

SECOND INDIAN ECUMENICAL CONFERENCE

R E P O R T

Stoney Tribe, Morley, Alberta.

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The Second Indian Ecumenical Conference was held in its year July 18-21 on the Morley Reserve near Calgary, Alberta. The Steering Committee of the Conference accepted the invitation of Chief John Snow of the Stoney Tribe to host the Conference. The meeting site was in the beautiful Stoney Park located in the forested foothills of the Rocky Mountains. Approximately 150 delegates attended the Conference. The delegates were members of the following tribes: Assiniboine, Blackfoot, Blood, Oklahoma Cherokee, Eastern Cherokee, Southern Cheyenne, Chippewa, Chippewyan, Plains Cree, Woods Cree, Swampy Cree, Eastern Cree, Creek, Dog Rib, Hidatsa, Kwakiutl, Locheaux, Malecite, Nicmac, Naskopi, Navajo, Nishku, Nootka, Odawa, Ojibway, Oto, Papago, Pomo, Saulteaux, Seminole, Shawnee, Sisseton-Wahpeton, Sioux, Teton Sioux, Canadian Sioux, Slavey, Stoney, Squamish, Tlingit, Ute, Winnebago, Yakima, and Yaqui.

The number of Indians who came to the Conference simply as observers is hard to estimate but they numbered several hundred. The Stoney officials in charge of meals at the Conference estimated that on the third day of the Conference, 800 people were served at each meal. A substantial number of the Indian observers were young people from all over the United States and Canada who came on their own initiative and resources. Two workshops of young people attended; the Native Youth Summer Programme of Toronto, and the Canadian Indian Youth Workshop. Approximately 34 non Indian observers attended the Conference. In terms of representation, the delegates came from a much wider variety of tribes and communities than last year. Not only was there a tremendous increase in the number of delegates but many tribes unrepresented last year sent delegates to this year's Conference - two ministers from the Locheaux tribe in the Arctic, five Papagos drove from southern Arizona, a Pomo couple from California, a Ute Chief came from Utah, the first Malecite from New Brunswick, and a Naskopi from Quebec attended the Conference, and so on. An impact on the Conference was the attendance of an entire bus load of people from the Indian communities in the southern part of the North West Territories in Northern Canada.

Several areas of North America are still largely unrepresented in the Conference - most of Alaska, Minnesota, Nevada, Oregon, and Idaho, California, Northwestern United States, Quebec, and Manitoba are very under represented. Representation from the Iroquois people of New York and Ontario is still a problem, but several key delegates had hoped to attend this year but were unable to do so. Another large tribe under represented at the Conference is the Sioux people. The main reason for this under representation is the lack of funds for field work and regional meetings in these areas.

The Southwest and especially Oklahoma were not well represented at this year's Conference. Last year, Oklahoma sent the largest delegation and this year only the Cherokees, Creeks, Cheyennes, Shawnees, and Otos were able to have a few people in attendance. The cause behind this situation was the unwillingness of American national church organizations to contribute funds for delegates' travel from the United States. At the last moment the Anglican Church Women of Canada contributed for delegate travel from the United States but it was almost too late at that point for key people in the Southwest and Oklahoma to co-ordinate the delegate travel from their areas which are a "patch work quilt" of different tribes. If the Anglican Church Women had not graciously contributed for the southern delegates there would have been very few people from the Indian communities in the United States at this year's Conference.

In spite of financial difficulties, representatives of tribes from the United States numbered approximately 50 delegates of the total 150 at the Conference, more than attended last year's Conference in the United States. Despite the refusal of the national church bureaucracies in the United States to contribute to delegate travel, Indians from the United States were able to attend the Conference. The generosity of the Anglican ladies in Canada was matched by the enthusiasm of several local Indian groups in the United States who raised money to send their religious leaders to the Conference: the Associated Indians of Detroit, the Chicago Indian Center, and a local chapter of the Navajo Native American Church. Cherokee ceremonial leaders were able to send several young interested Cherokees by eliciting contributions from other Cherokees.

Following the first Indian Ecumenical Conference in Montana, approaches were made for funds to every major Christian-denomination in Canada and the United States. The first conference resulted in a deficit of \$6,500.00 and the Steering Committee felt that this was the first priority in fund raising. During the year 1970-1971, we received a grant of \$10,000.00 from the Primate's World Relief and Development Fund of the Anglican Church

of Canada, \$5,000.00 from the Board of Home Missions of the United Church of Canada, and \$5,000.00 from the United Church Women. We were also assisted by a grant of \$1,500.00 from the Anglican Church of Canada Community Development Budget which enabled us to hold the only Steering Committee meeting between Conferences. Following the refusal of the American Churches to fund the Conference, an urgent appeal was made to the Anglican Church Women of Canada who promised us \$10,000.00 for the travel of American delegates. On the basis of this commitment we went ahead with the Conference at Morley. In July we received a \$6,000.00 grant from the Stone Foundation for the taping of the Conference proceedings. Our plans are to approach once again all the major denominations in both countries for continuing funds for a four year period which will enable us to do adequate field work, hold at least three Steering Committee meetings a year and to hold an annual Conference as well as regional meetings. The Steering Committee will be formally expressing their appreciation for the generous support of the Anglican Church of Canada, the United Church of Canada, and the Stone Foundation. Delegates began to arrive at the Conference on July 17th, Saturday, and Sunday morning, July 18th. The Steering Committee met on Sunday at noon and decided not to officially open the Conference but to call people to a planning session Sunday afternoon, and to officially open the meeting the next morning. Sunday night Christian services were held, lead by ministers from several different areas, tribes, and denominations. The service was coordinated by Chief John Snow, a United Church minister and Chief of the host Stoney Tribe, and assisted by two Anglicans, one a Cree speaker from Ontario, a Southern Baptist of the Florida Seminole tribe, a Stoney United Church minister, and a Yakima-Squamish missionary of a non-denominational Protestant Church.

Monday morning the session was officially opened with a ceremony by the Navajo delegates who blessed the meeting ground in the traditional Navajo Blessing Way Ceremony. The delegates met each morning and afternoon on Monday, Tuesday, and Wednesday, as well as Wednesday evening. Each session was opened and closed with prayers by different delegates. Tuesday morning was highlighted by a sun-rise ceremony led by the major traditional religious leaders of the Plains Cree tribes. On Wednesday morning, the Cherokee and Seminole delegation laid down their traditional sacred fire in the blessed ground. It was kept burning until the end of the Conference, i.e. Thursday noon. On Monday and Tuesday night, the delegates along with the people of Morley held Indian dances. In Tuesday morning, Reverend Andrew Ahenekew, Cree and Anglican Priest, held a short service at the opening session. The remaining business was concluded. Chief John Snow presented gifts on behalf of the Stoney tribe, as is their custom, to various conference delegates. At Chief Snow's request, the Buffalo 'welcoming

ceremony was held (the Stoney buffalo herd had broken out of their paddock the night before during the conference session and Chief Snow felt it was necessary to have this ceremony which had not been held when the buffalo first came back to the Stoney country). The meeting was officially ended with shaking of hands in the Creek and Cherokee manner and the participants gathered up ashes from the sacred fire in order to be blessed on their return trip and at their homes.

Following this, the newly elected Steering Committee held a concluding meeting. During the Conference, new delegates introduced themselves to the gathering officially but much visiting, getting acquainted, and exchange of ideas took place informally outside of the sessions. Many of the same concerns as at last year's conference were expressed informally and in speeches at the official meetings. It was apparent that many of the delegates had, because of last summer's experience at the Conference, been given the necessary social support to begin to take action to deal with the problem of religious strife, social ills, and the general concern with the "education" of young Indians locally in their home communities. Besides purely religious discussion in the sessions, important business matters were attended to. Many resolutions were passed and the Steering Committee was instructed to follow up on many of these concerns. A new Steering Committee was elected during the Conference. The Conference divided into regional groupings and chose their own delegates to the Committee. The resolutions will soon be distributed to delegates and to appropriate people and agencies. A number of significant trends were evident at this year's Conference:

1. Not only is the Conference attracting more Indians over a wider geographical area, but it is obvious that it is the religious leadership at the grass roots level who have both the social responsibility and power to effect change in the Indian scene who are attracted to the Conference.
2. The delegates act as if there is already an Indian Ecumenical Movement in fact and they are impatient to stabilize the Conference, to hold regional meetings and to deal as a body with their mutual concerns.
3. The Conference is having a tremendous impact on young Indians and may become a more stabilizing force in their lives than all the schools and social programs which purport to deal with their problems. At one point in the Conference, young people met as a group and decided that they did not want to organize or behave in any way which would separate them as a generation from the rest of the Indian people. They, in effect, declared their people hood. There were several positive responses to the aspirations of young Indians. Chief John Snow of the Stoney has offered to start a summer program in religious education for young urban and rural Indians on

his reserve next summer. Joe and Russell Mackinaw of the Cree tribe have responded similarly and are planning such a workshop at their camp in the Rocky Mountains.

4. Delegates generally showed enormous trust in each other. Two large tribes notable for secrecy in religious matters openly talked about their religion from the floor or performed their religious rites. Christian delegates spoke openly and honestly about their faith. Moreover, people did not feel so hesitant about making public religious differences as last year. There was much more general religious concern at the Conference as evident by the large attendance at services (over 200 at 6:30 AM), variety of religious services, and the performance for the first time of Christian services. Further, Indian Christians seemed to be able to function not only as ecumenical Indians but also as ecumenical Christians - e.g. Anglicans and Southern Baptists sharing services together.

There are a number of problems facing the Indian Ecumenical Conference such as the future participation of whites, the delicate problem of publicity, etc. However, these are problems that can be handled with a little wisdom. But nearly all the bigger questions are intimately connected with the amount and the stability of our financial situation. For example, the Conference wants the Steering Committee to move on certain resolutions. But we can't do that without adequate funds. We cannot continue as we are without a firm financial base, let alone expand to meet the needs and aspirations of young people, for instance. In the concluding meeting of the Steering Committee on July 22nd, the Committee members from the United States suggested that since they did not think the United States churches or other American sources would contribute in any helpful way that they should withdraw from the Conference so that they would not hold back the Canadian Indians in the movement's total development. The Canadian Indian delegates refused to consider such a motion which reflects not only a mutual trust and unity but also a recognition that the Indian Ecumenical Conference movement can only exist as a total North American Indian effort.

Whatever may be the outcome of the funding problem, there is firmly established a North American Indian Ecumenical movement. The only question that remains at this point is what forms it will take and what will its relation be to non-Indians and to the churches as national institutions.