

Native American Believers Anticipate Revival

They came from Texas and Saskatchewan, South Carolina and Wyoming, Alberta and Kentucky. They carried the names of their tribes with honor: Lumbee, Chippewa, Navajo, Apache, Sioux, Hopi, and more.

Altogether, more than 125 Christian leaders representing 14 states, two provinces and 24 tribes gathered for the Native Peoples Christian Leaders Conference in Rapid City, SD. They came to be encouraged and equipped, to worship and network, with the goal of seeing revival spread through Indigenous communities in the United States and Canada.

As Will Graham addressed the assembly, he recounted a similar gathering that took place in Albuquerque, NM, in 1975. During that meeting, Graham's grandfather Billy Graham said, "You as evangelical Indians are a sleeping giant. You are now awakening. The original Americans could turn around and be the evangelists to win other Americans to Christ." That statement has been held tightly by Native Christians, a source of encouragement to persevere in the faith.

"I believe this is our opportunity—a God-given moment in time," says Graham, pointing back to his grandfather's words. "God is waking the sleeping giant, and I believe God will use you to bring the last great revival."

"I've wept so many tears and cried so many times, like the prophet Jeremiah, weeping for my people," says Craig Smith, an Ojibwe evangelist from northern Minnesota. "Our hearts break for the conditions we find among our people. The challenges, the anguish, and the grief upon grief that cannot seem to be resolved."

The challenges, Smith says, are deep-rooted and endemic.

Leaders of the conference did not attempt to gloss over the stark realities of Native people, addressing a myriad of struggles head on: loyalty to traditional tribal spirituality, brutality (such as the massacre at Wounded Knee, on nearby Pine Ridge Indian Reservation), forced boarding schools (in the name of Jesus, Native children were taken from their families, stripped of their identities, and treated ruthlessly), alcoholism, generational family trauma, and the belief that Christianity is a “white man’s religion.”

One thing was clear at the Native Peoples Christian Leaders Conference: It’s time to be bold in carrying the hope of Jesus to Indigenous people.

“I believe we’re going to see Native people on fire for Christ, leading other Native people to Jesus, leading the last great revival,” says Graham. “I don’t think it will be the preachers leading a revival, but the broken repenting and turning to Christ.”

–Erik Ogren, Billy Graham Evangelistic Association .

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