

# Hearts Exchanged

## A report to the churches

Reflecting on the

## Cross-Cultural Ministry Forum

Christian Reformed Church  
in North America

The King's University College  
Edmonton, Alberta, Canada  
June 1 to 4, 2000

Also available with additional background at  
<http://www.crcna.org/cr/crwb/index.htm>

We have  
to move  
beyond  
mere  
toleration  
to a point  
of  
exchanging  
hearts.

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### Available on Web site

<http://www.crcna.org/cr/crwb/index.htm>

- Full report
- Glimpses: Stories from the forum
- Discernment Panel
- Circle Worship Bible readings
- Worship Booklet
- Sunday worship liturgy

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Additional background, including experiences, Bible readings and worship liturgy, available on the Web at <http://www.crcna.org/cr/crwb/index.htm>

## Preamble

At the Cross-Cultural Ministry Forum of the Christian Reformed Church in North America, 60 believers explored how to faithfully live, worship and bring the gospel of Christ in diverse cultural settings. Meeting at The King's University College in Edmonton, Alberta June 1 to 4, 2000, the participants brought together the perspectives of various cultures, including Dutch, First Nations, Metis, African and Korean. (See participant list, Appendix I.)

### Impetus

The forum was prompted by concerns about use of Aboriginal symbols such as the smudge and the sweat lodge in worship at CRC-supported Native ministry centres located in Edmonton, Winnipeg and Regina. Following a November 1997 consultation on intercultural ministry, Rocky Mountain House CRC sent overtures voicing those concerns to Classis Alberta North in 1998 and 1999, and to Synod in 1999. At the recommendation of the Canadian Ministries Board, Synod agreed to fund a forum exploring the issue.

### Stated purpose

In a spirit of appreciation and celebration, to explore with the Christian Reformed Church community how to fulfill its calling to love our neighbours, so that lives and communities (and the church itself) are transformed and the Gospel engages cultures.

### Forum format

The forum began Thursday evening and closed with Sunday morning worship, a service shared with Fellowship CRC. Structured to encourage experiential understanding, the forum included two morning circles patterned after worship at the Winnipeg Indian Family Centre, plus panel sessions in which seven people from Aboriginal and other non-dominant cultures sketched their faith journeys. In addition, participants travelled out of town Friday evening for soup, bannock and teaching circles at a cultural camp built and used by the Edmonton Native Healing Centre. A Saturday morning discernment panel chaired by Bert Adema of the Indian-Metis Christian Fellowship in Regina began to bring the threads of conversation together; participants then proposed recommendations for further action, which are explored in the following report.

### Hoped-for outcomes

This report is intended as a multi-purpose document, providing a backdrop to decision-making within our denomination but also a tool for learning and action among local congregations. To support those activities, additional materials are available with the report at <http://www.crcna.org/cr/crwb/index.htm>.

God's people are encouraged to ponder how the actions recommended by this forum might apply in their lives and congregations. In particular, the church is urged to create opportunities for the sort of cross-cultural dialogue that builds long-lasting relationships—and transforms cultures, including our own.

## Voices

*"We may not have found the answers, but at least we're able to look toward walking as brothers and sisters.*

*We do have a long ways to go, but a forum like this gives us opportunity to become educated, to share, to begin that journey together."*

Brenda deHaan  
Forum Listener

*"That we can sit in the same room with so many different opinions, views and understandings is beautiful. I felt a willingness during the forum to be compassionate with each other—it was a great process."*

Dale Missyabit  
Forum Listener

*"Given the contexts in which the gospel has come, we should be amazed at the reconciling work of Christ that is happening in the Native ministry centres in Canada. We should celebrate the working of the Spirit in the healing that takes place."*

Stephanie Baker-Collins  
Forum Listener

## Exchanging hearts: A story

*Many moving stories were heard at the Cross-Cultural Ministry Forum, but the very first set the stage, providing an image that surfaced frequently. Below, an abbreviated version of the reflections offered by Ray Aldred, director of the First Nations Alliance Christian Fellowship in Regina, Saskatchewan.*

**I remember the day** I started reading scripture as an Aboriginal person. I saw it for what it was—the story of God working with his people. And I began to understand the humour in it. I started wondering if the point of Christ’s coming was to offer a series of propositions. The church reduces the Gospel, moves the locus of authority in God’s story to a set of propositions—and then takes those to Aboriginal people, who understand story much better than propositions. And the Aboriginal people say, “Something is missing here.” The church hasn’t trusted them with the stories, the good stuff. Stories contain the truth, but propositions are one step removed.

**Other terrible things** have happened in the church. North Americans, accustomed to their top-down way of ruling, tried to impose their method on Aboriginal people. But we’ve governed by consensus for generations, and this imposition has produced hard feelings. I want to see strong Aboriginal churches, but my denomination, the Christian Missionary Alliance, considered something a success only if they recognized it from success in their own churches. Their idea of cross-cultural ministry always included a big body of water, and that body wasn’t Lesser Slave Lake, where I was born.

**Finally it occurred to me** that we needed a reconciliation gathering. After much urging, Larry Wilson and I finally were permitted to meet with two representatives from the Board of Directors. We told them, “We just feel like we’re fighting with you all the time.” We felt they treated the Aboriginal people in a paternalistic way, deciding everything for us, from the identification of problems to the success of solutions. After going back and forth for a while, one of the representatives said, “Well, what do you want?” He said it sincerely, but I could feel all of Canadian society saying to Aboriginal

people, “What *do* you people want?” Larry Wilson looked at the representative and said, “We want your heart.” The representative said, “We don’t do that.” He was right. They operate on an institutional level.

**But then we talked about all the pain** our people have suffered and described what we felt we had achieved in the church. Following that, I said to the representatives, “Tell me if it’s just me, and I’ll forget about it. But has Canada’s attitude toward Native people affected how the Christian Missionary Alliance has dealt with the First Nations Alliance Churches of Canada?” They looked at me and said, “Yes, it has.” Then we stood and prayed. And the Board of Directors said, “I think we begin to understand.” Apologies were offered and accepted, and we made peace with the denomination. Since that time, we have proceeded as brother and sisters in Christ. There are hard times ahead yet, but the denomination doesn’t act before consulting with us and doesn’t attempt to assimilate us anymore. They’ve spent more money in developing leaders for us and we have developed closer relationships with other districts.

**When it comes to cross-cultural** ministry, I could give you techniques, but what has made the greatest impact is when we exchanged hearts. As a church, we need to show Canadian society how to live as a multi-cultural nation. We should be the best at it. I want to see the Christian Missionary Alliance go to other cultures with the attitude of a learner, not the attitude of superiority. Aboriginal people don’t want charity, they want respect.

The First Nations people need the other people in Canada, and Canadians need the First Nations people. We have to move beyond mere toleration to a point of exchanging hearts.

## A beginning

Building cross-cultural understanding that reaches below the surface is a process, not an event—a process that begins with an exchange of hearts. Delegates to the Cross-Cultural Ministry Forum at The King’s University College June 1 to 4, 2000 experienced that reality firsthand.

The forum did not produce a definitive approach to engaging diverse cultures with the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Yet, amid three days of stories, accusations, concepts and symbols, hearts were exchanged—and that, in the end, is why participants left with renewed commitment. Commitment to the process of building understanding deep enough to transform lives, communities, cultures—and the Christian Reformed Church itself.

Stephanie Baker-Collins, one of three listeners asked to comment as the forum neared a close, struck a chord with many in the room when she said, “Words seem a very inadequate tool to paint a picture of this conference. We have experienced an amazing exchange of hearts.” But she also voiced the anxiety that frequently surfaced when she added, “Although we have had an exchange of hearts, the mind still wants an answer to questions such as ‘What does this mean?’ ‘How does this practice fit in with scripture?’”

Adding complexity to those questions is the fact that the visible differences among cultures are only tips of the iceberg. As panelist Norberto Wolf pointed out, below those tips lie history and values; even deeper are cultural patterns and processes that may be too complex and subconscious to describe in words.

Those differences were lived out at the forum, whose 60 diverse delegates hailed from a rainbow of cultures. Words failed and tempers flared, at times, as hearts attempted to dialogue with minds; as people who build their faith through story and shared experience described their journey to people from a church in which accountability involves prayerfully crafted propositions.

“I have heard two very different kinds of accountability contexts described,” observed Baker-Collins: accountability to the circle, through the process of dialogue, and accountability to a hierarchical structure. “It is in this area of freedom/trust that I think we will need to work further to understand each other.”

Anticipating the struggles ahead as Christ-followers wrestle with such issues, the forum prayerfully suggests the following nine actions to a church seeking to build faithful cross-cultural ministry.

1. Commit to the process
2. Broaden the dialogue
3. Engage in self-examination
4. Seek healing and reconciliation
5. Educate ourselves
6. Discern what is faithful
7. Develop leadership
8. Keep a vision of redemption
9. Be open to the Spirit

## Voices

*“What we have experienced is an amazing exchange of hearts.... Although we have had an exchange of hearts, the mind still wants an answer.”*

Stephanie  
Baker-Collins  
Listener

(See full text of listener comments, Appendix III)

*“I want to testify to the fact that I’ve learned some things. One thing that came through to me more clearly than I had perceived to be true before is that the Aboriginal communities themselves are struggling, reflecting, circling around the very same issues others have questions about. So it feels much less to me like the CRC asking questions, and the Aboriginal community defending.*

*It feels much more like a dialogue about what really is inherently truthful: What does it mean to be a follower of Jesus Christ in a multicultural setting?”*

Peter Borgdorff  
Executive Director of  
Ministries, CRCNA

## Action 1: Commit to the process

God's people have wrestled with the complexities of cross-cultural ministry since earliest times. In fact, as Peter Borgdorff noted in welcoming participants on behalf of the CRCNA Board of Trustees, the history-changing first assembly of the New Testament church, recorded in Acts 15, was called specifically to deal with cross-cultural concerns.

Two thousand years later, the forum in Edmonton was prompted by concerns that ministry to Canada's Native people had strayed from the gospel by adopting symbolic cleansing rituals such as smudging and the sweat lodge. "We've been officially commissioned by the church to have this conversation in our time, not just for ourselves, but to help the people who are not here, who are asking how we should minister in a multicultural society with the gospel of Jesus Christ," Borgdorff said.

The conversation will require patience. As one participant warned, "It's a long journey, not something we're going to finish overnight." Progress will require honest dialogue, and that cannot occur outside of trusting relationships. To facilitate relationships strong enough to survive the inevitable shock as icebergs collide, the church would be wise to provide more opportunities for cross-cultural listening, perhaps patterned after the forum itself. More opportunities to share personal stories, to hear each other's pain and joy, ideally guided by trained people.

Respectful listening must occur before judgment can be passed. That doesn't mean we don't argue; it does mean we cultivate wholesome, hopeful dialogue that asks, "What do you mean?" and invites, "Help me understand." Case histories presented throughout the forum reinforced the value of that approach, providing insights that challenged stereotypes and reshaped opinions. The forum learned, for example, that the question of Christ's place in Christianity is a topic of hot dispute within the Native community; that fact should help elevate the intercultural debate from inquisition to dialogue. It's together that we must discover what it means to be Christ-followers in a multicultural world.

Why take the time? Why be committed to a diverse Christianity? The answers became clear during the forum as people of diverse cultures shared their faith journeys, exposing facets of the Christian way that inspire awe and humility. As Bert Adema writes in a discussion paper commissioned for the forum's discernment panel, "The Creator's glory is too great to be borne by the image carrying capacity of any single culture. Promotion of a mono-cultural response to the Good News and hostility to Christian cultural diversity contradicts Christ's expectations and impedes the Holy Spirit."

Jeanet Sybenga, director of the Indian Family Centre in Winnipeg, was among those whose testimony affirmed that assertion. "In my own journey of learning with the Aboriginal people, I have discovered a whole new sense of what life is about, who God is and what it means to experience grace."

So we as Christ followers need to take the time. Without delay.

## Voices

*"Process is important for having the conversation we need to have, and that takes time."*

Forum Learning

*"Trust and respect are imperative; by that we do not mean agreement or ditto perspectives, but taking time to hear each other out."*

Forum Learning

*"It's possible for people from different cultures to form one group, and as one body walk together to produce amazing results. If crossing the cultural boundaries can work in business, why can't it work here? We have so many good values; we can make the process work if we try harder."*

Rev. Tong Park, who worked for a multinational before becoming CRC Korean Ministry Director

*"Up until now, our denomination has performed very poorly with cross-cultural ministry. It has taken us from the time of Acts until now just to get this far. Let's start doing it a bit quicker."*

Harold Roscher, who was adopted by CRC parents and has Aboriginal roots

## Action 2: Broaden the dialogue

Forum participants expressed appreciation for the depth of dialogue attained in three days of intense listening and reflection. God's Spirit was evident, especially when the participants gathered in a circle. But for that dialogue to reflect reality, the net must be cast even more broadly. As one person observed, "We need to listen to many people, because one person can't represent a whole culture." Among participants suggested for future circles: Native elders, youth, more women leaders, Muslims, Buddhists and people from other religions.

Beyond listening, authentic dialogue requires a sharing of power. Ideally, truly gifted leaders will emerge as the conversation continues, leaders wise enough to facilitate the hard work of cross-cultural learning and collaboration. Ideally, the church will honour those leaders, whatever their cultural roots or gender, for as one person observed, "We need the proverbs, the parables, the sayings and riddles of the wise."

Broadened dialogue brings pain as well as reward. Dale Missyabit, a Native worker from the Indian Family Centre in Winnipeg, illustrated that fact when speaking as one of the three forum listeners. "Yesterday was a rollercoaster day," he confessed, recalling times when he felt his heart had been "taken out and stamped on" as others questioned how his Native heritage fit with Christianity. In contrast, he added, "I had a really good exchange with Phil; I don't think we agreed on anything, but it was beautiful to share in an open and honest way, to look at each other, to say I still love you." Then Missyabit invited Phil Stel, pastor of the Rocky Mountain House church whose overture had prompted the forum, to come forward and read two passages from scripture, "because I think we have to do things in partnerships." Stel graciously complied, reading the call to love from Micah 6 and I Cor. 13.

Forum participants from other cultures expressed hope that more CRC people will open themselves to intercultural relationships and enrich the circle with their own stories. True mutuality, they said, will occur when the Hollanders who built this denomination share what is in their history, and on their hearts. The forum caught a glimpse of the power in that request when Henk DeBruyn sketched his journey from a scared young lad in wartime Holland to the streets of Winnipeg, where he began the Indian Family Centre.

As the conference ended, DeBruyn returned to that story, adding to the parable: "For years, I had been very disillusioned about what could happen in a CRC home mission setting, and I kept searching for the power of God. In Scripture, I found that if I want to see the power of God, I must be among people who don't have power. I saw that the renewal of the church—even the New Testament church—always came from the outside, always came through a conflict situation. So with a disillusioned heart and hurt, it was my hope that participants of this Native ministry would be instruments of healing in the CRC. Dale's approach to Phil said it for me. That was the fulfillment of my vision—of God's vision. To see people who have been criticized reach out to those who criticize and say, 'Teach me,' to me that is the work of the Spirit, that is the work of healing, that is the model for healing for the church."

## Voices

*"Dialogue implies a sharing of power, and that's what is required."*

Forum Learning

*"Every individual and every congregation's experience will be different; therefore, their dialogue will be different. We might like to think we're creating a blueprint here, but ours is a unique experience."*

David Long, The King's University College

*"I have a hard time understanding the CRC. They always talk about the partnership agreement, but I'm the only Native person involved."*

Marion Sinclair, Edmonton Native Healing Centre

*"What I see missing in our cross-cultural ministry is your stories. In true partnership, we need to hear your stories."*

Leo Beaulieu, Winnipeg Indian Family Centre

*"I started inviting Dutch people to my place and listened to their stories. They have suffered much the same as my race has. They came with nothing to this country and have done so much."*

Rene Page, Oshawa whose family were Arkansas slaves

## Action 3: Engage in self-examination

As the forum progressed, cultural blemishes surfaced.

Participants from minority cultures placed the offenses of their people on the table. Roy Cardinal chastised the Native ministries that delete Redeemer Christ from the gospel. William Davison alluded to dark powers called forth in the ceremonies of his Native Bear clan. Navajo Ted Charles named fear as the force that keeps many First Nations people locked in their traditions. Rene Page lamented the pecking order that divides various Black cultures, putting down those who, like her ancestors, were slaves.

But experiences shared at the forum also reinforced the fact that North America's dominant culture has no room to feel superior. Page recalled the terror caused by the very sight of a white man in a pickup truck, gun rack at the back. Ray Aldred of the First Nations Alliance Christian Fellowship pointed to distortions inherent in the fact that western Christianity has embraced modern capitalism. Native leaders spoke of the life-destroying devastation wreaked by years of cultural and physical abuse in residential schools—schools that often bore the name of Christ.

It's a cultural porridge that confines the power of the Gospel. In some cases, syncretism results, as oppressed people adopt approved worship trappings to satisfy their oppressors while holding tight to their own religious anchors. More often, at least in the Aboriginal community, the good news becomes anathema. As Aldred noted, "For 500 years the gospel has been here in North America, but it hasn't produced much in terms of creating an indigenous church."

Domestic divisions about significant aspects of church life, from women's place in leadership to styles of worship, also hobble the denomination's ability to raise a prophetic voice. "If our most heated debates about worship are within the CRC culture," one participant questioned, "how do we judge another culture?"

Given those realities, critical self-reflection is fundamental to cross-cultural dialogue. The CRC needs the fortitude, as one individual said, "to take the log out of our own cultural 'eye' before removing the splinter from another culture."

In this forum context, critical self-reflection became more an analysis (valid and useful) of very specific issues in cross-cultural ministry rather than a true analysis of what cross-cultural ministry is all about.

## Voices

*"When I was in the Bear Lodge, I spoke to a lot of spirits and had to set the blood sacrifice in the drum; I'm sorry to say that blood was human. These things continue, so I understand the fears people have."*

William Davison  
Youth worker, Indian-Metis Christian Fellowship Centre

*"I was abused by priests and nuns. When those people came, they came in the name of the Lord; they came to save us. Everything we had was no good and we had to give it all up to become Christian. Do I have to give up everything I am to please you?"*

William Davison

*"People fail to see that residential schools attempted to make Aboriginal children into little capitalists by tearing their culture out of them."*

Ray Aldred, Director  
First Nations Alliance  
Christian Fellowship

*"I come from a background where women played very important roles and worked side by side with the men, without concern for titles. That is something that I'm struggling with in this denomination."*

Rene Page, CRC Oshawa



## Action 4: Seek healing and reconciliation

Before dialogue can begin, healing and reconciliation must occur—in a spirit of humility. The forum itself offered living testimony, as rising animosity gave way to conscious acts of grace. Below are two particular tableaux that illustrate how public expressions of reconciliation can spur healing among diverse peoples who are divided by pain that is both ancient and ongoing.

But first, to set the stage. Friday afternoon at the forum was a time of accusation and recrimination. Angry exchanges occurred as some believers, including Native pastor Roy Cardinal, charged that the path taken by Native CRC ministries in Canada strays from Gospel truth—and, in making that charge, questioned the validity of others' faith. Speakers from minority cultures lamented the fear they felt in the room, while their questioners called for "a return to Scripture," and for "tough love."

**Tableau One:** In the worship circle Saturday morning, healing began. Noting the pain-filled messes we cause by our imprecise use of language, our awkward demands for clarification, our accusatory ways of naming hurts, worship leader Roy Berkenbosch recalled the Matthew 5:23 command to make peace before kneeling at the altar. "We need to lay some things down," he urged.

Heeding that call, Roy Cardinal rose to apologize for Friday's accusations; others crossed the circle to shake his hand, exchange hugs and respond with their own apologies.

"There is much that can divide us, but we all stand on the Word, under the Word," Berkenbosch observed. "God grants us the right to begin again. Thanks be to God."

That forgiving spirit extended through the day, aided by the fact that, seeing the positive impact of the worship circle, organizers reconfigured the meeting room so participants could face each other rather than sitting around tables with their backs to each other.

**Tableau Two:** As the forum neared an end, another healing moment occurred. Panelist Ted Charles, a Navajo from Classis Red Mesa, New Mexico, returned to the Biblical admonition to reconcile differences before offering gifts before our God. "On behalf of my ancestors to your ancestors," he said, "I want to ask your forgiveness for the way that we have treated you. I am intervening on behalf of my ancestors, who may have offended you. And it is with that spirit of reconciliation that this dialogue can continue."

Charles then asked Rene Page to come forward, recalling what she had told the forum about her family's slavery and persecution. "Her people have suffered much. I see in her a symbol of discrimination and also a symbol of the reconciliation that I have undertaken here today. And so it is with this gift that I make my commitment to God that reconciliation has filled my heart."

Taking a Navajo necklace from around his own neck, he placed it on Rene's shoulders, and they embraced.

## Voices

*"What gets between us is not our differences but our conviction of being right."*

Forum Learning

*"We once had beautiful families that supported one another and it takes a long time to heal after they've been broken down. We have feelings, and we have hearts and souls. We are a proud people, and we want to work and pray with you while we share our sorrows and joys. Please don't knock us down, for we are all children of God. Let us all work harmoniously as one."*

Marion Sinclair

Program Coordinator,  
Edmonton Native Healing  
Centre

*"I was born in Arkansas at a time when everything was segregated. I remember the Ku Klux Klan lynchings, Bible stories that showed Jesus as white with silky hair—I have all the reasons in the world to not like the white race. My ancestors endured a lot of abuse also. We had to give up who we were, we were given slave names. We had to conform to the white man's Christianity to be accepted."*

Rene Page  
Oshawa CRC

*"I was in a residential*

Responding to that moment, Peter Borgdorff noted the symbolism in the gift Charles had bestowed. “I would have put that necklace in a box, with a nice bow, and made a presentation, because that’s how the white culture does it,” he said. But in the Navajo culture, the most significant gift is one that is removed from the giver’s own body. “When Ted took that necklace off and put it on Rene, that was one of the most beautiful moments I’ve seen in a long, long time, and Ted, thank you for taking that initiative.”

Then Borgdorff added, “I think it is time for the CRC with sensitivity and meaning to reciprocate, and to say that our methodologies, our efforts to reculturate people to our form of Christianity in the Navajo and Zuni contexts also needs to be forgiven.”

Borgdorff recalled a scene from his own days of shepherding the CRC work in New Mexico and Arizona. Touring a mission post, he learned that the congregation had two worship spaces. The first, a yellow brick Grand Rapids implant, was neat, tidy—and used only in rainy weather. Not far away was the second, a metal-roofed patch of ground on the edge of a bluff, where the eye could gaze far to the horizon. “That was where God’s people preferred to worship. But for all of these years, it was indicated to the Navajo by people like us that to be Christian was to build churches like us, to go to boarding school, to be recognized by whites, even to change your name.

“There is a lot of evidence around of lessons we still need to learn, but for now we appropriately apologize for lessons we learned too late. I don’t feel I have the privilege to speak on behalf of the whole church, but I do want to speak for myself, and say I’ve been deeply touched by this spirit, and that is a better platform to talk together.”

*school for eight years.  
Life was tough there; the  
priest and nuns wanted  
me to be white. They are  
the people who said they  
would teach me about  
Jesus Christ, and they  
turned around and  
sexually abused me. I left  
that residential school  
broken hearted, and  
ended up on the streets.  
But today I can hold my  
head up. I’m healing  
now; I’ve found a way to  
reach God.”*

Leo Beaulieu  
Indian Family Centre  
Winnipeg

*“I was born in Kenya.  
We had to lose a lot to  
become Christian. So I  
see a lot in common with  
First Nations people.  
When we are in the midst  
of struggle, sometimes  
we don’t see others  
struggling, too.  
I look forward to a time  
when we can embrace.”*

Steve Kabetu, Fellowship  
CRC Toronto

*“Many of us came to  
this forum expecting  
theological reflection  
and concepts.  
But it’s about people.  
People come before  
theology.”*

Roy Berkenbosch

*“What happened here  
shows what the circle is  
all about. It’s a place of  
healing, where hurts can  
be let go.”*

Jeanet Sybenga  
Worship Leader

## Action 5: Educate ourselves

It's crucial to understand the cultures engaged through our ministry, for lack of understanding breeds fear, and out of fear grows premature judgement. Again, the forum offers a case in point: as participants experienced the circle, became part of the smudging ceremony and learned how CRC Native Ministries use the sweat lodge, they traded fear for at least a deeper understanding, although not always agreement.

The forum urges the church to significantly expand opportunities for all members of our denomination to learn and understand. Possibilities:

- Address prejudice in sermons and teaching ministries.
- Emphasize and illustrate that differences mirror the image of God.
- Educate the church about what culture is and how to respect it.
- Promote the multi-ethnic conference, where CRC members who embrace cross-cultural ministry gather each June in Grand Rapids, Mich. to celebrate, worship, share, learn, and pray for greater understanding and diversity in the CRC.
- Create and deliberately seek out cross-cultural training opportunities, locally as well as globally.
- Share the specific struggles and joys of cross-cultural ministry within congregations and at other church gatherings, including classes and synod.
- Encourage all members to reach out to people from other cultures and build Christ-like relationships.

Even as we seek to build bridges, it's crucial for people in the church to understand that cultures differ in ways we can never fully fathom. "It takes a lot of time to learn about another culture, but even then, we only communicate halfway," said Norberto Wolf of the CRC's Race Relations Committee, who described cultures as icebergs. "We can't think just because we participate in the visible aspects of a culture that we're communicating fully."

Beneath the housing, clothing, food and ceremonies of visible culture lies a submerged layer of cultural values, history and cultural memory. "Natives have been oppressed, and they carry that cultural memory with them," Wolf noted. "Unless we understand that, we will only remain on the surface." Even deeper lie thought patterns and processes that are incomprehensible to anyone outside of a culture. Symbols help to present those realities, especially for cultures that, like many First Nations peoples, learn visually. But symbols too can be easily misunderstood.

People seeking to understand a culture would do well to pay heed to three listening posts, advised Huron Claus of the Christian Hope Indian Eskimo Fellowship:

- The people who practice the traditional religion;
- The Christian people there;
- The political and economic aspirations of that group.

"If the Gospel story does not touch those things," Claus added, "we talk in a

## Voices

*"I know God differently than you do. I do put God and the Spirit to the test. As an Aboriginal person, I've spoken to spirits, so when I speak to God, I want to hear him and talk to him.*

*When people come in, I tell them Jesus Christ is good medicine, but I do it in an Aboriginal way."*

William Davison

Youth worker

Indian-Metis Christian Fellowship Centre

*"Regarding worship, native people aren't all the same. I'm a Coyote from Oklahoma, my dad is a Mohawk from New York State and we work with tribes all across the country. Even in worship, there are big differences. What is appropriate in one tribe may be offensive in another. Whatever group God calls you to, go very sensitively."*

Rev. Huron Claus  
Christian Hope Indian Eskimo Fellowship

*"People in my church have accepted me now. Often they don't even see my skin colour anymore, and I don't always like that. Because I am who I am.*

Rene Page, Hope Fellowship CRC, Oshawa  
whose ancestors were slaves

language that nobody can hear.”

## Action 6: Discern what is faithful

Even after hearts have been exchanged and apologies made, differences remain about how Christians should evangelize, live and worship in a multi-cultural world.

What does it mean that Christ redeems? How do we understand the Spirit? Can Aboriginal symbols play a role in Christian worship? Is the sweat lodge inherently evil? How do we give the Gospel room to engage a culture without resorting to syncretism? This forum did not seek definitive answers to those questions; rather, it addressed a prior question: How should we discern?

“I really see that we need to have the Bible as our starting point,” said Rocky Mountain House Pastor Phil Stel. “The Bible needs to judge my faith, my culture, my religion. Secondly, Jesus Christ as the Bible presents him, as the only way to God, needs to be central. Symbols can augment that, can set it off, but Jesus needs to be central, and if he is the offense, then so be it. It’s also key to recognize that the God we worship, the God of the Bible, is the Triune God: Father, Son and Holy Spirit.”

Jeanet Sybenga, director of the Indian Family Centre in Winnipeg, added a caveat. “In the CRC, we use scripture and I want to acknowledge that scripture is very important. But in Christian history we have other ways of discerning: tradition, experience, reason—things we use in all other areas of our lives. People in other cultures use these ways of discerning, too; for the Aboriginal people, experience is very important. In a cross-cultural setting, we need to hear the voices of other cultures. Together, we can come to a greater understanding.”

Bert Adema, director of the Indian-Metis Christian Fellowship in Regina, supports that approach in a discussion paper for the forum’s discernment panel. He suggests the process of discernment includes at least the following elements:

**Community.** Discernment cannot be done in isolation or by an outsider, but must be done by a Christian community reviewing its traditional cultural practices in the light of scripture.

**Bible study led by prayer.** Discernment must be led by prayer that directs the study of scripture to examine the merits or concerns of individual issues.

**Cultural critique.** Cultural practices cannot be taken at face value, nor can explanation of those practices be derived from a single source in oral cultures. Shallow understanding and analysis will limit contextualization to superficial adjustments rather than a deeper transformation.

**Time.** Allow members of the community time to consider the implications of transforming any individual practice.

**Experimentation.** Discussion, prayer and study provides much of the basis for discernment. At times, experimentation within Biblical guidelines, followed by further reflection, enables discernment to be a process rather than a single act of judgement.

## Voices

*“With this incredible privilege of sharing Christ with others comes a grave responsibility.*

*We must learn to communicate with clarity and accuracy. If we’re not clear and distinct, we will only repeat mistakes.”*

Rev. Huron Claus  
Christian Hope Indian  
Eskimo Fellowship

*“Identify non-negotiables. What is our common ground? Such as the Bible as final authority, a Triune God, Jesus as only God/Saviour.”*

*“Let Christ be our guide as if he were sitting amongst us.”*

*“Identify the spirit as the Spirit of Jesus Christ.”*  
Forum Learnings

*“I really believe it’s through community, with the guidance of God’s Spirit, that we are able to discern.*

*To me, the greatest example is Jesus, the liberator.*

*How can I emulate the way he lived?*

*The Bible is quite clear. Put aside greed, anger, idolatry.*

*Move toward what builds up.”*

Jeanet Sybenga, Director  
Indian Family Centre  
Winnipeg

**Crucial questions.** Questions such as the following provide a litmus test, facilitating the discussion needed to discern the fruitfulness or shortcomings of individual practices for proclaiming the Gospel of Christ:

1. How can this traditional teaching, ceremony or artifact help us to love the Triune Creator with all of our heart, soul, mind and strength?
2. How can this traditional teaching, ceremony or artifact help us to love our neighbours as ourselves?
3. How can this traditional teaching, ceremony or artifact proclaim and promote faith in the Creator's gift of forgiveness and healing in Jesus Christ?
4. How can this traditional teaching, ceremony or artifact encourage the claiming, development, use and celebration of the gifts of the Holy Spirit?

The Regina ministry centre spent three years in prayerful study before incorporating Aboriginal smudging into its worship. Adema's paper includes a one-page description of the Biblical basis for that decision (see Appendix IV); that description is displayed at the centre. "Simply put," he writes, "the process of discernment provides the difference between faithful contextualization and syncretism."

Contextualization happens when the gospel is at home in a culture, and that's only possible when Christians are faithful to the whole canon of scripture, said panelist Ray Aldred, director of the First Nations Alliance Christian Fellowship in Regina. "We need skill at telling the Gospel story truthfully, not as a myth, and Jesus Christ is central to that story. Theology, as important as it is, comes second because it changes throughout history to address the issues of its time." Too often, he added, "we only read Paul's letters and we end up with Christology shaped by letters to dysfunctional churches – not a wise idea."

For Aldred, a key question is, "Does this fit with the Kingdom of God?" He agrees that discernment must come within the context of a local body of believers, "so that we are accountable and so we can experience the fullness of Christ dwelling among his people." But he would dispute any who say ends justify the means. "The whole process is important, not just the results. God's righteousness means we have to seek to do the right thing in all relationships."

How can syncretism be avoided? "We need to ask how we're viewing the symbol," Aldred believes. "My experience is that you can't mix Christianity with native theology. I cannot go to a traditional sweathouse unless Jesus tells me to try to reach others. At the same time, if I wanted to do my own sweathouse and pray, that would be OK. With smudging, do we really believe our prayers go up only because we smudge? If yes, then that's probably syncretism. But if it's just a symbol, then it's probably OK...."

"I don't fault Bert (Adema)'s description of their use of sweet grass. But because I'm under the authority of my Native elders, I don't do it. Because I would lose them, and I don't want that. But at the same time, I want to create space. I try to honour people in the churches I serve who are being faithful to the gospel story."

Another member of the discernment panel, Ted Charles, board member of

*"When crossing a culture, you must first give the gospel. If you just hold their hand and give them a nice feeling, you end up with something, but I'm not sure what. If something doesn't have the integrity of the gospel story, then it's not Christian, and we want to avoid that."*

Ray Aldred, Director  
First Nations Alliance  
Christian Fellowship

*"I listened to you this morning, and I'm glad that it's hard for you. For me it's hard, too. I don't know what to do some days, but I do have a human being standing in front of me who was created by God. How can I be a Christian if I just walk away? How do we assist? How do we lead people to Jesus Christ? We can't just throw their culture out as if it were garbage."*

William Davison  
Indian-Metis Christian  
Fellowship Centre

*"Syncretism is like mixing water and gas: what you have isn't good for drinking and you can't use it to run your car. It happens when some cultural form becomes mixed with Christianity to maintain religious protection."*

Ray Aldred

Home Missions, noted that symbols are particularly important to those who, like Native people, are visual rather than verbal learners. “With a basis of symbols, can the gospel be contextualized? I believe it can,” he said. “But in so doing, we must proceed with caution.”

Similarly, panelist Norberto Wolf noted the importance of symbols for representing reality. “We need to keep changing and reforming to see how different cultures can enrich us,” he said. “I believe all the nations have to come to confess the basic creeds of the Christian faith, but this will take a long time. If I had to make a choice today between prohibition and permission, I would choose permission, but with guidelines. When we think about the next steps, we need to think about what guidelines to use.”

Below, guidelines suggested by various participants:

- God must be central in all our work; his son Jesus Christ is our guide.
- Focus on Jesus Christ.
- Identify the Spirit as the Spirit of Jesus Christ.
- God has set a standard; we need to uphold that. The Bible is our absolute standard.
- Ask questions on the basis of what the Bible teaches.
- Treat the Bible with respect.
- Measure our culture to the Word of God, not making our culture or religion fit to the Word.
- Use the criteria Scriptures give us regarding how to discern: What goes into the body does not defile; what comes out of the body defiles. A good tree cannot bear bad fruit; by your fruits shall you be judged.
- Always ask, “Is what we are doing here legitimate?”
- Does it point to our Lord Jesus Christ?

*“We need two things: a balance of Christian liberty and legalism, plus Biblical basics. All under the context of love.”*

Forum Learning

*“The issue of Christ and culture among Native people is one of the hottest issues within the Native community today.”*

Rev. Huron Claus  
Christian Hope Indian  
Eskimo Fellowship

*“Everybody shares a base value of wanting to be authentic to the faith and faithful to the Word, but their expressions and vocabulary may be different.*

*It could be that everybody has the same heart inside, or else that we understand words differently.”*

Forum Learning

## Action 7: Develop leadership

Given the submerged and sometimes indescribable differences among cultures, it should be no surprise that a culture's most effective leaders often rise from within. If CRC ministries are to have transforming and staying power in diverse cultures, the people involved must own and lead the work themselves.

As Ray Aldred learned in working within the Christian Missionary Alliance church, denominational leaders can do much to either frustrate or enable their diverse ministries. When his denomination placed higher priority on developing Aboriginal leaders and took steps to empower those leaders, First Nations worshippers began to feel more at home within that fold.

Aldred drew from those experiences in urging the forum to move beyond tolerance, and honour leaders who draw insights from other cultural traditions. "Aboriginal people have a different perspective, and we need our own way, a self-theologizing way," Aldred told the forum. "The gospel has to take a different shape when it comes into Aboriginal culture."

## Action 8: Keep a vision of redemption

God promises to redeem all of creation. Amid the realities of hatred, war, poverty, plunder and decay, that's an incomprehensible promise. All the more reason to open our hearts in faith to the potential offered by Christ's redeeming work. And to undertake our part in that drama.

We confess "one Lord, one faith, one baptism," but as Christ's own vision of his church reveals, that body is not unidimensional. Rather, like light passed through a prism, it is multi-hued.

Bert Adema illustrated that fact by pointing to John 15:1-17, where Christ describes himself as the real vine and his followers as those who have been grafted into him. In horticultural practice, Adema noted, scions of different types grafted onto the same plant will continue to bear their own fruit. "Biblical revelation describes a church and heavenly kingdom which is not merely an extension of Hebrew culture but rather a radical revitalization process through which people from all nations are redeemed in Christ to bear unique fruit through his life-giving Spirit (see Rev. 21:24). The Creator's glory is too great to be borne by the image carrying capacity of any single culture."

When cultural gifts are redeemed, people are encouraged to embrace new life in Christ, and by his Spirit draw from their heritage to reflect the greater glory of the Creator. To enable that good work, our faith must be strong enough to allow more than we can ever ask or imagine.

## Voices

*"North Americans, accustomed to their top-down way of ruling, tried to impose their method on Aboriginal people. But we've governed by consensus for generations, and this imposition has produced hard feelings."*

Ray Aldred, Director  
First Nations Alliance  
Christian Fellowship

*"If we stay in our human journey, we are in danger of rotting. We need a north star."*

Forum Learning

*"We are at a crossroads, at the point of experiencing either revival among Native people or God's judgment, depending on what we do as the church."*

*Go, but let the Word be your final authority."*

Rev. Huron Claus  
Christian Hope Indian  
Eskimo Fellowship

*The CRC is a good church. I hope we live up to the name by being open to diversity and always reforming."*

Rene Page  
Hope Fellowship CRC,  
Oshawa

## Action 9: Be open to the Spirit

Just as different varieties of grapes grafted onto one vine produce fruit with unique qualities, so cultures of the world bring unique gifts before their Creator. Discerning Christians, knowing that God's Spirit works through a variety of gifts, celebrate diversity that builds the body up.

For many at the forum (although not all), experiencing the Aboriginal circle and smudging became a gift to celebrate—and perhaps, in some way, to emulate.

Native leaders joined Jeanet Sybenga, director of the Winnipeg Indian Family Centre, in leading worship circles Friday and Saturday mornings. Sybenga began by describing the significance of the circle for Aboriginal people: with no beginning or end, and thus no hierarchy, each person has an equal place, an equal voice. "That brings a powerful presence to the community. What's shared in the circle is expected to stay there, so it's a safe place to say what is in your heart."

The circle is also the place where theology occurs, Sybenga added. "When we read scripture together, each person has an opportunity to say, 'What does that mean for my life? How does that impact me?' It's a place of healing, of learning, of teaching.

"We really believe the Aboriginal people have given us the circle," she concluded. "It's a gift we'd like to bring to the Christian Reformed community. It's one thing to talk about it; let's get a sense of what it means, how it feels."

In the circle, forum participants experienced the smudging ritual, in which fragrant elements are burned to set the stage for worship. But first, Ojibway leader Leo Beaulieu described the ritual's role in opening the circle as a sacred space, helping worshippers to connect with the Spirit. During his youth in a Roman Catholic residential school, he recalled, "All the elements we see in front of us were banned. As I went on a healing journey, I had to discover who I am in how I embrace Christ. It has been a long journey. I do not do this frivolously, for I know I risk offending others. But I truly believe this is something we can share with you, as the Holy Spirit says to share our gifts."

Smudging also serves as a symbol of cleansing, said Dale Missyabit. Aboriginal people call themselves Spirit-helpers, he noted. "In the time before we start any work, we cleanse ourselves, and invite honesty, kindness, love and sharing into the circle—all special gifts that come from the Spirit. The circle is so sacred, so beautiful we don't want to bring anything negative into it. What troubles us, or blocks us—we let go of those things."

As Clarence Malcolm, a member of the Indian Family Centre Council, carried the smoldering mixture of sweetgrass, sage, cedar and tobacco to each person in the inner circle, those who chose to participate wafted the smoke over head, heart and body. Silence and aroma permeated the air.

Next, individuals in the circle read sections from a printed handout containing the morning's Bible passages, which contrasted the confusion of

## Voices

### Responses to the circle:

*"In a circle, people really take care of each other."*

*"Let go and let God. Rather than control the process, learn from it; let God speak."*

*"My tradition is also rich, but I've learned from Native and Catholic people about our loss of symbolism. The greatest symbol is the circle. We live in such a competitive world; if we could only all be circle minded."*

*What happened around the circle was the beginning of the process of reconciliation among Native brothers and non-Native brothers. The ultimate picture of reconciliation was when Christ went to the cross. And it was agonizing."*

*"I was very touched. The smudging scared me, but the inner circle was beautiful."*

*"I've been so enriched by the First Nations understanding of the Creation belonging to God and how we have to be stewardly. We as Christian Reformed people have so much to learn."*



Babel with the understanding of Pentecost. Finally, a stone travelled around the inner circle, giving each holder uninterrupted time to reflect on scripture and share thoughts and prayers, while others simply listened.

As the stone travelled from hand to hand, several used the word “blessed” to describe their experience of the circle. Some expressed thanks for the caring evident there. Others prayed for a spirit of love amid differences. One remarked at how scripture came alive in this setting. Another termed himself “amazed and astonished, as I am every time I sit in the circle.”

Yes, the circle took time. Far more time than allotted. But to their credit, forum leaders allowed that time to be taken.

Fear and disapproval were present in the room, especially during the smudging ceremony, when a few participants walked out. Fear also surrounded discussion of other Aboriginal rituals, such as the sweat lodge.

For some listeners, a few of those fears were allayed Friday evening at the Edmonton Native Healing Centre Cultural Camp. Leading one of three teaching circles, Missyabit described the sweat lodge as another cleansing ritual. Sitting outside a lodge built by the healing centre, Missyabit told how the pitch dark inside represents going back to the womb, to the beginning of Creation. “We have to cleanse ourselves, because we pick up a lot of garbage as human beings,” he said. “We always ask for correction. We go to sit with the Creator and pray about our anger and hatred and fear—that we can let those things go.”

The sweat lodge also offers a natural way of healing, as colonizers discovered after outlawing sweats and seeing skin disease increase among Aboriginal people. “Many of the people who go into our sweat lodge are addicts, and they feel they can sweat out that garbage and have a new fresh start—a hope that ‘maybe today I can stay clean,’” said John Stellingwerff, director of the Edmonton centre.

The Edmonton centre does extensive preparation before holding a sweat, and has used its lodge just three times, Stellingwerff said. “It has become a way of praying that involves all our sense, with a lot of symbolism that points us to God.”

Listeners asked whether cleansing ceremonies such as the sweat lodge and smudging are seen as routes to salvation, alternatives to the blood of the Lamb. Not in CRC centres, Stellingwerff said. “We are very careful about who leads the sweats.” All three Canadian Native centres use the symbolism to help worshippers connect with the Triune God.

With those experiences as a backdrop, supported by stories heard throughout the forum, participants saw renewed evidence that the Holy Spirit works in diverse and mysterious ways. As a denomination, we need to invite that Spirit to enable us to give space for culturally appropriate worship that is life-giving and Christ-affirming.

It’s a matter of life and death, as one participant observed. “For our young people on the streets of Winnipeg, the need is so great that we no longer can put up roadblocks to reaching them.” For the CRC, it’s a path to engaging other

*“I believe there is a richness in worship that is missing—the freedom to release your feelings, to raise your hands, cry, do whatever the Spirit is leading you to do. I have done these things quite openly because that’s who I am, and people have noticed that.”*

Rene Page  
African-Canadian member  
Oshawa CRC,

*“Our church changed dramatically when our church started making space for God.*

*My father is 91 years old, and he sensed from his peers in the nursing home that this church is going downhill big time.*

*But he says, ‘I’m uncomfortable, and that’s good. Because if I were comfortable, the younger generation would not be.’”*

Ed Vander Veer  
Canadian Ministries Board

*“I truly believe the CRC cares for Native people; it has given us freedom to walk the journey in the way Christ has given us that freedom.”*

Leo Beaulieu  
Native worker, Winnipeg  
Indian Family Centre

cultures in Christ's name—and enriching our own.

## Participants

## Appendix I

Title	First Name	Last Name	Organization Name	City	Region
Mr.	Bert	Adema	Indian Metis Christian Fellowship	Regina	SK
Rev.	Ray	Aldred	First Nations Alliance Christian Fellowship	Regina	SK
Ms.	Stephanie	Baker-Collins	Canadian Ministries Board	St. Catherines	ON
Mr.	Leo	Beaulieu	Indian Family Centre	Winnipeg	MB
Rev.	Roy	Berkenbosch	The King's University College	Edmonton	AB
Dr.	John	Bolt	Calvin Seminary	Grand Rapids	MI
Dr.	Peter	Borgdorff	Executive Director, CRCNA	Grand Rapids	MI
Mr.	Henry	Bosch	Northern Alberta Deaconal Conference	Edmonton	AB
Mr.	John	Brouwer	First CRC	Rocky Mtn House	AB
Mrs.	Jean	Brouwer	First CRC	Rocky Mtn House	AB
Mrs.	Leona	Cardinal		Chetwynd	BC
Mr.	Roy	Cardinal		Chetwynd	BC
Mr.	Ted	Charles	Classis Red Mesa, New Mexico	Jamestown	NM
Mr.	Huron	Claus	Christian Hope Indian Eskimo Fellowship Inc.	Phoenix	AZ
Rev.	Martin	Contant	Christian Reformed Home Missions	Surrey	BC
Mr.	William	Davison	Indian Metis Christian Fellowship	Regina	SK
Rev.	Henk	DeBruyn		Winnipeg	MB
Mrs.	Brenda	DeHaan		Edmonton	AB
Mr.	John	DeHaan		Edmonton	AB
Mr.	Wayne	DeJong	CRWRC	Burlington	ON
Mr.	John	Doornbos	Covenant CRC	Winnipeg	MB
Mr.	Ray	Elgersma		Kitchener	ON
Ms.	Charlotte	Ferris	Edmonton Native Healing Centre	Edmonton	AB
Ms.	Edith	Gerard	Indian Family Centre	Winnipeg	MB
Mrs.	Ada	Gonzales		Rocky Mtn House	AB
Mr.	Dan	Gonzales		Rocky Mtn House	AB
Mr.	Henry	Hess	Communications Director, CRCNA	Burlington	ON
Ms.	Jennifer	Hoffman	Indian Metis Christian Fellowship	Regina	SK
Mr.	Melle	Huizenga	Fellowship CRC	Edmonton	AB
Mr.	Steve	Kabetu	Friendship Community CRC	Toronto	ON
Ms.	Carrie	Kachur	Edmonton Native Healing Centre	Edmonton	AB

Rev. Harry	Kuperus	Fellowship CRC	Edmonton	AB
Dr. Arie	Leder	Calvin Seminary	Grand Rapids	MI
Dr. David	Long	The King's University College	Edmonton	AB
Ms. Ann	Magnuson	Edmonton Native Healing Centre	Edmonton	AB
Mr. Clarence	Malcolm	Indian Family Centre	Winnipeg	MB
Mr. Robert	McKeon	St Joseph's College-UofA	Edmonton	AB
Mr. Dale	Missyabit	Indian Family Centre	Winnipeg	MB
Mr. Tim	Nguyen	First CRC	Toronto	ON
Rev. Peter	Nicolai	Canadian Ministries Board	Chatham	ON
Mr. Peter	Noteboom	Canadian Council of Churches	Toronto	ON
Ms. Rene	Page	Hope Fellowship CRC	Oshawa	ON
Rev. Tong	Park	CRCNA-Korean Ministries	Bellflower	CA
Mr. Harold	Roscher	Edmonton Native Healing Centre	Edmonton	AB
Ms. Marion	Sinclair	Edmonton Native Healing Centre	Edmonton	AB
Rev. Phil	Stel	First CRC	Rocky Mtn House	AB
Mr. John	Stellingwerff	Edmonton Native Healing Centre	Edmonton	AB
Ms. Jeanet	Sybenga	Indian Family Centre	Winnipeg	MB
Ms. Joyce	Tapaquon	Indian Metis Christian Fellowship	Regina	SK
Rev. Bill	Tuininga	Covenant CRC	Winnipeg	MB
Rev. John	VanTil	Christian Reformed Home Missions	London	ON
Dr. William	VandenBorn	Board of Trustees, CRCNA	Edmonton	AB
Rev. Ed	Vanderveer	Canadian Ministries Board	Nepean	ON
Mr. Clarence	Visser	Fellowship CRC	North Edmonton	AB
Mrs. Jenny	Visser	Fellowship CRC	North Edmonton	AB
Rev. Fred	Witteveen	Friendship Community CRC	Toronto	ON
Rev. Norberto	Wolf	CRC Race Relations Committee	Bellflower	CA
Ms. Rita	Wong	The Lighthouse	Toronto	ON

## Purpose

*In a spirit of appreciation and celebration, we wish to explore with the Christian Reformed Church community how to fulfil its calling to love our neighbours, so that lives and communities (and the church itself) are transformed and the Gospel engages cultures.*

## Objectives

### Cross-Cultural Panel

- A comfortable sense that Christians in other cultures are mature enough that their cultural activities will not be under constant scrutiny.
- Greater appreciation for the theological thinking, commitment to living the Word and faithfulness to Christ in our cross-cultural ministry thrusts in the CRCNA.
- Examine the experiences of other persons and ministries involved in cross-cultural work.
- New recognition of presenting the salvation of Christ to other cultures.
- Dialogue and more understanding of the diverse ways we encounter God and live out the gospel in our daily lives.
- Better understanding and respect for cross-cultural ministry.
- Greater sense of just how vibrant and varied the church is.

### Discernment Panel

- Discern the gospel in cross-cultural settings.
- Gain a better understanding of biblical interpretations of cultural practices.
- Gain an ability to articulate if and how their cultural practices reflect the presence of Christ and promote the work of Christ.
- Listen to/discern worship symbol concerns.
- Better understand Native symbolism in a Christian context.

### Both

- Gain insight, knowledge and skill that helps to be faithful and discerning in engaging culture with the gospel.

- Recognize the challenges of contextualization in our worship experience, given the diversity of worldviews all of us bring.
- Recognize/accept/respect contributions different cultures make to the CRC in bringing the gospel to all.

## Program

### Thursday Evening

- 7:00 Opening worship  
Welcome
- Henk Van Andel, TKUC
  - Peter Borgdorff, CRCNA
- 7:30 Reflections on Cross-Cultural Ministry
- Ray Aldred, First Nations Alliance Christian Fellowship
  - Harold Roscher, Edmonton Native Healing Centre
  - Rene Page, CRC, Oshawa, ON

### Friday Morning

- 7:30 Breakfast
- 8:30 Circle Worship/Bible Study
- 9:45 Coffee & Fellowship
- 10:00 Introductions and collection of learnings
- 10:20 Review of Forum Objectives
- 10:45 Case Studies and Experiences of Cross-Cultural Ministry
- William Davison, Indian Metis Christian Fellowship Centre
  - Rene Page, Oshawa, ON
  - Huron Claus, CHIEF, Inc.
- 11:25 Small Group Work and Plenary Sharing: Guiding principles, best practices
- 12:30 Lunch

## Friday Afternoon

- 2:00 More Case Studies and Experiences
- Marion Sinclair, Edmonton Native Healing Centre
  - Rev. Tong Park, Bellflower, CA
- 2:40 Small Group work and Plenary Sharing: more guiding principles, best practices; practices to be avoided
- 3:45 Break
- 4:00 Open plenary dialogue
- 4:30 Synthesis of the day's learnings, Mini-evaluation, Preview of Saturday
- 4:45 Closing worship, songs & prayer

## Friday Evening

- 6:30 Departure for Cultural Camp outing
- Soup and bannock
  - Fellowship
  - Impromptu gifts of song
  - Teaching circles regarding the sweat lodge, the pipe and Metis culture

## Saturday Morning

- 7:30 Breakfast
- 8:30 Circle Worship/Bible Study
- 9:45 Break
- 10:00 Discernment panel
- Bert Adema (chair), Indian Metis Christian Fellowship Centre
  - Ray Aldred, First Nations Alliance Christian Fellowship
  - Norberto Wolf, Race Relations, CRCNA
  - Jeanet Sybenga, Indian Family Centre
  - Ted Charles, Classis Red Mesa, CRC
  - Leo Beaulieu, Indian Family Centre

- 11:15 Small Group Work
- 12:00 Plenary Sharing
- 12:30 Lunch

## Saturday Afternoon

- 2:00 Listener Impressions
- Stephanie Baker-Collins, Canadian Ministries Board
  - Brenda de Haan, foster parent to Aboriginal children
  - Dale Missyabit, Indian Family Centre
- 2:15 Action Planning Session—Next Steps
- 3:10 Forum Evaluation
- 3:20 Closing Worship

## Sunday

- 10:30 Worship with Fellowship CRC
- Prayer to the Four Directions
  - Children's story on gift of sweetgrass by Ann Magnuson Edmonton Native Healing Centre
  - Smudging ceremony led by Leo Beaulieu, assisted by Dale Missyabit, Winnipeg Indian Family Centre
  - Message based on Isaiah 54 by Harold Roscher, Edmonton Native Healing Centre summer youth pastor
  - Children's story by Ann Magnuson Edmonton Native Healing Centre

**Ann Magnuson's children's story:** It brings me great honour to come today and teach you just a little bit about my culture. God has given us many gifts in our lives. One of the greatest gifts is sweetgrass. We use the four elements, sweetgrass, sage, cedar and tobacco, to connect with the Creator, with Jesus Christ. Every morning at work I use the sweetgrass and smudge and pray, so I can help the foster parents and children I work with. It's hard, humbling work to pick sweetgrass. You have to get down on mother earth. It's sorted, braided and the elder prays over it. It's a very important part of my praying every day to smell the wonderful aroma. This is one of the wonderful gifts God has given his people. You have many gifts as well.

### Stephanie Baker Collins

Upon being asked to provide a summary representation of this forum, I am reminded of the sign in the window of a St. Catharines bookstore when it was going out of business: “Words failed us.” In the same way, words seem a very inadequate tool to paint a picture of this conference. What we have experienced is an amazing exchange of hearts. It is not possible to put all of that into words.

At the same time, I do want to try to draw out some themes from the conference and I find myself helped in doing that by the diagram provided by Norberto Wolf. I would like to draw your attention to three themes and they represent the three layers described in the diagram.

#### **The context of the gospel - visible culture**

The first theme applies to visible culture, that portion of the iceberg above the water. Here it is important for us to acknowledge that the gospel has already come to the various cultures represented here in a context. One context that we heard described by native brothers and sisters is the context of residential schools, where the gospel came in the context of physical and sexual abuse and the denigration of native culture. Another context that we heard described is the gospel coming in the form of slavery, segregation, lynchings and lives lived in fear. These contexts were justified in the name of Christ.

A question we must ask is this: How does this first contextualization shape the recontextualization of the gospel? What is required to regain one’s cultural identity as well as one’s primary identity as a child of God? We have heard different answers to that question this weekend.

#### **The dialogue between heart and mind - history and values**

This next theme is at the level of history and values that lies below the surface of visible culture. We seem to have witnessed a dialogue this weekend between the heart and the mind. Native brothers and sisters encouraged us to exchange our hearts. I am reminded of the interchange described by Ray Aldred at the reconciliation meeting in the Christian Missionary Alliance Church. The church leaders finally asked in exasperation, “What do you want?” The native brothers responded, “We want your heart.” “We don’t do that,” was the reply. It seems to me that we (most of us) did that this weekend. We did reach a heart understanding.

Although we have had an exchange of hearts at this conference, the mind still wants an answer. It seeks an answer to questions such as “What does this mean?” “How does this practice fit in with scripture?” If we think back to Peter Borgdorff’s phrase in his opening comments: “experience against the backdrop of revelation,” we still have some sorting out to do about the relationship between these two.

*“This is not a gathering of some people who know the answer, who will try to persuade those still searching. The context for this conference is a common questioning and listening to those experiences that shape us, against the backdrop of revelation.”*

Peter Borgdorff  
Executive Director of  
Ministries, CRCNA  
at forum opening

*“This dialogue must continue, although precisely the form is not clear to me. I don’t feel I have the privilege to speak on behalf of the whole church, but I do want to speak for myself, and say I’ve been deeply touched by the spirit of reconciliation present here—and that is a better platform to talk together, so faith is carried forward.*

*I will commit that we will not leave this lay and hopefully be in dialogue about lessons yet to be learned.”*

Peter Borgdorff  
at forum close

## Freedom/Trust - Patterns and Processes

The final trend I want to draw your attention to is at the level of deep-seated patterns and processes. We have talked this weekend about trusting each other with the story of the gospel, and emphasizing that the gospel is first of all a good news story and only secondly a set of propositions. It is here that I think we may have the most work to do in reaching mutual understanding. I have heard two very different kinds of accountability contexts described.

I have heard native brothers and sisters describe the importance of the individual healing journey of faith as well as describing the worship circle of fellowship. I find myself wondering how these two fit together. When does respect for the individual faith journey become individualism? How does accountability for the faith walk work in the circle? Bert Adema described the circle as being at its best when you are able to listen to what the Creator is telling you in the other person's story. The accountability here is to a process, to a dialogue.

We in the CRCNA are used to accountability to a structure, not a process. We are used to accountability to a set of propositions that faithfully reflect the gospel story. It may be that we don't trust the Holy Spirit enough, as one participant suggested. But we are not used to trusting a process.

It is in this area of freedom/trust that I think we will need to work further to understand each other.

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**To come full circle** to the examples I began with, I want to point out how much we have to be thankful for. Given the contexts in which the gospel has come, we should be amazed at the reconciling work of Christ that is happening in the native ministry centres in Canada. We should celebrate the working of the Spirit in the healing that takes place.

## Brenda de Haan

When I went home last night and before I returned this morning, I tried to pinpoint some feelings. When we first came here on Thursday night, many of us didn't know what to expect. Many came with questions and fears, but I hope the majority came with an open heart and mind, willing to listen, learn and question.

Not knowing was the basis of fear. Fear can give rise to anger and misunderstanding, which we saw yesterday. This morning it was completely different. Some people have opened themselves up to the possibility of exploration, and this many enhance our worship

We may not leave with answers, but at least we're able to look toward walking together as brothers and sisters. Although there is still a long way to go, a forum like this gives us the opportunity to become educated so that we might begin to share the journey together.

*“For an indigenous person to become a Christian is a sacrifice some of us do not know about. We lose our identity, sometimes our family. The sense of loss is great, but yet we understand that God through his Son redeems us and gives us a new type of family.”*  
Native participant

*“We really experienced ministry going both ways. That's a fulfillment of a vision, because we have our own pain.”*  
John Stellingwerff  
Director, Edmonton Native Healing Centre, reflecting on the forum during Sunday worship

## Dale Missyabit

Yesterday was a roller coaster day. I had a good exchange with Phil. I don't think we agreed on anything, but it was beautiful to share in an open and honest way. That we can sit in the same room with so many different opinions, views and understandings is beautiful.

What kind of guiding principles can we draw from this forum? I am not an intellectual person, but the whole thing about the heart to me is very real. Whatever I'm called to believe, do or talk about has to be what I carry in my heart. I felt a willingness during the forum to be compassionate with each other—it was a great process. I want to acknowledge Peter Noteboom for the job he's done in keeping us motivated and together. He took on the hardest role of all and did a good job.

I want to share a story with you. Awhile back, I had a chance to go with an old man to look at land for a healing centre in southern Manitoba. It was a hot day, in the mid-90s. I love winter, so that was extremely uncomfortable. Four of us went with the man in his 70s to some land that used to be a Bible camp. Before the car was even in park the old man had hopped out and was running into the bush saying, "Follow me."

We followed him through the Pembina Valley, going up and down hills. The old guy was running around like a goat while the rest of us were sucking wind and getting smacked in the face with branches. Every time he crossed the path, he went into the thick brush again. We came out of a little opening and all I could see was his butt, climbing up. We crawled up and just sat there panting.

He said, "I want to talk to you guys." He started yelling at us, "Sit still. Close your eyes. What do you see?" He told us to breathe slow and asked us again what we saw.

I could feel the breeze on my face, cooling and yet warming, comforting.

"Feel the breath of your creator," he said. "What do you hear? Listen—birds, leaves—listen to the songs of your creator. Open your eyes."

All our tiredness was gone. It was spring and the green was just coming out. I could see the Pembina River in the bottom of the valley.

Life is like that for us. We can't always take the easy road. We need to go through harsh things in our lives. If I hadn't followed him, I wouldn't have seen this thing of beauty. Sometimes we like to take the easy road and we prefer to forget, bypass or ignore things.

Not everything is easy for everybody here. We're all very beautiful people. We all sit here created under one God.

I never read, but I reach into my past. Two things came to me last night. I would like Phil to share those two passages because I think we have to do things in partnerships. These two things are very important; they're about who we are. (Rev. Phil Stel comes forward to read from Micah 6:8 and I Cor. 13)

*Micah 6:8:*

*He has showed you, O man, what is good. And what does the Lord require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God.*

*I Cor. 13*

*If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal. Love is patient, love is kind. It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes always perseveres. Love never fails. And now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love.*



Excerpted from “Discernment in Cross Cultural Ministry,” a Discussion Paper by Bert Adema commissioned for the Cross-Cultural Ministry Forum of the CRCNA, June 1 to 4, 2000.

Full paper available at <http://www.crcna.org/cr/crwb/index.htm>

In Christian aboriginal faith, smudging is an offering to the Triune Creator.

Like church bells, smudging informs people that an act of worship is about to begin. The smudging ritual invites people to join the sacred space and activity of praying to the Creator in the name of Jesus Christ. The ritual of smudging communicates the initiation of a spiritual activity through the visual and olfactory senses. People see the smudge elements; they smell the fragrant aroma of the smoldering elements. Additionally, people participate in the smudging ritual by wafting the rising smoke over their hands, face and other parts of their body. Participation in a smudging ritual is always optional; people’s desire to participate or not participate is always respected.

At Indian Metis Christian Fellowship (I.M.C.F.) the elements used for smudging may include one or more of the following: sweet grass, sage, cedar, and tobacco.

The sweet grass reminds us of our impurity before the Creator. Covering oneself in the fragrant aroma of the sweet grass is a confession of our need to be purified by the blood of Jesus Christ. We are reminded that “*Christ loved us and gave his life for us as a sweet smelling sacrifice that pleased the Creator.*” Ephesians 5: 2

The sage reminds us of our need for healing by Christ the Creator. Covering oneself in the fragrant aroma of the sage is a prayer for healing by Christ. We are reminded that “*It is by Christ’s wounds that we have been healed.*” 1 Peter 2: 24

The cedar reminds us that we must worship the Creator in truth. Covering oneself in the fragrant aroma of the cedar is a commitment to be honest and to worship the Creator in truth. We are reminded that “*The Creator is spirit and his worshippers must worship in spirit and truth.*” John 4: 24

The tobacco reminds us that the Creator made us in his image from the elements of creation. Covering oneself in the fragrant aroma of the tobacco is a commitment to honour the creation from which we were made and in which the Creator placed us. Genesis 2: 4 - 25

Participating in the smudging ritual may remind people of the incense ritual and elements that the Creator gave to the people of Israel, see Exodus 30: 34 – 38.

Participating in the smudging ritual may remind people of the word of the Lord through the prophet Malachi that, “*My name will be great among the nations, from the rising to the setting of the sun. In every place incense and pure offerings will be brought to my name, because my name will be great among the nations,*” says the Lord Almighty.” Malachi 1: 11

Participating in the smudging ritual may remind people that the book of Revelation reveals that in heaven, incense offerings will be offered to the Lord. Revelation 5: 1 – 14 and 8: 1 – 5

### **A Smudging Prayer**

*Creator Father,*

*We come to you as your children.*

*We confess that we are weak and broken images of you.*

*We pray for the forgiveness and healing that you give us through Jesus Christ so that his Spirit will clean our spirits, minds, hearts, and bodies.*

*We pray that your Holy Spirit will help us to worship you in spirit and truth.*

*We pray in the name of Jesus Christ so that his Spirit will carry our prayers to the Creator our Father in heaven.*

*Amen.*

## Friday Morning Worship: Reflections on the circle

- Relevance of scripture.
- The biggest challenge is myself, regarding time and controlling outcomes.
- Being in touch with all senses.
- The importance of listening to understand each other.
- New songs.
- Bridging gaps between cultures and respecting each other's culture.
- Every circle is a confirmation of freedom.
- Freedom in Christ enables you to reach out to others.
- Respect for each person was given, and listening to gifts.
- In a circle, people really take care of each other.
- Value of listening.
- People precede theology.
- My grace is when I turn to the Lord.
- Willingness to share the gift of circle.
- Love each other as partners.
- To be vulnerable is rewarding.
- The importance of symbols, things we can use to remind ourselves of God's actions, or actions we need to perform.
- Teaching a group of non-native Christians about native culture takes a lot of courage. The speakers made themselves vulnerable, especially to a culture that doesn't understand. That bridge is just beginning to be built.
- Where the Spirit of the Lord is, is freedom.
- Let go and let God. Rather than control the process, learn from it; let God speak.
- We need to be open to the Spirit, who works in ways we don't expect.
- In the obvious sincere desire to be one, we also experienced brokenness. Can we all love one another?
- All of us come with stories; the Holy Spirit writes those into one. I hope we all keep our hearts and eyes open to that Spirit.
- It takes time to understand one's own spiritual heritage. We don't even always know what it was we were given.
- Different ways of receiving the gifts of grace.
- Circle listening: people don't remember who said what, but the circle saying these things. Native people not only listen to one another, but to what nature is saying.
- Christ unveils Creation.
- The circle represents both strength and vulnerability—provides safety.
- I will be their God; they will be my people.
- Can the symbols really be adapted to the Christian message? What are their roots, background, associations? I sat in the outer circle, and could not have participated in the inner. My children are cleansed and purified the by the blood of Jesus, not by a symbol that's rooted in non-Christian background.
- I appreciate all words that were said, but I felt a lot of fear in our midst, including in my own heart, that people would say or do things that offended other people. I admire the courage of those saying what is in their hearts anyway. I'm comforted that love casts out fear. What am I afraid of? We all need to ask that, in our hearts, for churches, for people.
- It saddens my heart there is not unity here with my Native brothers; instead, divisions.
- Jesus Christ says I am the way, the truth, the life. There is no mediator between men and God.
- There needs to be a division, a fine line, between culture and religion. I was told the Eagle feather would be my protector; I serve the God who created that Eagle feather.
- Honest sharing and listening.

- One of the things that got to me was the fear people had; I could sense it.
- God's Spirit is present in spite of our weaknesses and differences.
- Acceptance and love.
- We are at different stations along our cycle: some of us are infants in our Christianity, some of us are mature, some in between. I see taking place here what should have been done when evangelizing was first done with Navajo and Zuni people. This marks the beginning of dialogue that's often non-existent between our two cultures.
- I noted acceptance of people where they are at on their journey.
- For an indigenous person to become a Christian is a sacrifice some of us do not know about. We lose our identity, sometimes our family. The sense of loss is great, but yet we understand that God through his son redeems us and gives us a new type of family that we associate with worship.
- Two things: One, I'm challenged; another, I'm blessed.
- I see an emphasis on forms and rituals among our Native people. That emphasis is a concern for me. Back in the dark ages, there was a lot of emphasis on forms; it wasn't until the Reformation, when Martin Luther spoke about the importance of the Word, that the church was vibrant and alive. Our challenge: What does God's word say?
- Blessed. I see openness within the circle, and that blesses me.
- What happened around the circle was the beginning of the process of reconciliation among Native brothers and non-native brothers. The ultimate picture of reconciliation was when Christ went to the cross, and it was agonizing.
- Listening is important for understanding. I say understanding because there is a river of wisdom that flows from the throne of God. Sometimes when we say "I know," we begin to think that knowledge originated with us. But it came from before, from our ancestors.
- Having become foster parents to Aboriginal children has caused us to question our Christian role, but also how Aboriginals are treated.
- I was born in Kenya. We had to lose a lot to become Christian. So I see a lot in common with First Nations people. When we are in the midst of struggle, sometimes we don't see others struggling, too. I look forward to a time when can embrace each other.
- We do not support our denomination in this Native ministry, but we do support native pastors in Rocky Mountain House.
- I was very touched. The smudging scared me, but the inner circle was beautiful.
- When one turns to the Lord, the veil is removed.

### **Friday morning panel**

- Listen before you shape an opinion.
- Accept the viability of others who live their Christian lives differently.
- What gets between us is not our differences but our conviction of being right.
- Does it point to our Lord Jesus Christ?
- To invite God's Spirit to enable each of us to struggle and deal with human differences.
- To practise apology and forgiveness.
- Don't lump all similar ethnic and Native groups together.
- Find where people truly are with respect to their own ethnic and cultural communities.
- Focus on what is life-giving and positive.
- Build one another up.
- Let the truth guide you.
- God said he will redeem all of creation.
- Let Christ be our guide as if he were sitting amongst us.
- Acknowledge and be sensitive to differences.
- Be aware of the way in which effective cross-cultural ministry is taught.

- Keep communication with each other and the gospel open and honest.
- Have the ability to practice self-criticism. Be willing to take the log out of our own cultural “eye” before removing the splinter from another culture.
- Avoid stereotyping, practise respect and love.
- Let the Word be the final word.
- Do you have to give up everything to please the church and God?
- How do we lead people to Christ?
- Identify the Spirit as the Spirit of Jesus Christ.
- It takes time to listen and understand before passing judgement.
- We need to listen to many people because one person can’t represent the whole culture.
- If our most heated debates about worship are within the CRC culture, how do we judge another culture?
- Scripture says we should strive forward, but different cultural groups remain living in the past and experiencing their pain.
- Everybody shares a base value of wanting to be authentic to the faith and faithful to the Word, but their expressions and vocabulary may be different. It could be that everybody has the same heart inside, or else that we understand words differently.

## Friday afternoon panel

### Guiding principles

- Trust and respect is imperative, and by that we do not mean agreement or ditto perspectives, but taking time to hear each other out.
- Process is important for having the conversation we need, and that takes time.
- Respect each other’s differences as well as similarities.
- Focus on Jesus Christ.
- Accept each other as children of God/Creator, and learn from each other.
- Three places to listen to a culture:
  - To the people who practice to the traditional religion
  - To the Christian people there.
  - To the political and economic aspirations of that group.

If the gospel story does not touch those things, we talk in a language that nobody can hear.

- The community needs to be shaped by the gospel story: God the Father, revealed by Jesus Christ, at work through the Holy Spirit among his holy people, by his holy scriptures.
- We need to know the source, how a ritual came about, to discern whether we can practise it.
- Seek to operate or communicate with a common understanding of what it means to have faith in God as Father, Son and Holy

Spirit. Because of how we’re communicating, we’re missing one another on certain exchanges, and that’s unfortunate.

- It’s difficult yet necessary to distinguish between a cultural practice and a spiritual practice.
- Critical self-reflection needs to be a fundamental part of cross-cultural dialogue.
- Recognize that every individual and every congregation’s experience will be different; therefore, the dialogue they have will be different. (We might like to think what we’re creating is a blueprint, but it is a unique experience we are having.)
- Always ask, “Is what we are doing here legitimate?”
- Strive to cultivate wholesome, hopeful dialogue. That doesn’t mean we don’t argue, but it does mean we especially work at asking, “What do you mean?”
- Measure our culture to the Word of God, not making our culture or religion fit to the Word.
- God is central in all our work; his son Jesus Christ is our guide.
- We love and respect one another, and have Jesus as our Saviour.
- We need to relate to and dialogue with Muslim, Buddhists and others.

- For our young people on the streets of Winnipeg, the need is so great that we no longer can put up roadblocks to reaching them.
- We need to be accountable.
- Use the criteria scriptures give us regarding how to discern: What goes into the body does not defile; what comes out of the body defiles. A good tree cannot bear bad fruit; by your fruits shall you be judged. In our theological reflection, it is critical that we name these issues of discernment.
- We need two things: a balance of Christian liberty and legalism, plus Biblical basics. All under the context of love.
- Three words: Help me understand.
- Proverbs: We need the proverbs, the parables, the sayings and riddles of the wise.
- Acts 1:8: Go into all the world and preach the gospel of Jesus Christ.
- God has set a standard; we need to uphold that. The Bible is our absolute standard.
- We need to work together in how we journey together.
- It's not enough to say God is love.
- There is good stuff in Aboriginal spirituality and bad stuff.
- In our use of words, we have to be very careful.
- We have to listen to each other.
- Ask questions on the basis of what the Bible teaches.
- Treat the Bible with respect.
- When some of us use the word *Spirit*, that throws a whole bunch of others of us; we get scared by that.
- Being judgmental, as distinguished from wholesome discerning dialogue.
- Assuming we understand people without committing ourselves to listening fully.
- Preventing people from asking whatever questions are on their hearts.
- Accepting everyone's theology of the gospel as the gospel truth.
- Pulling out verses like bullets, and throwing them at each other; the Bible is a story.
- Patronizing for the sake of unity, rather than standing up for the truth.
- Hebrews 10:9: Jesus came to do away with old way of worship and establish a new way. If God has done away with the old way, why are we trying to bring it back?
- Talking behind backs.
- Assumptions.
- Hindering the gospel of Jesus Christ from penetrating into lives of our Indian people.

### **Learnings**

- Healing circle
- Talk from the heart
- Pain
- Reconciliation
- Forgiving
- Scared
- Honesty
- Tough love
- Pressure
- Confession
- Tested
- Grace
- Sharing
- Humanness
- Understanding
- Listen
- Brokenhearted

### **Practices to avoid**

- Confrontation dialogue; it is really eliminating, and it disempowers.
- Judgmental one-way attitudes about Christianity or worship.
- Idolatry and secrecy.
- Non-acceptance of multi-culturalism.
- Making the assumption that someone else understands what we mean.

## Suggestions for the church in promoting faithful cross-cultural ministry

### Process

- Commit to the process.
- Have patience.
- It's a long journey, not something we're going to finish overnight.
- Build relationships cross-culturally.
- Provide opportunities for dialogue with a focus on listening to each other.
- More sharing of personal stories of pain and joy, from other cultures and our own.
- Cross-cultural contacts guided by trained people.
- More dialogue, like this.
- More fellowship, sharing, stories.

### Broaden the dialogue

- Give power away; the discerning circle should be wide.
- Encourage our church to share its cultural stories and those of other cultures (probably less than one per cent of worshippers are intimately involved, other than making donations) and to share in fellowship.
- Invite more of our native elders, to have better understanding.
- Cast the net wide.
- Nurture dialogue, and promote discernment by identifying and using gifted people.
- Engage Aboriginals and the CRC through the circle.
- Allow women to have a voice in the CRC.

### Self-examination

- Have the ability to practice self-criticism. Be willing to take the log out of our own cultural "eye" before removing the splinter from another culture.
- If our most heated debates about worship are within the CRC culture, how do we judge another culture?
- Critical self-reflection needs to be a fundamental part of cross-cultural dialogue.

### Healing & Reconciliation

- Reconciliation is needed of the CRC and churches like Red Mesa.
- Put emphasis on teaching humility.
- Be sensitive to where Aboriginal people are in their healing.
- Start with apology and reconciliation.
- Sacrificial demonstration – will start a healing process.
- Our church does not have a sense of needing to make an apology.
- No more theology of my way or the highway.
- Celebrate diversity.

### Education

- Pastors need to address prejudice.
- Educate the church about what culture is and how to respect it.
- Promote and allow opportunities to learn from one another.
- Promote the multi-ethnic conference.
- Deliberate cross-cultural training.
- Emphasize that differences enrich and mirror image of God.
- More opportunities for learning.
- Exchanges – other ways of learning from each other, building understanding.
- More education about cross-cultural ministry at church/classis level.
- Be aware of the way in which effective cross-cultural ministry is taught.

### Determine Basics

- Teach what you mean and what you don't mean.
- Identify non-negotiables – what is our common ground? Such as Bible final authority, Triune God, Jesus as only God/Saviour.

### **Develop leadership**

- Empowerment.
- Need for leadership development in Aboriginal communities.
- Develop/empower indigenous leaders.
- Developing ownership of Aboriginal ministries in local church at a deeper level.

### **Keep a Vision of Redemption**

- If we stay in our human journey, we are in danger of rotting – need north star.
- God said he will redeem all of creation.

### **Be open to the Spirit**

- Don't limit the Holy Spirit; allow the Spirit to work in mysterious and different ways.
- Invite God's Spirit to enable each of us to struggle and deal with human differences.