

# Report of Center for Indian Scholars Meeting In Tempe, Arizona

January 6 – 8, 1989

We have a total of 16 people involved in the Center – 5 on the Board of Directors and 11 on the Advisory Board. One member of the Board could not attend, Alvin McKay. He is Superintendent of the Nishga School System and the Nishga School Board wouldn't give him time off.

Five members of the Advisory Board were absent. Jose' Miguel had a very important Village Meeting to attend on Jan. 8, regarding San Xavier land which is to be taken by the central Arizona Project, a huge irrigation water canal. Paul Ethelbah appears to have been snowed in at his mountain home. Vine Deloria, Sr. was not well and unable to travel. (His son, Vine Deloria, Jr. has agreed to take his father's place on the Advisory Board.) Joe Cancio had an important religious meeting he absolutely had to attend. He sent a noted young Yaqui deer singer, Felipe Molina, to replace him. Mr. Molina was able to attend our Saturday morning session. Winona Arriaga sent her son, "Butch" Elliott, in her place.

A sacrifice to the Fire ceremony was held at sunrise on Sunday in memory of a member of the Advisory Board who died recently, Jensen Jack, leader of Ute Bear Dance in Utah. Father John Hascall performed an Indian style mass later in the morning. We met for a short time Friday, night but everyone was tired from traveling so we did not undertake any business. We met Saturday morning, Sunday morning, and for two hours Sunday afternoon. We met, jointly with the Native Ministers' Consortium on Saturday afternoon.

The Center directors and advisers jointly made the following decisions:

1. We decided to take advantage of the celebration of Columbus Day, 1992 and plan a large conference then. The group felt that such a conference should neither celebrate nor harshly condemn Columbus, the symbol of the European advance into North America.
2. The 1992 conference should have two co-equal goals. One, Indians need to confer among ourselves about how we came to our present situation over the last 500 years, take stock of our situation as of 1992, and decide how we could best help ourselves in the future. Two, the conference should draw up a list of conditions which white society needs to guarantee for our survival, a list which could be presented to national church organizations: federal, state, and provincial governments, foundations, international bodies, and the like.
3. I believe it was assumed that this 1992 meeting should include the tribal groups of the U.S.A. and Canada. At our next meeting I am going to suggest that we include the tribal groups of northern Mexico – Papago, Yaqui, Kickapoo, Tarahumara, etc., and perhaps representatives of selected tribes in other parts of Latin America: Cuna of Panama, Mapuchi of Chi li and so on.
4. We agreed that we would build up to the 1992 conference by slowly, over the next three years, adding to our group assembled in Tempe. In that way we could be selective and avoid the phonies, crazies, and operators "on the make" that flock to every important Indian meeting.

## **Ministers:**

5. We met jointly with the Native Consortium teaching staff, most of whom are white theologians involved in the training of Indian ministers. We agreed to meet with them in the future in order to set up a dialogue with them about Indian culture and religion, so that they could learn more about these subjects and thus better teach their Indian students. Some of us may want to go to the Vancouver School of Theology in Vancouver, B. C. this summer to set up the dialogue. Later, Mackenzie and I arranged for one of the members of the Advisory Board, Winona Arriaga, to teach a course entitled “The Role of Women in Ojibway Culture” at their summer school.

6. We dissolved our special Columbus Day Committee and asked one of the members, Father John Hascall, to serve on the Advisory Board.

7. We repeated our desire to work toward the goal of our original mandate from the Indian Ecumenical Steering Committee – to establish a permanent meeting place and a “think tank” for Indian elders and religious leaders. Secondly, we want to establish the Board of Directors and especially the Advisory Board as a credible group that can:

- speak out and take stands on Indian religious issues such as the certification of Indian healers who practice among whites or urban Indians,
- take stands on the desecration of particular Indian religious sites,
- draw up statements regarding our relationship to the game animals and to other parts of the natural world, certification of Indian language teachers,
- advise on Indian culture and history programs in schools,
- review books about Indian religious practices,
- explain the sacred nature of our treaties, and so on.

8. We tabled a suggestion by the president that we sponsor and hold funds for an intertribal council to be called and hosted in 1993 by the head Fire of the Cherokees. They wish to explain the wampum belts of which they are custodians at this meeting. As custodians of these belts they feel mandated to call such a council in troubled times. The group felt they needed time to consider this suggestion.

I want to personally thank Cook School for their hospitality. I, also, want to thank all of you, my friends, for coming to the meeting again. It was great to see all of you. We had a great meeting!

Robert K. Thomas, President  
Center for Indian Scholars