



Indigenews

My People International

Fall 2005
Volume 1, Issue II

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Tragedy and Opportunity

by Terry LeBlanc

Recent events in Canada's First Nations communities make it very clear: much remains to be done to bring Native North American peoples into full, healthy participation in the wider society!! Youth suicide continues to overwhelm already grief-stricken families and communities—youth are dying in unprecedented numbers at their own hands. According to many, the struggle for individual and social identity is at the root of much of the "statistics."

Social science says that, in any society, young people need to successfully resolve the adolescent identity crisis. Not to do so risks increased personal, social, and family dysfunction in adulthood. Since Native families, leaders, and communities as a whole are challenged to define a place for themselves within the wider society, the process becomes even more difficult for Native youth.

Proposed solutions often create a tension of choice. Young people are forced to choose between personal health and the traditional social bonds of Native people. Native youth need a contemporary response to the expectations of tradition. How would contemporary Native community life look if health were its foundation?



Native Christian leaders meet to pray and plan for suicide intervention.

In Northern Ontario, all else appeared to have failed. Community awareness programs, focused suicide prevention programs, and reintegration of traditional spirituality were not working. In early September, many, many Native leaders in the north, at wits end to know what to do in the wake of a suicide per week since May, called for help. Responding to the call, Rick and Linda Martin and four other native Christians met to pray and plan with the leadership. The request: create an intervention founded on biblical, Christian teaching and spiritual beliefs.

Was there a way to create an integrated response, rooted in the cultural reality of the people, affirming the social context but offering the hope of Christ?

Social Realities in Native North America

- Historically, aboriginal suicide was rare; now it's 3 times that of the general population. Canadian and US stats are similar.
- Young aboriginal girls are 7.5 times more likely to commit suicide than their non-native counterparts; boys are 5 times more likely.
- Native youth suicide very often affects entire communities as a result of suicide clustering (Dr. Charles Grim, Director of Indian Health Services, testifying before the U.S. Senate in May, 2005).
- Suicide is the second leading cause of death in the 15-24 age group, accounting for 1/3 of all deaths of Native young people.
- In one study of Native 7th—12th graders, 22% of girls and 12% of boys reported having attempted suicide!

Fall 2005

Helping Youth Make Sense of Life

The Nishnawbe Aski Nation covers 2/3 of northern Ontario; it includes 52 isolated communities with a population of 30,000 Cree, Ojibway, and Oji/Cree people. In 2005, the suicide rate in these northern communities escalated to an average of about one per week. And the suicide victims are getting younger; in October, one was a twelve-year-old girl.

Ongoing trauma and grief have left these communities reeling. The political governing body, the Nishnawbe Aski Nation, has formed a six-person task force to address the issue on a spiritual level. They

have invited Rick and Linda Martin and four other Christian health care professionals to participate.

These political leaders are not necessarily Christians but recognize that “some aspects of suicide are deeper than the government can go.” For instance, young people have repeatedly spoken of evil spirits visiting and urging them to kill themselves.

Native youth suicide is a complex issue with spiritual, emotional, and physical factors. Many young people are from broken homes and bear the pain and emptiness of

missing one or both parental relationships. Linda Martin also points to the cultural disintegration of the Aboriginal culture where skills that formerly defined life are no longer needed, resulting in a sense of meaninglessness. Referring to a “chain reaction of disintegration,” she says, “Our children suffer most from what’s happening to us as a people group, because they have no frame of reference whereby they can understand the social chaos. Therefore, many of our young people live with confusion and with an ongoing sense of being overwhelmed.”



Guess what happens when a Mennonite boy from southern Ontario meets a Cree girl from northern Ontario and God is at the centre? ... Two transformed lives, two wonderful kids and an incredibly impacting ministry with the Native community! What more would you expect from a gracious God!

Staff Profile

Linda and Rick Martin— Sioux Lookout, ON

I met Rick and Linda at the seminary they were attending back in 1999 where each was completing a masters degree in Biblical Counseling. Linda, Cree from Muskrat Dam, Ontario, and Rick, Mennonite from southern Ontario, were preparing themselves to work among the Cree communities of Northwestern Ontario.

Linda, like many Native people in her generation, was still wrestling through issues of identity and acceptance. Was the history she learned of the mainstream society really the only history that was valid? What about the history of her own people? How was she to understand her identity as a Cree person in the context of someone else’s history? Rick, raised in the secure but during his youth, somewhat confining Mennonite Christian faith, wondered if there was another way to view God, Christian faith and life. For many young men and women, their own culture and context can seem too pre-packaged and rigid as they begin to discover their own thoughts and ideas. This was very much so for Rick. And so, he set out to explore life, to find faith moorings that would be very much his own.

Rick had gone to northern Ontario to teach school. Here the simple but deep faith and spirituality of the indigenous people impacted and transformed him. The gracious Cree people of Muskrat Dam helped re-invigorate his faltering Christian faith. Linda, a beautiful young woman from that community was in turn influenced by Rick to understand some things about herself differently. Over time, Rick helped her see herself through new eyes.

Rick and Linda lead counseling training programs, conduct abuse survivor and anger/stress management workshops, provide pastoral care for several Native pastors. On the side, Rick is involved in sports camps and clinics with kids in the north. Much of the Martins’ work is with communities accessible only by plane or winter road.

Linda and Rick live in Sioux Lookout, Ontario with their two high school-aged daughters, Rochelle and Lynette.

Ministry Highlights— July through November 2005

- Terry spoke at the World Christian Gathering of Indigenous Peoples in Sweden.
- Ray and Terry met with the Episcopal and Anglican bishops to discuss training Native clergy in the north.
- Ray led the Aboriginal Task Force meeting in Edmonton—discussion and prayer about ministry to the Native suicide issue in Canada.
- Terry spoke at Taylor University about diversity and reconciliation in Christ.
- Ray spoke at York University in Toronto and Western University in London, ON.
- Rick served as a support staff/consultant for the Rowe Hearings. (A white priest is accused of sexually abusing 300 boys.)
- Native Healing Centre workshop on cultural foundations of faith.
- Terry led in the Indigenous Theological Symposium in Manila, Philippines.
- The Mohawk Bible translation team has finished the book of Esther.
- Ray spoke at the Canadian National Church Planting Congress in Toronto, sponsored by Outreach Canada.
- Revisions complete on first year VBS, incorporating feedback from teachers. Goes to print right after Christmas.

Prayer Needs

- The ongoing work with the Nishnawbe-Aski Nation communities .
- Our fundraising efforts through the next months.
- Adrian Jacobs as he parents five children into and through the teen years.
- The Native students involved in their doctoral studies in theology and mission.
- Dancing the Way as the team begins ministry preparation for the coming year. There are many invitations. Pray we are able to focus on the right ones.
- More people who are fluent in Mohawk to help with the translation project.
- Funding to fly Christian musicians whose music is relevant to Native youth into remote communities.
- For the planned summer sports and culture camps
- Planned survivors of abuse leadership training for fall '06.
- Ray's meeting with U.S. and Canadian Mennonite leaders on leadership development and aboriginal issues.

Staying Connected

- If your church or school is having a missions/ministry conference that you would like My People to participate in, please call or write.
- Our new website, www.mypeopleinternational.com will be up-and-running Dec 15. Check us out for monthly updates and news.
- Christian people with counseling training can contact the Martins if they would like to help.
- People can encourage Native pastors by helping the work on projects in their homes.
- People skilled in sports, especially hockey and volley ball can come up and help with clinics.
- Donations of new or gently used hockey, soccer, or volley ball equipment are needed.
- Help with special events.

Dancing The Way



Remember to pray for the many youth in Native communities in Canada—especially in the north struggling to make sense of life. Pray they might not seek to lose their life, but look to God to fulfill their life in Christ!





“The Cutting Edge of Native Ministry!”

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*Our new website—
www.mypeopleinternational.com will
be up and running by December
15th. Check us out for current
events, articles, updates and more!*

Upcoming Events

- | | |
|------------|---|
| Nov. 28-30 | Rick and Linda conduct Parenting Workshop and marriage counseling in Bearskin Lake, ON |
| Dec-Feb | Terry preparing for PhD Qualifying Exams and writing materials for ministry
Adrian writing materials for Men's Discipleship |
| Dec. 6 | Community outreach in Kenora, ON |
| Dec. 7-9 | Hockey Clinic in Muskrat Dam with Dave and Steve Chee Choo |
| Jan. 6-8 | Rick takes an Aboriginal team to hockey tournament in Kitchener/Waterloo, ON |
| Jan. 17-20 | Staff meetings with our US partner, Luth. Assoc. of Miss. and Pilots, US. |
| Late Jan. | Tim will be speaking in Lutheran churches in Osoyoos/Oliver, BC |
| Jan. 29 | Ray will speak at Emmanuel Christian Community Church's Mission Fest in the Vancouver, BC, area. |
| Feb. | Rick and Linda teach on Aboriginal social issues in Winnipeg, MB |
| Feb. 23-26 | Rick and Linda teach on sexual abuse issues at conference in Prince George, BC |
| March | Ray will be speaking at the “Street Level” Conference in Ottawa. This is a conference of ministries to poor and homeless people, sponsored by the Evangelical Fellowship of Canada. |