



# Native Sons



## Equipping Native Leaders to Reach Native Americans

### PASTOR KATHRYN PIERCE

#### CHRISTMAS CREATIONS

- In 1867, a Boston industrialist heard Charles Dickens read a Christmas Carol and was so moved he closed his factory on Christmas Day and gave every one of his employees a turkey.
- We abbreviate Christmas as X-mas because of ancient tradition. X is the Greek letter "chi" which is an abbreviation for "Christ" in Greek.
- The old English custom of wassailing was to toast to someone's long life at Christmastide and was the forerunner for the tradition of Christmas caroling which St. Francis of Assisi began in the 13th century in the church.

#### PRAYER POINTS

- Pastor Kathryn's car recently died so she is now in need of reliable transportation. If you would like to help her so she can get another car her address is: Teesto Crossroad Assembly; HC 63, Box 315; Winslow, AZ, 86047

#### John & Theresa Flood US Missionaries to Native Americans

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"Ministry is definitely a faith walk. A lot of times it feels like you do not know what you are doing, where you are going, or how it is going to work out."

Pastor Kathryn first began ministry among the Navajo in NM & AZ about 20 years ago. They had spent 10 years ministering in OK and felt God calling them to minister to the Navajo. Moving in March, the family, including children and grown children with their own families, loaded everything they could onto a trailer and lived in a tent outside of Gallup for about 2 months. "We dealt with rain, ice, snow, heat, windstorms, and sandstorms in those two months. The tent blew down several times. On good days the kids would go out climbing on the rocks and cliffs, but we were trying to figure out how to feed the family and survive. Eventually, we were able to rent a 3-bedroom trailer.

She and her husband served as youth pastors for a year in a Native church in Gallup, then a door opened in Houck, AZ for them to minister to the youth there. Shortly after, the interim pastor stepped down and the district asked them to take the church. She says, "This was God opening the door,

but it was hard at first.

Pastor Kathryn's journey has been a long one. They ministered at the church in Houck for 5 years and this led into missions. She and her husband itinerated in 23 states and many reservations. While itinerating they attended a Native American Fellowship Convocation in Albuquerque, NM. During the Convocation her husband went to be with the Lord.

For a time Kathryn returned to Oklahoma, but eventually she accepted the pastorate

at Teesto Crossroad Assembly, which is about 40 miles from Winslow, AZ. It is the first church she and her husband had interviewed at years earlier. Shortly after taking the church the head of the Intercultural department called and suggested that she become a missionary associate (MA). This requires less fundraising than become a full missionary and eases itineration concerns. Itineration is extremely difficult while pastoring a church!

Pastor Kathryn ministers among the Navajo, but is a Muscogee Creek from Oklahoma. Even though her parents were saved, out of curiosity she became involved in Muscogee tradition. In college she majored in Native American Art and Silversmithing and some of her paintings hang in museums.

When she came to Christ Native people were being told that they needed to give up everything from their cultures. She had friends that threw out everything. She says, "I disagree. God created us and not everything in Native culture is bad, but it was taught at that time that everything that had to do with



Pastor Kathryn Pierce

#### ON A PERSONAL NOTE

I have been hard at work interviewing Native pastors, missionaries, and ministers appointed by their districts who are ministering at Native churches. I have interviewed about 70 pastors thus far and visited five different reservations, including two distinct areas on the Navajo Rez. I am learning a great deal about each area and the challenges of ministering in Native country. Almost everyone I speak to agrees on the need to provide pre-field training for those that want to minister to and among Native people. Top of the list for what should happen as part of training is an extended period of training in the area that a missionary proposes to go to.

Theresa continues to love teaching and although she has some challenging students this year she finds the antics of a number of these quite amusing. When I was a Christian school administrator and Children's pastor I used to encourage the parents of mischievous children that they were leaders seeking

to exercise their gifts. Theresa has found this to be very much true and tends to delight in these above the less challenging students. The parents of her children are always thrilled to see the changes in their children's lives after Theresa has worked with them for a while. He school's new facility continues to face delays in its completion. They now hope that it will be sometime early in January.

Levi, Alicia, and the boys are doing well. Alicia will be graduating with a bachelor's in nursing in the spring. Levi has recently accepted an internship starting in January at the church they attend, but is still looking for a paying ministry position. His fishing tour-guide business is going well and helps to supplement their income.

Caleb is doing well. Apparently he has a new girlfriend. He is plan-

ning on coming to visit sometime in January, but he is waiting on the December/January firehouse schedule to find out when he can come.

*We wish you all a  
Merry Christmas  
and Happy New Year!*



Native culture was wrong. There are some things that are dedicated to spirits and so are unacceptable, but there are things in our cultures that tie into the Bible such as shepherding and sheep. Native food is wonderful!"

This false teaching that demands Native people give up everything in their culture to follow Jesus has existed for centuries. It is found in every denomination, including the AG, and was still being taught in the 1970s and 80s. There are still some that believe and teach this.

Every Native American culture is unique. Pastor Kathryn notes the importance of understanding the history and culture of the particular tribe in order to minister effectively. Native history involves a lot of hurt including: being forced off one's homeland and forced into land prisons (reservations), being denied the ability to hunt or work, being forced to live off government handouts that were often not enough to survive, and having one's children forcefully taken and raised in boarding schools where they were often physically, sexually, and verbally abused. Native people often face ongoing struggles because of historically created circumstances. Outsiders need to be aware of these in order to minister in a respectful and sensitive way. She says, "Sometimes when we come from other cultures and other places we do not think about these things. Native people look at how you approach them. Our approach can open people up or close them down. You cannot go in with the idea that you are going to fix the people."

Teesto is a small community of 495 people. The surrounding communities are equally small and very spread out. There are a few main paved

roads, but most of the roads in the area are dirt roads subject to being washed out by the rains. Sometimes the roads are left in disrepair while the tribe and state debate whose responsibility it is to maintain them. Most homes are located far apart and far from the graded roads. Driveways are created by driving across the desert terrain. Sometimes you can see a group of 2-3 homes, often with a Hogan among them. These are family homes where children build a small home next to their parents. There are a few tribal communities located off the paved roads, but these are rented homes.

Like the housing, and perhaps because of the housing, many of the Navajo people in this area live isolated lives. Pastor Kathryn related to me that many of the people in her church did not fellowship together, this seems typical for this area of the Rez. It is hard to grow in Christ without community. Not long ago God opened several community building doors in Teesto. This occurred as Pastor Kathryn regularly encouraged the people to have prayer meetings in their homes. Initially the people were reluctant, but finally one young man volunteered to host a home prayer meeting. He told of things he struggled with including demonic things showing up at his house. They all prayed over his home anointing it with oil. To be invited to someone's house is a massive thing among the Navajo—it shows acceptance. This led to others opening up about their needs and asking that their homes be anointed and prayed over. Now, the people are beginning to visit and spend time with each other.

The second community building event is connected to a historically recent problem caused by the

US government. The Hopi people have a reservation within the Navajo reservation. For many years there was joint use land where both Hopi and Navajo lived. In the mid 1970's the US Government awarded this land to the Hopi, forcing many Navajo out homes they had lived in for multiple generations. Tensions have existed between the Hopi and Navajo ever since. Recently a Hopi Day of prayer was started. Navajo and Hopi churches of all denominations gather on the first Sunday of each month. They begin at 4:00 with an extended time of prayer, followed by a fellowship meal, then the evening service of praise, prayer, worship, and preaching. This month's service, which I attended, included an extended time of song by the various churches singing in Hopi and Navajo. 16 churches attended this month and God is using these meetings to heal the wounds, break down strongholds, and heal divisions.

Pastor Kathryn is a sectional presbyter and she regularly visits the 8 churches within her section, but they are extremely spread out. Like all reservations there are serious problems with substance abuse, depression, suicide, gang violence, etc. in the Teesto area. Because the community is so small and the area so spread out the children in this area continue to be sent to boarding schools, normally at five years of age. There is very little employment in the area and many do not have running water or electricity in their homes.

Pastor Kathryn says, "Ministry is all about relationships. The Lord networks us in order to strengthen us." Her ministry may seem small by comparison to many, but the Lord is giving her ministry opportunities and developing communal relationships through her that are nothing short of miraculous.



Many know about the Navajo Code-Talkers because of the movie *Windtalkers* (2002). Fifth

Marine Divisional Signal Officer Major Howard Conner in discussing Iwo Jima stated, "The entire operation was directed by Navajo code ... Were it not for the Navajo Code Talkers, the Marines never would have taken Iwo Jima."

Navajo is one of the hardest languages to learn. One word can mean four different things based on how it is pronounced. For decades the US government had tried to eradicate Navajo and all other Native American languages. In 1942 Navajo was an entirely oral language with no alphabet. In that same year WWII was going very poorly for the Allies: France had fallen, Britain was staggering, the Japanese had crippled the US fleet at Pearl Harbor. Germany had penetrated deep into the Soviet Union. German subs were reek-



## The Navajo Code-Talkers

ing havoc on ships leaving US and Russian ports.

A 50 year old civil engineer, Philip Johnson came up with the idea of the Code Talkers. The son of missionaries he grew up with the Navajo and knew their language. He came up with the idea of a code based on the Navajo language which he presented this to Marine Lieutenant Colonel James E. Jones at Camp Pendleton. Although skeptical, Johnson persuaded Jones to test the idea. Four bi-lingual Navajo were recruited who accurately transmitted and translated orders while in separate rooms. This impressed Major General Clayton Vogel of Camp Elliot who wanted to recruit 200 young, well-educated, bi-lingual Navajos as Marine communication specialists. Washington only authorized 30.

Adjusting to the military discipline of the Marines was sometimes difficult for the new recruits, but they proved to be tougher than most of the white Marines because of reservation life. The Navajos were told to devise a code in their language that would baffle the enemy. Code words needed to be short and easily learned. They developed a two-part code. The first part involved a 26-letter phonetic alphabet based on Navajo names for ani-

mals and a handful of other words. The second part was a 211-word English vocabulary with Navajo synonyms. The Navajo system was faster, more accurate, and more reliable than the sophisticated electronic system the Marines had been using. The Code-Talkers had proven themselves and by August of 1943 nearly 200 had been recruited and trained.

In the jungles of the Pacific islands the Navajos' Spartan habits, ingenuity, scouting, tracking and combat skills, and disregard for hardship made them ideal Marines. Though originally assigned to low-level positions, their skills and stamina made them virtually indispensable. However, often they were mistaken for enemy combatants and some eventually had white soldiers assigned to be with them at all times for their protection.

The Navajo and all Native people honor & hold their veterans in high esteem.

Pastor Kathryn's church has 3 Code-Talker families in it who are honored on military holidays.



*Information for this article taken from historynet.com.*