good way means we work from relationships that God has already given, trusting that they are spiritually significant and guided by him. If we look at relationships too instrumentally or strategically, we might look past opportunities in front of our noses in favor of those that fit some preconceived goal. It was worth the extra time in ND when we sought out and strengthened the relationships and partnerships God had already given¹³, and expanded through those (more about this in the next section).

Partnership

Partnerships take time and emotional energy, so it is understandable that the primarily partnerships we have fostered in InterVarsity are with donors. In Native ministry, however, partnership takes on additional and necessary dimensions.

Access. As with private colleges, we cannot take TCU campus access or access to Native resource offices at NSIs for granted. Partnership with key administrators or leaders (we often refer to them as the “gatekeepers”) must be developed as a matter of access.

Resourcing. Native students, and TCUs in particular, are under-resourced.¹⁴ It is not unusual for aboriginal peoples to note the multiple small competing churches that crop

¹² https://bismarcktribune.com/news/state-and-regional/standing-rock-clergy-took-different-approaches-to-protest/article_c259e095-5cae-569a-ba67-7c2249a193e4.html

¹³ Luke 10, 5-7 (ESV) “Whatever house you enter, first say, ‘Peace be to this house!’ And if a son of peace is there, your peace will rest upon him... do not go from house to house.”

¹⁴ “Tribal Colleges are chronically underfunded requiring them to charge tuition and fees that on the average are 52 percent higher than those charged by all of the nation’s two-year public institutions.” <http://www.aihec.org/our-stories/TCUmovement.htm>

up on their lands. When people and institutions are struggling for survival, however, duplication of resources or anything that undermines current resource allocation is received as an immoral waste. The right thing for various entities to do is cooperate to spread the resources as far as possible.

Knowledge. Know-how is not cheap, and experience often hard won. On our ND trip, it was apparent how much we needed Pastor Larry's directions when the Google clearly hadn't taken any care in mapping the Spirit Lake reservation. Our outsider knowledge (and cell phone mapping) was useless. Partnership acknowledges the wisdom of those God has been guiding long before we showed up.

Leadership Development. Native students and the community at large need their leaders, need models of indigenous leadership, and respond with pride when their leaders are honored by partnership. At a WJEF event, Native leader Mark Charles wisely insisted that we have Native leaders wherever possible, even on the kitchen food preparation team. It is not unusual for a kind of deference or "learned dependence" to take over when White "experts" show up. Resilience and renewal in Native communities requires that Native leadership be honored and developed.

Native InterVarsity's **partnership with Cru Nations** is an example of fruitful partnership, and not just for the national WJEF conference. When Donnie Begay and his wife Rene (who are the national directors of Cru Nations) moved to Albuquerque, they came to an area that had no Cru Nations ministry. They acted as friends and partners and began, without fanfare, serving the local Native small group even through it was part of IV's ministry.

The ministry in ND exemplifies this value of partnership. When Justin (AD) contacted Tim for help, Tim noted that part of the proposed itinerary was in Bobby GreyEagle's area (Cru Nations staff). Justin contacted Bobby, who ended up coming along and arranging key meetings. Tim also asked Richard (an Ojibwe elder and advisor), who put him in touch with his friend Father John. John and Bobby, as it turned out, were already partnering on some youth ministry. John, in turn, put the group in contact with another Native leader, Pastor Larry near another TCU. After several months, partnerships are still growing at both Spirit Lake and United Tribe's and resulted in a kick-off event at UTTC. Bobby had been building partnership for years there with the administration, and they sponsored the event.

While relationships of respect and cooperation do not always lead to close partnership, "coming in a good way" maintains a **posture of openness to partnership**. Evangelical ministries, by contrast, can have a posture of competitiveness or suspicion, even (perhaps especially) where doctrine and methods are nearly identical. "Top-down" expressions of unity (from the Urbana stage, for example) are important, but don't always mitigate competitiveness on campus. Fruitful Native ministry often works "**bottom-up,**" working together in practical ways that then require permission from or explanation to the larger organization.¹⁵ Father Floberg pointed out various "newcomer" churches to Standing Rock, and expressed concern that pressure to report success to off-reservation funding sources may run contrary to

¹⁵ For example, Cru Nations and Native IV have asked their legal departments for help in drafting a "memorandum of understanding" to help the organizations understand the nature of the partnership and make practical things like resource sharing easier.

community need for unity. We sometimes joke in Native ministry that the last thing the reservation needs is another White organization showing up to plant a territorial flag. There is a bad history of Christian denominations staking claims: it is a legacy of colonialism, a topic to which we now turn.

Decolonization, Resistance, and Resilience

It is beyond the scope of this paper (and the knowledge of its author) to account for the origins of colonialism or examine its varieties, but a brief discussion will help keep the idea from being too abstract to be useful.

Colonial powers extend their sovereignty beyond their homelands through direct rule or influence, displacing or subjugating people in the colonized lands, and extracting or repurposing resources, strategic locations, and labor, all for their own interests (and often in competition with other colonial powers). *Settler* colonialism (the U.S., Canada, and Australia being prominent examples) involves large-scale immigration. In the Bible, Rome is probably the best example of colonialism, though there are similar things going on in the behavior of any empire to vassal peoples.

Many would say that colonialism took on a new twist in the enlightenment, where ideas of White supremacy and race were given a (pseudo)scientific basis. Further, in countries influenced by Christianity colonialism required a theological rationalization to justify behavior that otherwise looks like simple greed, oppression, or unjustified warfare. That is, colonialism, like the institution of slavery, leads to an uneasy conscience for those who profess a different way.

Settler colonists, especially those who have broken from the home country, share the need of all peoples to meaningfully account for themselves. Colonists develop things like origin myths and sacred ideals or objects (like “the land of the free” or the constitution) to spiritually locate themselves in the world. Add to this the trauma that many experienced in their home countries or in transitioning to this country. We could well call them refugees rather than immigrants or pilgrims. We have a fertile soil for misrepresentation and abuse.

Why does this matter? For many Americans, the colonists and their conflicts are in the distant past, Native Americans are a diminishing minority group¹⁶, and national myths are assumptions that go unexamined. For indigenous people, the colonists are still occupying their lands, the U.S. government is still an impediment to their self-determination, abuse of power and privilege by Whites is ongoing, and many of the things Whites believe about themselves are lies. So, coming in a good way requires at least some knowledge of this great divide in experience and understanding.

It also requires some subtlety in interpreting what one sees, because reactions to living in this reality will vary. Political activism or acts of resistance, while certainly present at times among indigenous peoples, are not the only ways to respond to injustice.¹⁷ Some people will

¹⁶ We could look at this as a form of racism. Not the overt form of the sort directed against Blacks, but a sort that ignores Native issues and peoples. It is no wonder that Native people long for visibility.

¹⁷ Activist responses may actually be more common from White advocates and friends.

internalize shame, hopelessness, or feelings of inferiority. Others will respond with a matter-of-fact pragmatism and resourcefulness, even a stoic indifference. Some will game the system and get back what they can. A few will respond with a grace and depth of forgiveness that takes one's breath away, celebrating any small step in the right direction. **All live under the shadow of colonialism.**

When we visited Standing Rock with Bobby GreyEagle, he was careful to show us sites of the NODAPL protests. It seems peaceful now when one stops by, the only remaining evidence a long, wide pipeline scar of grassless prairie beneath the feet of a herd of bison. The large mural in the Episcopal church and the collage of photos and placards along the wall of the library at Sitting Bull college, however, still stand in mute testimony to the travesties endured there. Bobby showed us these things because we needed to see them. One simply cannot minister in such a place without entering into its history.

Some elders will bristle at a simplistic message of *healing*. There will be no Hollywood endings for many stories on the reservation. Instead, they want to build *resilience* in the face of challenges. It is literally a matter of life and death for young Native people. Suicide rates among the college aged are reported to be higher than another other ethnicity, and especially high among young men.¹⁸ Rates of Native deaths at the hands of the police generally exceeds that of Blacks.¹⁹ Native women are incarcerated at six times the rate of White women.²⁰ Aaron Huey states, "the last chapter in any successful genocide is the one in which the oppressor can remove their hands and say, 'my god, what are these people doing to themselves? ...they're killing themselves while we watch them die.'"²¹

The positive side of decolonization is a recovery of Native culture and identity, traditional sources of strength and resilience that have been threatened. After a couple hundred years of assimilation policies, it is clear that trying to make Native people White is not making most of them stronger. Coming in a good way requires coming in a way that joins in this recovery. "Decolonization of the mind" is a phrase that describes what must be done, not only for White perpetrators²², but for those who have internalized the messages of colonization, messages of self-hatred that leads to self-destruction. Discipleship cannot begin unless it begins here. In our North Dakota trip we didn't articulate this philosophy in so many words, but tried in our posture and conversations to make it clear that we wanted to get behind the goals of the local leaders and their institutions as well as distancing ourselves from colonizing attitudes.

There are also small ways we practiced that attempted to indirectly communicate support and seemed in some cases to be appreciated. We always asked permission to visit (reception desk, security officer, administrator) to communicate that we respected lines of authority. We

¹⁸ Almendrala, Anna. Native American Youth Suicide Rates Are At Crisis Levels. The Huffington Post, 12/20/16, and many other sources on the internet.

¹⁹ Koerth-Baker, Maggie. Police Violence Against Native Americans Goes Far Beyond Standing Rock. ABCNews, 12/2/16.

²⁰ Flanagan, Jake. Native Americans are the unseen victims of a broken US justice system. Quartz, 4/27/15. Etc., etc. Just pick your measure of societal trauma and google it preceded by 'Native.'

²¹ Huey, Aaron. Amerca's native prisoners of war. TED talk, 9/10. Available on Youtube.com.

²² Indeed, Judge Ackley argues that White people are *more* vulnerable to colonialism and have *fewer* psychological resources to fight it. An idea like White supremacy is spiritually damaging for anyone who believes it, even when the toll in misery is more one-sided.

bought lunch on campus, from a local eatery, or from the tribally owned business (casino in this case). We also spent time early on at two colleges in the campus bookstore, purchasing items, for example, made by local artists. This seemed to make a difference at Sitting Bull, where after an extended time in the bookstore an administrator came to check up on us, then (I believe) that same administrator touched base with us after we left the library NODAPL display and engaged in longer conversation.

Ministry proceeding in many TCUs (and ministry budgets) will have to address poverty and injustice in practical ways, ways that typically would seem optional to us in campus ministry. For example, a recent report on TCUs, found that persistence in college was threatened in nearly 50% of students by lack of internet access at home or computer equipment; 34% of students worried about running out of money for food, and 25% actually did go hungry at some point during the school year.²³ At least three of the colleges we visited had community volunteers come regularly (Father John went once a month) to provide a free meal to students.

We can, then, look at colonialism as policies or activities that account for difficult circumstances Native people find themselves in. On a deeper level, it can capture an internal condition of false belief and sin that accounts for the intractability of these problems. Coming in a good way has spiritual dimensions that imply theological correctives.

Revelation & Openness

One way that coming in a good way prompts a theological adjustment²⁴ is in our view of revelation and God's activity. It is becoming more common in InterVarsity to recognize God's Spirit preceding us in planting, evangelism, and ministry in general. That is, God is already at work before we show up, drawing people to himself. Our job is simply to join him. This view takes some pressure off us (we don't have to force anything or make it up), deepens our dependence, humility and discernment, relativizes our organizational loyalty, and de-centers our ministry strategy and techniques.

Coming in a good way can take this sensibility a step further. Beyond individuals, can we conceive of God's activity, his revelation, in things like culture, history, even traditional stories or the land itself? Paul's appropriation of the Greek poets in Acts 17:28 could be taken in a purely instrumental way, as an example of Paul's rhetorical cleverness. However, he had already grounded his reflection in theology, in God's sovereign provision: "...he himself gives to all mankind life and breath and everything...having determined their allotted periods and the boundaries of their dwelling place, that they should seek God, in the hope that they might feel their way toward him and find him. Yet he is actually not far from each one of us," (Acts 17:25-27, ESV). I keep discovering things in my own Oneida culture that deepen my faith in Jesus. Coming in a good way includes this anticipation.

²³ Center for Community College Student Engagement. Preserving Culture and Planning for the Future: An Exploration of Student Experiences at Tribal Colleges.

²⁴ For a more full theological reflection on mission, see Paladino, Dave, Rethinking the American Evangelical Church's Apostolic Impulse in Light of Native American Hospitality (Vineyard Scholars Conference, 2018).

We've joked in Native InterVarsity that there are not enough "loves" in our national purpose statement. We'd like to include not just growing in love for God's people of every ethnicity and culture, but growing in love for the cultures and identities that God gifted to them, as well as love for God's land, the revelation and context of his grace. While this latter theology of the land is a stretch for some, the Acts 17 passage (and others) can at least open the conversation. Part of this anticipation of God's revelation includes the possibility that we can learn from Native points of view and ways of knowing. One anticipates that the ancient Israelites would have been more comfortable with the rich Native views of land as organism, gift, source of identity, etc. rather than the modern reductionist view of land as commodity.

This sort of openness can at times require a suspension of judgement. Even syncretism, Richard Twiss argues, can be a natural step towards full contextualization, and ought not to be stamped out before it can mature.²⁵ It can also be disorienting. One of my student coachees, overcome by the differentness of it all and guilt over American historical abuses of the tribe she was getting to know, began to feel a sort of paralysis of doubt in her own voice and the possibility that the gospel could be good news to Native people. But as she began to see Jesus going before her, she regained a sense of calling. In a conversation with Native Pastor Thiele at Spirit Lake, he too brought us back to the centrality of Jesus when he asked us, "What do you say when people say Jesus is White?" Just as Jesus fulfills the cultural roles of prophet, priest, king and wise man, so too he can fulfill roles like Peacemaker, chief, and medicine man, though people who know the culture best are likely the ones who will receive that revelation.

Success

Native ministry requires that we re-envision what success means and when we have achieved it.

The Long Haul. Sometimes this can seem very modest. Initially, Willie and Megan Krischke defined success in their ministry to be sticking with it for 10 years. Their own formation, as well as the development of relationships necessary for ministry, was a long-term proposition. Bobby GreyEagle and Father Floberg have a similar long-term approach. John calls his a 300-year plan (referring to the time it took Christianity to take root in Norway). Metrics that focus on quick cycles and large numbers will likely drive ministry that will do more harm than good.

Relational. Bobby likes to report the metric of "number of touches," i.e. the number of relational contacts he makes, which might include things like helping at a basketball game or visiting a grieving family. Similarly, judge Ackley conceives of success relationally. One begins with respect and reciprocity, ultimately moves to relationships that involve mutual responsibility to each other (a sort of 4 Thresholds of Native Planting). Movement along this progression might be a measure of "success."

Leadership. The emergence of Native campus ministers is a significant sign of success, as it signals empowered indigenous leadership. There are many ways in which these young Native staff carry burdens or responsibilities that their White counterparts don't,

²⁵ Twiss, Richard, *Rescuing the Gospel from the Cowboys*, (p.31). InterVarsity Press.

and it is important to consider this when measuring their “success.” They are successful just by making it to this position!

Their Terms. Ultimately, true partnership and respect requires that we defer in large part to *Native* perspectives of success. It is a legacy of colonialism for an outside organization to suppose that it can unilaterally define the problems, determine the solutions, adjudicate readings of the scriptures, settle best practices, etc.

For purposes of our ND trip, just getting in the door felt like success. Being welcomed and given an opportunity to begin to build friendships, especially friendships with cultural or institutional leaders and potential ministry partners, was our hope. When the relationship reaches a point of mutuality (where school and parachurch work together on something that advances the concerns of both), such as the opportunity that Justin and Bobby have to serve at UTTC Sunday afternoons, then I think we can say that we have come in a good way and ministry is likely to flourish.

Reflection Questions

What can we be doing to increase our ability to “see and honor” Native people? Do we have some sense of the history, the struggles, and the joys of the people of this place?

Where are there opportunities to build relationships with Native people at this school? How can we connect from relationships we already have?

Where are there opportunities to serve in area of need that our hosts identify?

Can we begin to identify where God is at work here? Is there some partner who we could come alongside?

Where are there cultural “blindness,” intractable problems, places of racialization, paternalism, sovereignty disputes, or other indicators that colonialism may be coming into play here?

What is Creator saying about how to measure the success of ministry on this campus?