

'I WILL POUR OUT MY SPIRIT ON ALL FLESH' NATIVE AMERICAN SPIRITUALITY IN NORTH CAROLINA

PROPER 25, YEAR C

Lectionary Texts: Jeremiah 14:7-10, 19-22 II Timothy 4:6-8, 16-18	Psalm 65; 84:1-7 Luke 18:9-14
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Focus Text: Joel 2:23-32

²³O children of Zion, be glad and rejoice in the Lord your God; for God has given the early rain for your vindication, God has poured down for you abundant rain, the early and the later rain, as before. ²⁴The threshing floors shall be full of grain, the vats shall overflow with wine and oil. ²⁵I will repay you for the years that the swarming locust has eaten, the hopper, the destroyer, and the cutter, my great army, which I sent against you. ²⁶You shall eat in plenty and be satisfied, and praise the name of the Lord your God, who has dealt wondrously with you. And my people shall never again be put to shame. ²⁷You shall know that I am in the midst of Israel, and that I, the Lord, am your God and there is no other. And my people shall never again be put to shame. ²⁸Then afterward I will pour out my spirit on all flesh; your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, and your young men shall see visions. ²⁹Even on the male and female slaves, in those days, I will pour out my spirit. ³⁰I will show portents in the heavens and on the earth, blood and fire and columns of smoke. ³¹The sun shall be turned to darkness, and the moon to blood, before the great and terrible day of the Lord comes. ³²Then everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved; for in Mount Zion and in Jerusalem there shall be those who escape, as the Lord has said, and among the survivors shall be those whom the Lord calls.

NRSV

ADDITIONAL TEXTS

For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek; the same Lord is Lord of all and is generous to all who call for help. For, "Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved."

Romans 10:13

Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. And all of us, with unveiled faces, seeing the glory of the Lord as though reflected in a mirror, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another; for this comes from the Lord, the Spirit.

II Corinthians 3:17-18

Beat your breasts for the pleasant fields, for the fruitful vine, for the soil of my people growing up in thorns and briars; yes, for all the joyous houses in the jubilant city. For the palace will be forsaken, the populous city deserted; the hill and the watch-tower will become dens for ever, the joy of wild asses, a pasture for flocks; until a spirit from on high is poured out on us, and the wilderness becomes a fruitful field, and the fruitful field is deemed a forest. Then justice will dwell in the wilderness, and righteousness abide in the fruitful field. The effect of righteousness will be peace, and the result of righteousness, quietness and trust for ever.

Isaiah 32:12-17

For all who are led by the Spirit of God are children of God. For you did not receive a spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received a spirit of adoption. When we cry, "Abba! Father!" it is that very Spirit bearing witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs, heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ – if, in fact, we suffer with him so that we may also be glorified with him.

Romans 8:12-17

SCRIPTURE COMMENTARY

BY REV. MILFORD OXENDINE, JR., PASTOR,
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Joel is one of the twelve Minor Prophets in the Hebrew scriptures. As a prophet living in Jerusalem or the Jerusalem area, he is a spokesman for God. The exact date of writing is difficult to determine because no Israelite king or foreign nation is recorded in the book's three brief chapters. The date of writing may have been between the 9th and 8th century B.C.

The theme of the book deals with the "Day of the Lord." Joel is the first prophet to introduce the "Day of the Lord." Five specific theme references are found in Joel 1:12; 2:1-2; 2:10-11; 2:30-31; and 3:14-16. Also, the "Day of the Lord" can be found in Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and Daniel. Joel looks down through the centuries and sees "the Day of the Lord." What does the expression mean? J. Vernon McGee states that it "is a technical expression in Scripture which is fraught with meaning." For some, the term carries images of the millennial Kingdom or the second coming of Christ. For Joel, however, the "Day of the Lord" begins with the Tribulation Period, the time of great trouble.

The book opens with Joel's prophecy of a plague of locusts. This plague is compared with future coming judgments that will impact the earth. Chapter One is a remarkable passage describing the invasion of Judah by a plague of locusts that destroy and devour everything in their path. This will impoverish the people. One interesting note about Joel's treatment of this Day is that it contains both judgment and blessing. The blessings will occur after the time of tribulation. According to Joel, the "Day of the Lord" begins with night - "that is, it begins with trouble." The Hebrew meaning for the word "day" always implies a period which begins at sunset. Gen. 2:5 states, "And the evening and the morning were the first day." In our Christian world, day begins at sunup. God's day, however, begins at sundown.

When the "Day of the Lord" finally occurs, the great blessings promised by God will be poured out upon all of God's people. Genesis 49:1 uses the phrase, "the last days", an important concept in prophecy. In the New Testament, "the last days" introduce the Advent of Christ (Hebrews 1:2; I Peter 1:20). The signs preceding the "Day of the Lord" are found in Isaiah 12:9-10; 24:21-23; Ezekiel 32:7-10; and Matthew 24:29-30. Joel however, depicts God's future deliverance, blessings finally revealed in the coming "Day of the Lord" (2:30-3:21).

PASTORAL REFLECTION

BY REV. MILFORD OXENDINE, JR.

"Lord, Pour Out Your Spirit on Us"

Is a better day coming for Lumbee Native Americans in North Carolina? Being an optimist, I believe that God's words, "I will pour out my spirit on all flesh" (v.28), will become a reality in the last days.

As a boy growing up in a triracial community in Robeson County, I recall how my people were treated. Many of my elders were farmers. They depended upon a white-owned hardware store to provide farming materials to assist in their work. Many would get their supplies on credit. At the end of the farming season, they went to the local hardware store to settle their accounts. Most of the time, the Indian farmers did not make enough money to pay for their supplies. As a result, many of them lost their farms. This created a type of bondage as they were forced to work off their credit as tenant farmers. The Indian families became like slaves living on land they once owned.

In the book of Joel, the Israelites are living in bondage in Babylonia. They once owned land, but now the Babylonians have conquered and captured the Israelites and put them in bondage. They are allowed to work and to make their own money, yet, they are in captivity.

Joel, the prophet, speaks and reminds the Israelites that God will pour out God's spirit on all flesh. The barren land, eaten by the locust, will receive rain, and the fields will produce wheat again. This blessing will be given in the form of dreams and visions seen by old and young, sons and daughters, and servants and handmaids. All of this will take place in the Last Days (vs. 30-32).

"I will pour out my spirit on all flesh" are encouraging words. These prophetic words speak of God sending help for my people, Native Americans in North Carolina. Help is a word meaning "aid," "save," and "relieve." Using these definitions, I believe my people need help in four areas.

First, North Carolina Indians have health problems. Many of them are dying of cancer and heart attacks. These diseases are killing both young and old. There is an epidemic of sexually transmitted disease among our youth and young adults. Drugs are a major problem among many of our people, too.

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Second, ever since I was a child, my parents reminded me that education was the key to success. In our culture today, however, I find that many of our children are not being told that education is a priority in their lives. When I was in grammar and high school during the days of segregation, I had Indian teachers. Now during the days of integration with all races, our Indian children are still at the bottom of the totem pole in education. Even though our children have an opportunity to excel, many choose to be lazy and are not pushed by their parents to give their best efforts at all times. Third, in the Indian world, land is called "Mother Earth." For us the land is sacred, as we acknowledge that God is everywhere. One of the most basic Indian values is "Respect for Nature." We know that the land (soil) must not be poisoned by many harmful things. To neglect to honor and to give respect to the land will cause the earth to rebel against us. It will become barren and lifeless. Fourth, our Indian communities need to hear from our prophets. They need to receive dreams and visions for our people. Then, they need to share both with our people and with others.

These four areas in which North Carolina's Native American communities need help can be addressed politically, socially, or economically. More importantly, they can also be improved through the involvement of our churches and in the act of worship. In our worship services, four elements are vital: praying, witnessing, singing, and preaching. Each element is dependant upon the others. Failure of any one means that the vision to help our people will not become a reality as we face the Last Days.

Prayer is a personal conversation with the Great Spirit. When an Indian prays, he or she depends upon the Holy Spirit in order to speak the words that will bring hope and healing to our broken world. We seek comfort and peace of mind through prayers that will relieve the hurts and pains of living in a White man's world. In many Lumbee congregations, an Altar Prayer is usually prayed before the sermon. The majority of the members will come to the front of the church, kneel down, and pray out loud. As the Holy Spirit descends upon the people, it's like a stick of dynamite is lit and then explodes. God's Spirit is felt by everyone. Members will cry, shout, and wail. The experience is alive with God's Spirit. During the moments of gathering around the altar for prayer, some members will give testimonies of what God has done in their lives. Some will share a miracle that might have taken place in their own lives or that of a loved one. After the Altar Prayer and testimonies, one person may begin singing a heartfelt song. As the spirit is felt, the congregation will join in singing. Joy and peace will settle upon their hearts.

When these three elements are completed, the minister will read the Scriptures and talk about what God has placed on his or her heart. Then, a sermon will be preached. While preaching the sermon, the members will usually say "Amen," "Preach brother/sister, preach," etc. These words encourage, provide, and invite God's Spirit to speak the words the congregation needs to hear. Thus, the preacher becomes a prophet. I believe he or she can also be a prophet for our people by encouraging our families to make education a priority for all our children and youth. He or she must also challenge our young people to become more health conscious. Finally, the Native pastor must continue to remind our farmers about the sacred nature of Mother Earth and encourage them to protect and respect our natural world.

It is of utmost importance that we in Indian congregations share our worship encounters with the Anglo community. When our people come together in worship, we look forward to hearing God's words, "I will pour out my spirit on all flesh." We look forward to seeing the visions and hearing of the dreams of young and old, our elders and our sons and daughters. Finally, we look forward to the Last Days of entering into God's Kingdom.

Lord, come and pour out your Spirit on our flesh.

WORSHIP AID - 'I WILL POUR OUT MY SPIRIT'

BLESSING OF THE PEOPLE

(Opening Ceremony and Closing Prayer)

As the people gather, either sweet grass, cedar, or sage (or all three) can be used as incense and burned in a basin sending forth its fragrance.

OPENING CEREMONY

Creator, Grandfather, we offer the burning of (sweet grass/cedar/sage) as a purification, a reminder for those gathered here to cleanse our thoughts and hearts that we may hear and be guided by your word and direction. We thank you for all our relatives: the four-leggeds, the wingeds, the star people of the heavens, and all living things you have blessed us with to sustain this life.

Empower each of us through the bringer of Peace, Jesus Christ, to seek and make change for a better life for all people and all creation. Hear our prayers this day and everyday. Accept our thanks for all the blessings we enjoy and for those yet to come to us. Aho-Amen.

CLOSING PRAYER

Great Spirit, Creator, behold us! You have placed a great power in the direction from which many generations have come forth and have returned. The generation that is here today wishes to cleanse and purify itself, that we may live again... Bless our going out from here and each new morning you grant to us; that we will make a difference in this world following the sacred red path marked for us by your Son, the Messenger of Peace and Justice.

Your Spirit, my spirit, may they unite to make one spirit in healing. Aho-Amen.

(By Z. Susanne Aikman (Eastern Cherokee), excerpted and used by permission from "Voices: Native American Hymns and Worship Resources," copyright 1992, Marilyn Hofstra, p.75)

PRAYER OF CONFESSION

God, Great Spirit, when we walk the path of beauty with sincerity, honesty, courage and truthfulness, we are like the upright basket which can hold the fruits of harvest. We can receive and share the blessings abundantly. But when we have strayed from the beauty path and are not trustworthy, honest, or reliable, we are like the basket turned over... we are empty and useless. Help us to always be upright, to receive and share the blessings of life.

(from The United Methodist Church, General Board of Church and Society, "A Day to Acknowledge the Gifts of Native Americans", www.umc-gbcs.org/site/apps/nl/content2.asp?c=fs|INK0PK|rH&b=1048921&content_id=%7B542F0C85-3EDE-46F4-B382-02ACE0AE46F1%7D¬oc=1)

SUGGESTED HYMNS

- ❖ *Many and Great, O God, Are Your Works* UMH 435, BH 49, PH 271, TH 385, CH 58, NCH 3
- ❖ *O God, the Creator* PH 273, NCH 291
- ❖ *Praise God From Whom All Blessings Flow* (see below)

Oo ne la nuh hi i-ki-do-dah,
Oo ne la nuh hi Oo we-ji,
Oo ne la nuh hi ad-dah-nuh-do,
Keh-di-luh-gwo-dah hna-gwa-se. (WORDS: Trad. Cherokee)

Used by permission from "Voices: Native American Hymns and Worship Resources" copyright 1992, Marilyn Hofstra, p.51)

ADDITIONAL PRAYERS

Beauty Is Before Me

Now Talking God,	Above and below me hovers the beautiful.
With your feet I walk.	I am surrounded by it.
I walk with your limbs.	I am immersed in it.
I carry forth your body.	In my youth I am aware of it.
For me your mind thinks.	And in old age
Your voice speaks for me.	I shall walk quietly
Beauty is before me	The beautiful trail.
And beauty is behind me.	

(From Navajo prayer tradition by Christian American Women for World Day of Prayer 1981, used by permission from "Voices: Native American Hymns and Worship Resources", copyright 1992, Marilyn Hofstra, p.70)

Call to Worship

We come together today to celebrate the contributions Native People of this land have made to God's Church.

We learn from them that life is a sacred circle, of which there is no beginning and no end.

We are all a part of that circle, ever contributing, ever receiving.

Native Americans teach us that as a part of the circle, we must care for all of God's creation.

♦ Hymnal Legend ♦

- † AM – African Methodist Episcopal
- † BH – Baptist Hymnal
- † CH – Chalice Hymnal (Disciples of Christ)
- † CM – Christian Methodist Episcopal
- † GA – Gather Hymnal (Roman Catholic)
- † LW – Lutheran Worship
- † MW – Moravian Book of Worship
- † NCH – New Century Hymnal (UCC)
- † PH – Presbyterian Hymnal
- † TH – The Hymnal 1982 (Episcopal)
- † UMH – United Methodist Hymnal

We know that God's creation includes all that is a part of this earth: the wingeds, the two-leggeds, plants, water and the sky.

We remember and worship God the Creator throughout our daily lives, even as we look at a tree, the grass, or the sky.

For Genesis reminds us that God looked at everything and was very pleased.

We join in this day acknowledging the gifts that Native Americans offer to all of us, remembering that worship encompasses all of life. We embrace and celebrate the sacred circle of life. Amen.

(Cynthia Abrams,, Seneca, from The United Methodist Church, General Board of Church and Society, "A Day to Acknowledge the Gifts of Native Americans," www.umc-gbcs.org/site/apps/ful/content2.asp?c=fsjNK0PKjRH&b=1048921&content_id=%7B542F0C85-3EDE-46F4-B382-02ACE0AE46F1%7D¬oc=1)

ADDITIONAL HELPS

▪ QUOTES ▪

Treat all men alike. Give them all the same law. Give them all an even chance to live and grow. All men were made by the same Great Spirit Chief. They are all brothers. The earth is the mother of all people, and all people should have equal rights upon it.

Chief Joseph (Nez Perce)

I had rather live one day and enjoy the privileges of citizenship to which I am entitled than live a thousand years and be denied them.

Henry Berry Lowry (Lumbee)

There is one God looking down on us all. We are all the children of one God. The sun, the darkness, the winds are all listening to what we have to say.

Geronimo (Apache)

▪ PERSONAL VIGNETTE ▪

DREAMING OF CHEROKEE

REV. MARY LOUISE FRENCHMAN (LAKOTA SIOUX), PASTOR, LIVING WATERS LUTHERAN CHURCH, CHEROKEE

I had no intentions of ever being involved with organized religion. I grew up on the Pine Ridge Indian Reservation in South Dakota hearing horror stories of the religious and government boarding schools that forced Christianity upon native peoples including my parents and grandparents.

Everywhere I looked, I observed native people in conflict with Christianity. Some had bought into it, leaving behind their own tribal dance, songs and spirituality, accepting that the church said "Christ or Indian- you must choose one or the other." Others, like most of my family, had nothing to do with Christianity. However, my paternal grandmother was proudly both traditional Lakota and Christian. She never seemed to have a conflict, and from her I learned you can have both. I do know she argued with Christian missionaries sent to our reservation and stayed set in her ways.

My family relocated from Pine Ridge to Phoenix, Arizona, when I was a teenager. It was there I first encountered members of the Lutheran church working with the Phoenix Indian Center helping natives who were relocating to the urban area. This impressed me, and it was the first time I really heard Indians saying nice things about a church. As I grew more active in the Indian community, I noticed that the Lutheran church was an advocate for social justice and encouraged native people to be involved in the community through advocacy and community organizing. I saw this as a healing process. Here were Indian people being empowered to have some say in their future with no one standing over them asking if they had been saved! That was a turning point in my life and my view of churches.

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I am a second career pastor, finally relenting and becoming involved in ministry after much discernment and introspection. My thought is that if the church hurt so many people, then the church can heal people, too. I believe that Christ and Culture can, and do, walk hand in hand.

It was not my wish to come to Cherokee in North Carolina, but after refusing to even consider the call, an elderly Cherokee woman visited me in my dreams three consecutive times bringing more people with her each time, all beckoning me with their hands to come to them. Finally, I called the North Carolina Lutheran Synod and accepted the call to Cherokee. I believe that God speaks to us in many ways and sees in us that which we cannot see ourselves. With all certainty, I knew I must go to Cherokee. I have been here eight years now, and it has been good to be about healing and preaching the empowering good news of a risen Christ.

We use Native symbols in our worship, such as an eagle feather to brush the smoke from the cedar, tobacco and sage into the air. We know God hears our prayers, yet some of us also believe that the Eagle is a special helper for us in carrying our prayers to God, as well as the herbs and the smoke which they send forth. We use the drum to sing a Muscogee chant as our Gospel Acclamation. In addition we have a women's drum choir, and we call to worship by dipping hands in water in memory of the ancestors and to acknowledge the four cardinal directions, north, south, east, and west, as well as three other sacred points: earth mother, God the creator, and God within each of us. Generally, the children do this dipping of water in a wooden hand carved bowl, but we welcome anyone who wishes to "come to water" to join in.

▪ CONTACTS AND OTHER RESOURCES ▪

In the Heart of Tradition - a 28-minute DVD that provides an overview of the eight state-recognized tribes in North Carolina. To obtain a DVD copy, contact the Native American Resource Center, UNCP, 1 University Dr., Pembroke, N.C. 28372, call 910-521-6282, or email nativemuseum@uncp.edu. Cost is \$15 (includes \$3 shipping).

www.doa.state.nc.us/cia/indian.htm – *North Carolina Commission of Indian Affairs*. Created in 1971 by the North Carolina General Assembly in response to the requests of Indian citizens from across the state, the commission was formed to bring local, state and federal resources into focus for the implementation of meaningful programs for the state's Indian citizens, assist Indian communities in social and economic development, establish appropriate procedures for legal recognition by the state and provide for official recognition, and initiate procedures for recognition by the federal government. See the website "Factsheets" for an overview of Native American history in North Carolina.

www.doa.state.nc.us/cia/tribes.pdf – *Contact information for tribal administrators or websites for North Carolina Native American Tribes and Associations*, including: Coharie Tribe, www.geocities.com/coharieindian/coharies.html; Cumberland County Association for Indian People, ccaip@netzero.net; Eastern Band of Cherokee, www.nc-choerokee.com; Guilford Native American Association, www.guilfordnative.org; Haliwa Saponi Tribe, www.haliwa-saponi.com; Sappony, www.sappony.org; Meherrin Indian Tribe, www.meherrintribe.com; Metrolina Native American Association, mnaa2000@excite.com; Occaneechi Band of Saponi Nation, obsn@mebtel.net; Triangle Native American Society, www.tnasweb.org; Lumbee Tribe of North Carolina, www.lumbeetribe.com; and Waccamaw Siouan Development Association, siouan@aol.com.

www.ncindian.com – *North Carolina Indian Economic Development Initiative*. NCIEDI's mission is to foster, enhance and promote economic development in North Carolina's urban and tribal Indian communities. During 2005, NCIEDI coached over 100 Indian start up and existing businesses and assisted almost all of the state's Indian Tribes and Organizations with new and existing ventures.

www.ncai.org - *National Congress of American Indians*. Since 1944, the National Congress of American Indians has been working to inform the public and Congress on the governmental rights of American Indians and Alaska Natives.

www.interpretermagazine.org/interior.asp?ptid=43&mid=10741 – *Native American Awareness Sunday Worship Resources*. Online resource with litanies, prayers, suggested hymns.

<http://origin.org/ucs/doc.cfm?e=1&ps=2&edit=1&fg=3176&fi=1147> – *Native American/Christian Worship*- Description of Native elements and symbols that can be used for cross-cultural worship. (Excerpts from the service booklet for "A Celebration of Native American Survival," held at the National Cathedral on October 12, 1992.)

KEY FACTS

DID YOU KNOW?

- ❑ North Carolina has the largest Native American population (over 80,000) east of the Mississippi River. The Lumbee are the largest Indian tribe east of the Mississippi and ninth largest in the nation with 56,000 members. More than 47,000 Lumbee people live in four North Carolina counties: Robeson, Cumberland, Scotland, and Hoke. According to the 2000 census, Robeson County's population is 47% American Indian.¹
- ❑ The Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians has an estimated 13,400 members with 9,000 living on the North Carolina reservation based in the mountain town of Cherokee. It is the only tribe in NC with federal recognition, allowing its members to receive benefits from federally funded health-care and housing programs, as well as eligibility for a range of other aid programs administered by federal agencies including the Bureau of Indian Affairs, Housing and Urban Development, and the U.S. departments of education, transportation, and energy. The Cherokees, as a federally recognized tribe, operate North Carolina's only casino, which opened in 1994 and distributed \$5,700 in casino profits to each member in 2001.²
- ❑ Eight tribes are recognized by the state: Eastern Band of Cherokee, Coharie, Haliwa-Saponi, Indians of Person County, Lumbee, Meherrin, Waccamaw-Siouan, and Occaneechee: Band of Saponi. The Lumbee tribe has petitioned since 1889 for federal recognition which would allow them to participate in badly needed federal programs, but the Cherokee tribe has been one of the most vocal opponents, arguing that the Lumbees should have to qualify through the Bureau of Indian Affairs administrative process which would determine whether the tribe meets the seven standards set forth for federal recognition. This process has been widely criticized as slow, arbitrary and subject to political influence. Also, the Cherokee once worried that the Lumbees, by their sheer numbers, would diminish federal money available to the Eastern Band and other tribes.³ The Lumbees persist in pushing for full federal recognition, although bills introduced in the U.S. House and Senate in 2005 were never put to vote and expired at the end of 2006.⁴
- ❑ Like other Indian populations in the country, North Carolina's Native American citizens continue to have serious health issues, including diabetes and substance abuse; excessive school drop-out rates; and higher-than-average unemployment and poverty rates.⁵ Effective programs for combating these issues often originate from within the tribes themselves. For example, the Lumbee tribal government, with help from the College of Design at NC State University, uses HUD grants to rehabilitate dilapidated housing and build new affordable single-family homes using designs that take into account cultural preferences for open spaces and Eastern North Carolina-style farmhouses. The Lumbee housing rehabilitation program has a waiting list of 1,195 homes in need of major repair whose owners can't afford to fix them.⁶ The Eastern Band of Cherokees enacted a law in February 2007 that banishes from the reservation members of the tribe who are convicted of drug dealing. Similar laws have been adopted by tribes in other parts of the country, such as the Upper Sioux, the Chippewa, and the Fallon Paiute-Shoshone.⁷
- ❑ Pembroke State College for Indians, founded in 1887 as the Croatan Normal School, was the first state-supported four-year institution for Indians in the nation. It became a member of the University of North Carolina regional university system in 1972 and is now UNC-Pembroke.⁸
- ❑ The Cherokee language is in danger. Of the 13,400 members of the Eastern Band of Cherokees, just 460 are fluent in Cherokee, and 72% of those speakers are older than 50. The Tribe is aggressively taking action to preserve the language through a public campaign to encourage elders to speak Cherokee to children, and a day care center, the Kituwah Immersion Academy, where the children cared for are spoken to exclusively in the Cherokee language.⁹

Native American Congregational Life in North Carolina

In the 1700's and 1800's, waves of European colonists pushed coastal Indian tribes into swamps and less desirable areas in eastern North Carolina while in the west, many Cherokees were forced to leave their mountain homeland for Oklahoma on the "Trail of Tears." Racism and Jim Crow laws pushed many North Carolina Indian farmers off the land they had cultivated for years as timber companies and wealthier whites bought up titles and land rights. In eastern North Carolina, many Native Americans and those of mixed heritage attempted to conceal their racial identities in order to avoid persecution. Assimilation was a survival mechanism. This became problematic later on to tribes like the Lumbee and Meherrin in their attempts to receive state or federal recognition of their Indian heritage.

One way that Native Americans in North Carolina preserved their identity and culture in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century was through the establishment of their own schools and churches. Most were simple structures erected in the same way as a barn-raising with community members sharing the cost and labor. For example, Prospect United Methodist Church in Robeson County was established in this way in the 1870's and grew quickly to become one of the largest Native American congregations in the country. As the number of individual churches increased, denominations established religious conferences and associations. The Burnt Swamp Baptist Association was formed by several churches in the 1870's and became the first documented Native American religious organization in North Carolina.

Native American churches, like schools, played an important role in Indian communities. Churches hosted both religious and secular activities, provided social opportunities for young and old, and became an economic safety net for members in times of trouble. The church was seen as the moral center of the community, defining accepted codes of conduct. It was a harsh punishment, indeed, to be "ex-communicated" from one's home congregation since the church filled so many roles in community life. Ideologically, Native American churches in North Carolina were very similar to other rural churches in the deep south having been formed by the wave of Evangelical fervor that swept the country at the time, and by the end of the nineteenth century most Indian congregations were either Baptist or Methodist. Summer revivals were an eagerly anticipated annual event, and baptisms were routinely performed in the river.

Although many of these congregations retain a conservative, evangelical identity, the "pan-Indian" movement of the twentieth century has made it more acceptable to incorporate Native culture and tradition into religious life. Some Cherokee congregations have adapted the ancient practice of "going to water" for use in modern worship services. "Going to water" was a traditional spiritual practice of immersing oneself in a river in order to receive physical and spiritual purification and healing.

Lumbee churches have traditionally recognized individuals in the congregations with a gift for healing, particularly those who could use herbal remedies, "lay on hands" or "blow out fire," i.e. cure burns or other injuries or sickness through blowing breath on or touching the affected person. Dollie Lowery, of Pembroke, remembers that her mother was known for such a gift, and it was recognized as coming from God. Says Dollie, "This is a way that God takes care of us."¹⁰

(Historical information above from *Keeping the Circle: Native American Indian Identity in Eastern North Carolina 1885-2004* by Christopher Arris Oakley, Univ. of Nebraska Press, 2005; *The Lumbee Methodists: Getting To Know Them* by Joseph and Lula Jane Smith, Commission of Archives and History, NC Methodist Conference, 1990.)

1. *News and Observer*, January 7, 2007, 16A
2. *News and Observer*, September 21, 2003, 29A.
3. Ibid.
4. *News and Observer*, January 7, 2007, 16A.
5. Ibid.
6. Ibid.
7. *News and Observer*, February 11, 2007.
8. www.uncp.edu/uncp/about/history.htm
9. *News and Observer*, February 25, 2007
10. Interview conducted by Denise Cumbee Long at UNC-Pembroke, April 9, 2003.