

What can my church do? (cont'd)

Networking for Evangelism — identifying relationships (continued)

- Form a construction team to do home repair on a reservation. If there is not an established ministry on that reservation, contact the tribal chairman and explain that your church would like to send a team to repair any homes that the tribal government identifies as in need of repair. Such work is usually much appreciated.
- Ministries such as Celebrate Recovery can help American Indians break free of the cycles of addiction that grip so many. Talk to tribal leaders about bringing Celebrate Recovery to a reservation or urban Indian Center.
- Bring together a group of businesspersons to teach entrepreneurial skills.
- Tribes often have powwows or other public events. Volunteer to help with clean up, security, or tearing down when the event is completed in order to establish relationships.
- Assist Indian Avenue Baptist Church in Lawrence, Kansas, as they minister to Haskell Indian Nations University, the only four-year Indian school established by treaty for students from all 500 plus federally-recognized tribes.

Starting Small Groups — that can become churches

- Train church members to form small groups that can become churches. Bring in someone to teach about Bible storying as a method of teaching the Bible. Many American Indians live in a storytelling culture.



www.peoplegroups.info

If you cannot locate this people group in your community, find them online at www.peoplegroups.info, a site sponsored by the North American Mission Board, SBC.

What are their needs?

American Indians need to know that the Creator loved them so much He came to earth to show them how to live and that He even gave his life, taking the punishment they deserved for their wrongdoing. They need to understand that Christianity is not the “white man’s religion.” Jesus Himself was brown and from a tribal people (the Jewish nation).

In addition, American Indians need opportunities to overcome the effects of centuries of oppression and injustice. Anger, poverty, high unemployment, poor education, alcoholism, drug abuse, suicide, and broken family structures make life difficult for many American Indians.

What is keeping the gospel from them?

Often, Jesus is not understood as loving, but as an oppressor. Christianity and the U.S. government are closely connected in the minds of many American Indians because, all too often, Christian churches have stood by silently as American Indians were treated unjustly. To reach the American Indian culture with the gospel requires that not only must the gospel be preached, but that Christians must engage in the battle to correct the wrongs and to walk alongside American Indians as they rebuild the strength of character that has been eroded by centuries of hurt. American Indians are a spiritual people; they need to see Jesus “being lived” among them.

Information may be updated by writing peoplegroups@namb.net.

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Native Americans of North America

Who are the Native Americans?

Native Americans are the descendants of the tribal groups that were in North America when the Europeans arrived. Today, the U.S. government recognizes over 500 of these tribes, while many other tribes are only recognized by their state governments. Because Native American can be understood to mean anyone born in America and thus, native to the land, the term “American Indian” is becoming more common and is preferred by the U.S. Census Bureau. For Southern Baptists, this group includes Alaska natives as well.

Population in North America:
4.1 million (Census 2000)

Languages spoken by Native Americans:
English and tribal languages

Top 5 locations with highest population of American Indians in North America:

1. New York, N.Y.
2. Los Angeles, Calif.
3. Phoenix, Ariz.
4. Tulsa, Okla.
5. Oklahoma City, Okla.

What is their heritage?

The heritage of many American Indians today is mistreatment and oppression by a U.S. government that has tried to separate them from their traditions and culture, forcing many American Indians into boarding schools and denying them access to quality education and opportunities for advancement. This painful history is often misrepresented in movies and history books, though much progress is being made in helping the rest of America become aware of the truth. Christianity was forced upon the ancestors of many American Indians.

“Most American Indians follow a personal faith that combines traditional and Christian elements.”

What are their beliefs?

According to CensusScope, many Native families today have been devout Christians for generations. Others, particularly in the Southwest have retained their original traditions more or less intact. Most American Indians follow a personal faith that combines traditional and Christian elements. Pan Indianism is a contemporary movement that encourages a return to traditional religious beliefs and seeks to create a common Native religion. The Native American Church (NAC) continues the ancient Peyote Religion and uses the peyote cactus which is known for its psychedelic properties. The NAC was incorporated in 1918 to promote Christian beliefs and values, but it is not a Christian church.

To discover the beliefs of a particular tribe, it is best to use the Internet to study that particular tribe since religious beliefs and traditions vary among the tribes.

What can my church do?

Endvisioning — beginning with the end in mind

- Learn about cross-cultural ministry. For information on crossing into the American Indian culture, contact Ron and Alpha Goombi for the training materials they send to mission groups. They can be reached by e-mail at allnations@cox.net.
- Obtain a subscription to *Indian Life* newspaper. It shares information about Christian work among native peoples in both Canada and the United States. For more information, visit www.indianlife.org.
- Many tribes have tribal newspapers. To learn more about a tribe, contact the tribal government for a subscription to its newspaper.
- Contact your state convention for information about American Indian ministries in your state.

Prayer — focusing on the people as well as calling out workers to the harvest

- Pray for a Christian spiritual awakening among American Indians. There are Christian leaders among both American Indians and evangelical churches who believe that God is preparing a great awakening that will begin with American Indians and sweep through the continent.
- Pray that God will lead your church to despise injustice as much as God does.
- Pray for American Indian Christians. They are often seen as traitors who follow “the white man’s god.”
- Establish a prayer team to pray about your church becoming involved in American Indian ministry. Ask God to bring together a team that will make a long-term commitment to bringing the gospel to American Indians. Tribal peoples are weary of those who show up to just smile and take pictures. American Indians are looking for a commitment from outside groups that tells them they matter to you.
- Share information learned through research with the prayer group so they can pray for tribal leaders, individuals, families, and persons of peace.
- Pray for persons of peace from among the tribe to help you establish relationships or serve as a point of contact.

Networking for Evangelism — identifying relationships

- Reservations are sovereign nations. In reaching out to any reservation or tribal group, you must work with the tribal chairman or a tribal government leader. Discuss tribal needs that your church could help meet. If there is a ministry group that already has a relationship with the tribe, you may want to partner with that group first.
- Form a group within your church to develop a partnership with American Indian churches and ministries. Many churches are linking up with existing ministries and going on mission trips to reservations and learning how to meet identified needs on the reservation.
- Serve a group by meeting needs. This is a first step to gaining a good reputation so that a tribal group will care to hear what you have to say about the gospel.
- Identify American Indian groups living in your own state, especially in the urban areas, and explore the possibilities of planting churches among them. Remember, reservations are sovereign nations within the United States. You must request permission from the tribal leaders to do any service projects on the reservation, even prayerwalking.
- Discover the needs of a local tribe (through an existing American Indian ministry) or in a nearby state, and determine how those within your church can help meet that need. For example, businesspersons in the church could partner with American Indian businesses to help them become more successful.
- American Indians place great emphasis on honoring their elders. Service projects for the elderly are important ways to honor the tribe’s culture. Ideas include home improvement (similar to a World Changers ministry), nursing home visitation, helping with meals on wheels, and stocking a food pantry.
- Education is highly stressed. After-school programs that provide tutoring, ACT prep, and training in developing job search skills, are greatly appreciated. Gifts of school supplies at the beginning of semesters are valued.
- Youth suicide is a terrible plague among American Indians. Invest in their youth through mentoring. Sports camps (basketball, stickball, football) are a great way to build relationships.
- Support single parent families and young families by providing parenting classes.

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