WINTER COUNT

Stories of Native American Stewardship

Compiled by Howard R. Anderson
About the Cover

The title "Winter Count" is a translation of an Indian term which describes a custom among Native American peoples. In most Indian nations, tribes, or bands, winter was the permitted time for coming together to share stories, record events, and pass along the lore of the people; these stories about counting the cost of stewardship were collected, and are passed along, in that spirit.

The drawing is a rendering of a Winter Count pelt which served as a permanent historical record for the tribe: an animal skin on which were painted symbols standing for specific significant events.
The Compiler

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Anderson earned his Ph.D. in the field of American Studies at the University of Hawaii, and the focus of his dissertation was cross-cultural education. This prepared him for serving as the founding director of the Native American Theological Association, a program designed to secure quality, culturally sensitive theological education for Native Americans.

He joined the staff of the Diocese of Minnesota in 1982 and the Diocese of North Dakota in 1984, and has published several monographs on Native American spirituality. He assumed the position of diocesan stewardship officer for the Diocese of Minnesota in late 1988.

Dr. Anderson grew up on the White Earth Indian Reservation in Northwestern Minnesota. He and his wife and daughter are currently residents of Minneapolis. They also have a grown foster son, who is an Ojibwe Indian, and a four-year-old granddaughter.
Foreword

When I was a kid growing up on the edge of the White Earth Indian Reservation, in the region of lakes and woods of Northwestern Minnesota, I began to notice that non-Indian people in their cars would pass me when I hitched rides. Inevitably, the first car with an Indian driver would stop and pick me up. When our car broke down, or I noticed another disabled car at the side of the road, it was again usually an Indian person who stopped to offer help. We used to joke in our family (I am non-Indian) that Indians all drove old cars, and that they developed into very good, ad hoc mechanics, making repairs with whatever pieces of bailing wire, nuts, and bolts were available. But we also knew it was more than that. In my twelve years of ministry with American Indians, I have noted that the ethic of generosity was almost universally the rule in Indian and Eskimo communities which I have visited. There was always a meal offered. People were genuinely gracious and sincere in their hospitality. Giving was and is a way of life.

As a young church administrator, and the founding director of the Native American Theological Association (NATA), an ecumenical program to recruit and equip Indian people for ministry, I couldn’t miss the difference. When NATA students received their master of divinity degree from one of the NATA member seminaries, they gave gifts, as well as received them. It seemed that social status was secured from giving and not from having.

In the dominant culture, it is in having that one acquires standing in the community. I began, with my interest in stewardship patterns and the Indian community, to inquire of tribal people, medicine men and women, clergy, and others how this ethic of giving is lived out in the daily lives of Indian people. Why did Indian people give so generously? Beyond the issue of getting status for giving, what was the cultural basis for this
giving? In this little collection of stewardship stories retold from Native America, you will get an idea of the answers to these questions.

For the past six years I have served as the executive director of the Minnesota Committee on Indian Work (MCIW), the program department of the Diocese of Minnesota through which the Indian churches and other ministries coordinate and guide all activities of the diocese with the Indian community. At one of the first diocesan conventions where MCIW was providing voice for Indian people, Doyle Turner, then a seminarian, told the Rt. Rev. Robert Anderson and those assembled why the MCIW had held an auction of Indian art work, wild rice, star quilts, and beadwork and—in spite of all the needs in the Indian community—turned the entire $5,000 raised over to the diocesan capital funds drive.

You and the diocese have allowed us to give. For Indian people to give, to share our gifts, now, after our rich 125-year journey together, has given us our chance to dream dreams and, in our giving, to share our joy at being a part of this diocese and its wider mission. Thank you for allowing us our separate gifts. Thank you for allowing us the intermingling of these gifts to become one in the Body of Christ. Thank you!

You will see in these stories how correct Father Turner was, how central giving is to the concept of “Indianness” in all the tribal people who live in Minnesota and elsewhere. The concept of the self-giving of Christ was easily accepted by American Indians. It went without saying that leaders, both political and spiritual, gave of themselves without limit. The leaders ate last. The leaders were truly servants. To this day, as you meet Indian Episcopalians across our Church, you see this ethic of servanthood and giving operative in the lives of Indian church leaders.

A story told in Navajoland describes the response of the Navajo people of one village at a first encounter with a Christian missionary. The missionary shared the good news with the people. The message was translated, and many nodded in agreement as the message of Jesus Christ unfolded. The missionary confided to the translator, “Now comes the hard part—tithing.
I’m afraid that they won’t like this message.” The missionary told the people that being a Christian required that they give 10 percent of all they have to the Church. Sure enough, many of the people got up and left after some brief discussions among themselves and some disgusted head-shaking. The missionary was distraught. He asked the translator what was being said, adding, “I knew that the tithing part would be hard. I just knew that they would react negatively.”

The translator turned to the missionary. “They all said that any God who required only 10 percent of their livelihood couldn’t be much of a God. They feel that all they have is God’s gift and knew that they needed to share it all.”

And so it is today. Indian mothers are known to tithe the meager public assistance grants they receive to their churches. Poverty-stricken or unemployed Indian people often give all they have—food, skills at fixing automobiles, a bed or floor to sleep on, all shared with others who have need. The values that dictate that one should always share with those in need comes both from scripture and from tribal culture and tradition.

When the National Committee on Indian Work made a generous grant to the Minnesota Committee on Indian Work to hold a stewardship conference, for the purpose of exploring stewardship stories in the reservation and urban Indian churches in the midwest and in Minnesota, we should have known that what would result were stories. Tom Carson, Laura Wright, and Ron Reed, of the Office of Stewardship at the Episcopal Church Center, knew it—in spite of not having worked extensively with Indian people before. They gave generously of their time to give direction to the Indian Stewardship Conference in May 1987 in Minnesota, and heard with interest the stories that Indian people from the dioceses of Minnesota, South Dakota, North Dakota, Alaska, and the Episcopal Church in Navajoland told about their heritage of giving. We non-Indians working in the Indian community also have experienced the generosity of Indian people, as Indian churches and communities have helped us and others recapture our own biblical stewardship tradition by living in tribal communities where stewardship was seen as a joyous way of giving and living, rather than as a legalistic requirement laid on us by the Church.
I hope that you, too, whether Indian or non-Indian, will recapture a sense of joy in giving that has permeated the Indian community in its traditional form. Today, Indian people in all the American Churches are reclaiming this heritage of holistic stewardship. The kinship system includes not only human persons in the extended family, clan, tribe, or church, but other-than-human persons whom the Creator has also given life and being. The whole of the universe is alive, and tribal people see themselves as placed in time and space by their relationship, in the manner of kinship, with all of the created order. It is not the hierarchical model of the Roman Empire which I fear our Church has adapted. It is an egalitarian model where stewardship assumes a central place in the cosmos and the daily life of all people. This stewardship model from Native North America can, if we will only listen to the stories, enrich the biblical stories which are the core of our faith.

Listen then, to the stories told at the Indian Stewardship Conference. Some are subtle. Some ask for a stewardship of the created order far beyond our minimum standard of giving, the tithe. And if we will only listen, these stores can infect us with the joy of giving to which Christ calls us.

Howard R. Anderson
September 1988
In Time of Need

The phone call came, as they always do, in the middle of the night. The Rev. Philip Allen, groggy from sleep, could scarcely absorb the enormity of the tragedy being recounted by the sobbing voice at the other end of the phone. There had been a fire. Five small children had burned to death in a reservation home back in South Dakota. Phil had baptized three of the children, and the family were members of the church he serves, All Saints, in the Indian neighborhoods on the south side of Minneapolis, called by many the "urban reservation." Heartsick, he hung up the phone and begin planning how to contact the family members in his congregation. It was not a task that he relished, and the family was, like most Indian families, a very close one.

The next morning, he began the sad task. He called on the homes of the relatives, prayed with them, and helped them to grieve openly, to release the anger and shock and pain of the sort that only the untimely deaths of innocent children seem to stir. Perhaps the hardest hit were the two aunts to the five children who died. As in most Indian families, the children had an extended family structure that made them very close to their aunts. These two aunts had helped their sister raise the youngsters, and in every way it was like losing their own children.

After the initial shock of the deaths, the aunts wanted to be there for the funeral, which, like the funerals of most urban Indian people, was to take place at the spiritual home of the family, the reservation. They had no money. Father Allen, like the vast majority of Indian clergy, had little discretionary money to dispense, even when desperately needed, as it was at this moment. "I feel blessed in being born a member of the Lakota (Sioux) people. My people have always given the best they have to the Church, and to help others," Phil said, as he retold the story of how his congregation responded to the crisis created by these
tragic deaths. “You know that over 65 percent of the members of All Saints are unemployed. There really isn’t much discretionary money in any of the pockets of the members of All Saints. But the very night that I got word on the deaths of the five children, we had our usual Wednesday night Bible study group. It’s a small group, maybe ten or twelve on a good night, usually less. But I told them about the deaths, and the desire of the aunts to return to the Standing Rock Reservation for the funeral. The small group dug in their pockets and purses, several even said they ran home to raid the cookie jar, and contributed well in excess of what was needed to get the two women home. The church gave even more later, to help out the bereaved family.

“But you know,” said the priest, looking away thoughtfully, “I would have been shocked if anything but that had happened.”

Phil Allen remembered countless examples of stewardship from the Indian people with whom he ministers, and among whom he was, as he said, privileged to grow up. All Saints has several women who actually tithe their small grants through the Aid to Families with Dependent Children. “The Indian people who I grew up around gave so generously that I have just come to see that as the norm. My grandmother was devoted to her little church in Martin, South Dakota. She always had someone from the family over at the church long before service, or even the night before to stoke up the wood stove. My family always had lay readers, too. Our priest, now roundly respected as the dean of native clergy in South Dakota, was the Rev. Vine Deloria, Sr. He was priest-in-charge of so many churches that many Sundays we did Morning Prayer led by lay readers. I remember one time we had a terrible blizzard, and hardly anyone could even get to church. We lived close, so my grandfather got there to stoke the stove and read the service. Do you know that that man didn’t even know how to read, and had committed the prayers to memory?

“My grandma would always provide food, as did many of the other women of the church. This was really important to her, because she felt we had to be faithful to our responsibilities as Christians. She spent lots of time cooking for the potlucks after church. She always made sure that the church got the best food she prepared for the week. Even on her deathbed, she insisted
that representatives from the family stoke the church’s wood stove and be available to lay read and bring good food for the potluck.

"There were almost no limits to what the old people would sacrifice for the good of the church. It’s just a part of our culture. Grandma Fast Horse, for instance, would spend the whole year getting star quilts and other gifts for the bishop, dignitaries, and those in need who would be in attendance at the Niobrara Convocation each year." The Niobrara Convocation is the annual gathering of all the Lakota and Dakota (Sioux) Episcopalians. Held the third weekend each June, thousands of people return home to the reservation church hosting the annual event. It is a homecoming in the best sense of the world. Babies are baptized, people ordained, old friendships renewed, and the Dakota hymns are sung in worship and around campfires long into the night. "She would fill up a whole big trunk with food, and all these gifts. She attended seventy-five consecutive convocations.

"That is the kind of commitment to giving that I grew up assuming was the way everyone did things. I feel really blessed to be born a Lakota, among these people who were really saints of the church."
Pine Point

Pine Point is a small Indian community in the extreme southeast corner of the largest Indian reservation in Minnesota, the White Earth Reservation. It is surrounded by forest, but sits on the edge of the "Ponsford Prairie," a ten-by-ten-mile stretch of open country that white farmers carved out of Indian land early in the century. It has been a poor community, often unrepresented on the White Earth Tribal Council, and always the last to benefit from Bureau of Indian Affairs or federal poverty program grants made to the reservation. Over the years, two institutions have come to represent the aspirations and hopes of the people of Pine Point. They are Pine Point Experimental School, and Breck Memorial Episcopal Mission.

A lumberjack named Reuben Rock, an Ojibwe, worked the woods most of his life. He was a huge man, with a barrel chest and heavy biceps built up from years of hard work. He was dedicated to his church, and after he had retired from working the woods, the Bishop of Minnesota ordained him as deacon. There was much pride when this happened, and for once the people of Pine Point felt that they counted in the larger scheme of things. This action by the Episcopal Church was one of the catalysts which helped the people of Pine Point to see that they had something to give. They had themselves and the gifts God had given them to offer to the community, even if they didn't have lots of money to give to their church or community.

Pine Point had been a sad place in many ways. The village was made up of tar-paper shacks, and the school was run down and neglected by the school system responsible for it. But things were about to change. After Reuben was ordained, some of the younger leadership of the community began to see the possibilities of "people power" in Pine Point. An athlete, Jerry Buckanaga, got a college degree and with other community leaders secured funding for an Indian alternative school which stressed Indian culture. The Pine Point Experimental School was soon the
heart of the community. There was never any doubt who the first school board president would be: the Rev. Reuben Rock. With strong administrative support from Erma Vizenor, a lifelong Episcopalian, and with Jerry Buckanaga as principal, the school and community of Pine Point began to build a future for itself.

Deacon Rock and his niece Erma Vizenor began to give voice to the long silent Ojibwe people at Pine Point. They stressed the linkage between God’s love for the whole creation and the responsibility of all God’s people to give back a portion of what God gave them to others. Soon, Pine Point began to see changes. The year before the experimental school was launched, there had been eighteen young people from the community incarcerated for crimes ranging from auto theft to murder. Three years into the life of the experimental school, there were no young people from Pine Point in jail.

Upon walking into the school, you would see signs of a people who knew who they were, knew that God loved them, and knew that their heritage was rich, something to be proud of and to cherish. Erma Vizenor articulated the changes best. “We really had a bad image of ourselves and the community in the days before the school. But with the church ordaining Uncle Reuben, and the school beginning to help the kids feel that they were gifted by God, things really took off. When the state of Minnesota had a budget crisis, they tried to close down the school. Reuben spoke like a real Old Testament prophet—first in Ojibwe native tongue, then in an English accent—and turned the tide. He stood before the State Board of Education with his collar on, very proud of being an Episcopal deacon, and said that the school and the church were the heart of our community. His sermon to them kept us funded.”

But the empowerment of Pine Point didn’t stop there. Reuben Rock was elected tribal chairman, and Jerry Buckanaga was also elected secretary/treasurer to the tribal council. For the first time in the history of the reservation, Pine Point had a voice. These were heady days for Pine Point. But Reuben’s first love and first commitment were always for his God and his church. As he aged, he began to worry about what would happen to his little church when he died. He didn’t see many younger people committed enough to the Church to seek ordination, or even to lay read. Always a man of action, Deacon Rock hatched a plan.
Erma Vizenor, principal of Pine Point School, had become worried about her uncle's health. Often it was difficult for him to read the scriptures and prayers on Sunday mornings. He said his eyesight was blurry and wondered if new glasses would help. Erma started to lay read.

One Sunday Father Rock “forgot” his glasses at home. Erma stepped forward as her uncle beckoned. He placed his well-worn Prayer Book and Bible in her hands, all pages and passages marked. He nodded and said, “Nee-dah-nis, gigah nah dee mo. Gah ween nee wah bis ee noongoom. Ingah nah bah dub gee bizin dah mahn.” My girl, you will have to take over for me. I can’t see well today. I will sit and listen.

Erma went through the Morning Prayer service as she had often watched and listened to her loving uncle do. He sat in the front pew, listening, arms folded across his tired chest. Erma looked at him and thought about the many times she heard his strong voice carry throughout the little chapel. When the door was open in the summertime, half of the village could hear Uncle Reuben sing the Ojibwe hymns he loved so much. Now he sat quietly and listened.

When Morning Prayer was over, Erma quickly looked to her uncle for a reaction, approval. Always a man of a few choice words, Father Rock said in a voice of affirmation, “O nish ish in.” You did well. After that service, Erma was recognized as a leader in standing at Breck Memorial. At prayer meetings or during church meetings, Father Rock always said, “We will now hear from our church leader, our lay reader.”

After the mah no men (“wild rice”) harvest one late autumn, Father Rock took very ill. He could no longer make it to church on a regular basis. Erma was summoned one day to his home, and she feared the worst. The family had gathered, accepting what lay ahead for our beloved family, church, and community leader.

Not a word was spoken as the keys to Breck Memorial Church were handed to Erma. Deacon Rock felt satisfied and happy. He said, “Our little church is in good hands now. Nee-ah-weh-eh (my namesake) will carry on.” He could die in peace. The church he loved and attended for over eighty years would live and continue. Erma took a solemn vow to continue the work
of her uncle, Reuben Rock. She was now Lay Reader, and in some ways, in the two places that bespoke God’s love—the church and school—the mantle had fallen to her.

Deacon Rock’s health failed rapidly. He no longer came to church. While it was officially frowned upon, he had done “Deacon’s Masses” for years, and in everyone’s eyes, he was the priest in Pine Point. On three occasions, the bishop rushed to his hospital bedside to be with his deacon at the time of death. Three times Reuben rallied, worried about there being no ordained person to take his place in his beloved Breck Memorial. At last, he could hold out no more. He knew the time of death was at hand. He told his family. With all his loved ones around him, he softly spoke of what he wanted done. He wished his Ojibwe-designed, beaded stole to be given to Erma, Nee-ah-weh-eh, his namesake. God came to Reuben in a vision with a message that Erma was standing as an ordained priest with Reuben’s beaded stole on. The old deacon died shortly thereafter. His legacy of love for his people, his community, and his church can be seen everywhere.

Dallas Vizenor, Erma’s husband, has lovingly restored Breck Memorial, modernizing and insulating it so the people can worship in the church in the winter. Yet he has preserved the simplicity and peace that so many Pine Pointers have felt in that church; the memories of the baptisms, marriages, funerals, confirmations, the ebb and flow of life, are still alive in this special place. The church is one of the fastest growing in the Diocese of Minnesota, having grown by over 30 percent in 1987. Its new priest is a native of the reservation, the Rev. Doyle Turner. The school, while always struggling to survive budget cutting, can boast of sixty of its graduates and school board members having college degrees. It was recently commended as the “number one leader in Indian higher-education productivity in the entire state of Minnesota.” Its principal, Erma Vizenor, has informed the people that she is taking a leave of absence for several years. She won a prestigious fellowship, and will go off to Harvard to complete a Ph.D—and to secure theological training at the Episcopal Divinity School. Needless to say, she still has the old deacon’s stole.
Pine Point may be a small community. It still suffers from many social problems. But don't ever say it's poor. God has given the people much—a rich heritage, courageous leaders, a thriving school, and a little Episcopal church which knows about giving.
There Is Always Room For More

Ron Campbell is a big man. He has an imposing voice, sort of gruff in his demeanor. But after spending a minute or two with him, you realize that the winning smile he flashes is not only mischievous, but warm. He is a Pied Piper with children and young people. He loves to tell you why that is.

"My Dad left me a lot of things. No money, no land, but lots of more important things. He taught me the Golden Rule. He brought me up in the Episcopal Church. And he taught me about stewardship. He taught me how to give. There were thirteen of us in a ten-by-twelve foot tar-paper shack. But we always were made to feel like we had a lot.

"One thing Dad stressed was how much we had been given and how we needed to share it with others. It was a normal thing to have Dad bring home a new baby, or people who were in trouble or who had no place to go. There was never a homeless person or street person around our place. Dad made them all a part of the family. You know, there were a lot of us, but it never felt crowded. If a person came who needed a home for awhile, we made room. I think that’s one reason I like doing youth ministry so: my Dad loved kids so much and taught us all that our family was wider than just my brothers, sisters, Mom, and me."

A master storyteller, Ron smiles in a certain way just before he is about to dispense a lesson or especially important bit of information. He smiled and began a story.

"One Thanksgiving we were really low on food and money. We kids were feeling sorry for ourselves, thinking we’d have to eat oatmeal for the Thanksgiving feast we always had. But my Mom told us to get the dog and the gun and go out and shoot some pheasants for the feast.

"That would have been fine, but in that year, there were only a few pheasants, and we only had a couple of shotgun shells. We grumbled, but went out after pheasants. It wasn’t too long
before the dog took off in the other direction. We were mad, and ran after him, hollering for him to come back and hunt. When we found him, he had dug up a big bull mink, its expensive pelt prime. We rushed home, and Dad went into town to sell the expensive pelt. There were lots of things we needed: shoes for school, clothes, staple food for the next time supplies were low. But my Dad bought turkeys and all the trimmings and we had everyone in the area come for the biggest, grandest Thanksgiving feast any of us could remember. That’s how it was in my family. And that’s how it was on the reservation. When one family had something, we all had something."

Ron tells stories of the generosity of the Indian people with whom he grew up. The Niobrara Convocation is the annual gathering of all the Sioux Episcopalians. One of the churches will be the host and spend a whole year preparing to feed the several thousand guests who converge on villages with populations of several hundred, churches with under 100 communicants. The giving at these events is sacrificial. People give gifts, such as star quilts, which take many months to make. People donate whole cows to feed the people. "At the Convocation we are at our best," Ron contends. "We are the people to whom giving is second nature, and the giving is in thanksgiving for all God gives us."

One of Ron’s many gifts is his ability to work with people. He has served non-Indian parishes. He has served reservation churches. He has served a university parish made up of many college professors and students. Ron Campbell is an accomplished professional. After he graduated from the Church Divinity School of the Pacific in Berkeley, Calif., he came home to dedicate his life in service to the Church he loves, especially to its young people. He has served the Diocese of South Dakota as youth director, and given countless hours both to the diocesan camp which is in the holy ground of the Black Hills and to Teens Encounter Christ; but perhaps most satisfyingly, he has given much time and sweat to establishing a camp on the reservation.

Enemy Swim Lake is a lovely prairie lake. The people of the Episcopal churches on the reservation, always including a Campbell or two or three, are justifiably proud of their camp. It serves the young people of the churches and the community. Youth from other dioceses have also used the camp. Here, Ron is
truly in his element. He leads the camping experience forcefully but also with joy. His gift with young people comes out clearly. It is at the camp that his God-given gifts are most fully used.

"My Dad always reminded us that in giving, the important thing was to remember that what we gave—whether money, our time, or our skills—didn't belong to us anyway. God gave them to us. As a grandfather now, myself, I try to teach my family and the people I serve this same lesson. We give in thanksgiving for God's gifts to us. We can't let our pride get in the way, or strut around because we've been given something we can share with others. If ever we get too big-headed about these kinds of things, God lets us know. When I was ordained years ago, I was sitting in my home with my new clerical collar, clerical shirt, shoes, and a suit. They were all new and all black. One of the guests asked my little girl if her dad was a priest. She said, in my hearing, 'Yes, sir, he is a priest.' But then she quickly added, with some relief, 'But before he was a priest he was a human being.' Kids have a way of reminding us that whatever honor or gift comes to us is not really ours.

"We were taught to share with others. My family taught me that, my community taught me that, and the Episcopal Church taught me that. My whole family serves the Church in some way." The influences that convinced a successful contractor, Ron's brother, Leslie, to become a priest also convinced another brother, Dan, to give countless hours of time to the camp at Enemy Swim Lake, and to offer his services to the Niobrara Convocation as its leader, or Itancan.

In the Campbell household there was always room for one more. In each of their homes today, there is room for one more as well. One can't help but wonder if the person welcomed in with such love and caring doesn't represent Jesus Christ. Ron Campbell isn't preachy, but slyly mentions something about "the least of these" before he goes on to tickle his listeners with more stories.
Stewardship and the Old Ways

She said we should never lock our doors.” The Rev. Mitchell Whiterabbit, a Winnebago Indian, was talking about his grandmother.

“My parents could not take care of us, so we went to live with our grandmother. She said we shouldn’t lock our doors, because if someone wanted to get in the house, they must need what is in the house—food, clothing, money—more than we did. Mauona (the Creator) gave us a lot, a roof over our head, enough to eat most days, warm clothes in the winter. We had a lot to be thankful for. In today’s terms we didn’t have much. But you know, not having a lot of things wasn’t all bad. We really knew about sharing and love.”

Mitch smiled as if remembering something pleasant. He had just retired, and the smile spread across his weathered, gentle, brown face. After being one of only a few Native Americans to attend seminary in the 1940s, he had served as an active-duty Navy Chaplain. To have been a warrior was very important to the Winnebago people, and Mitch’s war years gave him a comfortable status among his peers. He spoke with a self-confidence born of years of serving Native American churches and serving at the national Church level as well. Then after a long, pensive pause, he continued.

“Grandma told us that we should always treat others as we wanted them to treat us. She said we have a responsibility especially for the poor among us.

“It was terrible for anyone to be hungry, so we were always bringing home strays, hungry kids, old people, hitchhikers. She had a special concern for people who had been in jail, and orphans, and for people even older than she.

“She lived a really full, loving Christian life. She taught me that to be a Christian you have to be a good steward, to share, to give freely.”
Here, Mitch stopped and grinned, as if waiting to give the punch line.

"Yes, my grandma really did teach me about being a Christian. But do you know that she spoke only the Winnebago language? And do you know what else? She never set foot inside a Christian church. She was a traditional Medicine Lodge member. But she knew Christ's message that we should all be servants and share all we have."

Mitch and his wife Camille lived by this ethic. In addition to their own children, they raised many other Winnebago children. In Native American cultures the sharing of lives and houses with children—nieces, nephews, orphans, neighbors—is still a hallmark of the culture. These cultures could well be characterized as "cultures of sharing." Status is accorded in these cultures by how generously one gives, not how many things one has accumulated. Mitch used to talk about what he called "the Indian stewardship difference."

"When the missionaries first came to us, Native Americans often noted that this Christianity had a pretty weak sense of stewardship, asking only 10 percent giving to their church. Winnebagoes and other tribal people viewed the tribe as their church, and often gave half or more of what they had to that church."

Mitch died recently. But he took great pleasure in telling others that one of the best ways to live out the values of Christian stewardship was to live by the tribal values he learned at the knee of his Winnebago grandmother. Mitch helped to found the Native American Theological Association (NATA) so that other Native Americans could attend seminary as he did. But he wanted NATA students to be allowed to integrate their theological education and their tribal culture. Mitch studied with theologian Paul Tillich, and counted H. Richard Niebuhr as a friend. He was an astute theologian. And he believed passionately that the wider church in North America could be called back to its true values of stewardship by learning from the Native American cultures.

And Mitch's dream is coming true. When the NATA students graduated from seminary, they did not receive gifts—they gave them, in the traditional Native American "giveaway."
Mitch always said that clergy are to be servants. “In traditional tribal cultures, when food was scarce, the leaders ate last. They took care of the widows, the orphans, the children and all elders first. If there was anything left over, then the leaders themselves ate. That is how we who are in the Church are called to act. We are to be generous, joyous givers. I can’t help but think that if the Church would act as an Episcopal or Presbyterian or Methodist tribe, where the leaders are servants, where they saw their role as serving the world like our Indian leaders did, we would be acting more like Christ wants us to act.”

Before he died Mitch Whiterabbit saw medicine men and seminary deans, theologians and Native American seminarians, Native clergy and non-Indian church executives meeting to discover how the core of the Christian gospel can be understood through the cultural lens of Native American spirituality. That was his dream. And the sharing of this powerful tradition may be the best stewardship of all.
Rising Sun

Rising Sun was a staunch old Chippewa churchman, whose name memorialized the fact that he had first seen the light of day just as the sun rose in the east. Sometime in the 1860s this persistent Ojibwe (Chippewa) took upon himself a near-lifetime quest. His quest was to bring the gospel and lasting Episcopal mission to his people, a band of Ojibwe which had moved westward from Minnesota into the Turtle Mountains of north central North Dakota. Rising Sun’s group is still known as the Turtle Mountain Chippewas.

Rising Sun is first glimpsed in 1869 when he set out in the company of several other chiefs for the White Earth Reservation, located 175 miles away in Minnesota. The party was seeking to recruit an Episcopal missionary. They had heard of the work of the indefatigable Enmegahbowh, who two years earlier had been ordained as the first Native American Episcopal priest.

When Enmegahbowh was unable to produce a missionary for the Turtle Mountain Band, Rising Sun trudged on to Faribault, nearly 300 miles distant from White Earth. There he pressed his request for a missionary directly to Bishop Henry B. Whipple. The dynamic Minnesota bishop unfortunately had no one to send but recommended that Rising Sun return to White Earth and prevail upon Enmegahbowh to teach him the Creed, the Ten Commandments, and the Lord’s Prayer.

By 1873 the Turtle Mountain people had made three more fruitless pleas for an Episcopal missionary.

The dauntless Rising Sun, despite disappointments, continued his lonely efforts to bring the Christian gospel to his people, and historians provide a will-o'-the-wisp vignette of Rising Sun counting the days and, each seventh day, teaching his people all he had learned from Enmegahbowh.

In 1875, Dr. David Buel Knickerbocker, later Bishop of Indiana, appeared in the Turtle Mountains with a treaty commission. His astonishment was considerable when he discovered Rising Sun’s followers reciting devotionals from memory. He reported to Bishop Whipple that he had discovered “forty-seven Chippewas trying to be ‘good Indians’...keeping up prayer and singing...but feeling the need for someone to be with them to lead and teach them.” The Bishop of Minnesota was still unable to send a missionary to the Turtle Mountain Chippewas.

Nine years after the Knickerbocker report, a new bishop arrived in North Dakota territory. He was the Rt. Rev. William D. Walker, noted in later years for his ‘railroad cathedral’ because he used a railroad car to criss-cross his large diocese.

Once again Rising Sun, then about sixty years old, tramped across great distances in pursuit of a missionary. This time he set out to call upon the new North Dakota bishop. He carefully laid his strategy to succeed in his fifteen-year quest. As companions with him to call upon the bishop, he chose his seven-year-old grandson, a young chief named Little Elk, and one of the tribal elders who spoke a little English.

More importantly, Rising Sun decided to prevail upon Enmegahbowh to accompany the Turtle Mountain emissaries, so first the little party made a very long detour to the White Earth Reservation. Enmegahbowh did agree to go with them, and the valiant little group then set out on an eleven-day walk from White Earth to the see city of Fargo. Old documents provide a fleeting glimpse of the stalwarts along with a description of the clothing they had acquired to impress the bishop:

They had traded beadwork for “civilized” clothing, and one of the group wore checkered trousers, another wore a vest, and the lad wore a long linen duster which trailed the ground. The old chief, Rising Sun, donned a battered
white top hat...Bishop Walker warmly received the emissaries; they are recorded as having enjoyed his cakes and candies.

The initial meeting lasted far into the night until early morning, and the Chippewas of the Turtle Mountains of North Dakota at last wrung from the bishop of the Episcopal Church a commitment for mission.

True to his word, during the ensuing year the bishop, from his own meager funding, erected the Church of the Resurrection at Belcourt. In the following year he sent to the Turtle Mountain Chippewas a teacher, Wellington Jefferson Salt, a Canadian of mixed Indian and white ancestry. Son of a Methodist minister, the Canadian had been working in Minnesota lumber camps when he made his decision to offer his services to Bishop Walker.

Salt arrived at Turtle Mountain Reservation on May 2, 1888. During his first year he enrolled twenty pupils at the school which he established at the Belcourt church building. Though he later was engaged to teach at the government school, Salt continued to conduct weekly lay services, and at intervals Emnegahbowh traveled the 175 miles from White Earth to administer Holy Communion to the faithful.

In 1901 an outbreak of smallpox closed the Turtle Mountain school, and Salt was transferred to a South Dakota government school. His departure spelled doom for the Indian community at the Church of the Resurrection, and the little building was soon hauled 12 miles away to Rolla, a white community.

Even then, Rising Sun—who lived to reach the approximate age of 110—did not lose hope for Episcopal mission among his people. From his first government annuity check, he and his wife purchased $30 worth of lumber for a future Episcopal chapel and kept the lumber stored in their tiny hut for six long years. He then gave land from his allotment, near Dunseith, for an Episcopal mission. A full decade would pass before his gifts would be accepted. But in the year 1911, reckoned to be Rising Sun’s ninety-ninth year, the faithful old Chippewa saw his dream become reality: Wellington Jefferson Salt was ordained to the permanent diaconate and returned to Turtle Mountain, and on October 15 the Chapel of St. Denys was dedicated. The little
chapel, built of logs set upright on the foundation, would soon be renamed St. Sylvan's and it was ably served by Father Salt until his death in 1920.

Today, St. Sylvan's is potentially North Dakota's largest Indian congregation. It stands on a high elevation of land as a monument to the faith, perseverance, and devotion of Rising Sun, who for nearly half a century knocked on Episcopal doors seeking help to bring the gospel to his people and who, in his quest, once donned a battered white top hat to impress a young bishop from New York.
Sacred Things

There is a stark beauty where the Missouri River and Rock Creek meet on the Standing Rock Sioux Reservation in South Dakota. St. John’s Episcopal Church is there in the town once called Rock Creek, now called Bullhead. The people are isolated, and their children go to high school in a neighboring town, a long bus ride away.

The people of Bullhead are poor. The per capita income there is lower even than the incredibly low figure for the Standing Rock reservation as a whole. Its most famous export is its young people; so Bullhead is populated mainly by elders and the very young children, often being raised by their grandparents—a very common arrangement in “Indian Country.”

“It was a good place to grow up,” says the Rev. Virgil Foote, an Episcopal priest who serves an urban Indian congregation in St. Paul, Minn. “We rode horses, did lots of hunting, swam in the creek all summer...or at least until it started to dry up in August. The people were close, a real community, like our churches are supposed to be. I was raised by my grandparents, and they taught me great respect for the holy, for the sacred. They taught me that the mother earth was sacred, that my relatives included the animals, the hills, the rivers and trees, all the things Wakantanka created. They also brought me to church every Sunday. I take my shoes off when I approach the altar now. It’s because that is sacred also, and we must show deep reverence for the sacred.”

Virgil Foote knows about stewardship. He watched very poor people travel miles by horse and wagon, and even on foot, to attend church. “They gave what little they had. I remember when St. John’s hosted the Niobrara Convocation, (the largest gathering of Indian Episcopalians, often in the thousands) and my Uncle Ole, who didn’t have much at that time, gave twin steers to help feed the people. When there was a funeral, a wedding, or any gathering at the church, everyone brought the very best they
had to offer. People saved hard to get sugar to bake a cake to bring to church...and you were in trouble if you got your one good pair of jeans (church pants) dirty. The church always got your best, because it was sacred.

"I remember one old grandmother—we call all the older women grandmother, and treat them as if they were our own relative. She had very little, but saved her money to be able to brew a pot of hot egg coffee to drink each Sunday after church. Coffee was expensive, but she made sure she always could offer that. As frail as she was, she would often walk those two miles from her house to the church, lugging that huge pot of coffee. It's kind of like the widow's mite. She gave the very best of what she had, and did it gratefully and thankfully. I feel privileged to have been raised by those people in that place. That may be the greatest gift of all."

Now Father Foote is deeply involved in the life of the Church. He has been on the staff of the national Church. He has been on the executive council of Province VI, and has chaired committees at the diocesan level in Minnesota. He draws on the strength of his Christian commitment and the depth of his Lakota tribal traditions to live out his faith as a Lakota Christian. His parish, Mazakute Memorial, is named after the first Dakota to be ordained an Episcopal priest, the Rev. Paul Mazakute. While many of Mazakute's members are poor, like Father Foote's relatives they give the best they have and give it gratefully.

Only three weeks into a Bible study, a group of Mazakute members put down their Bibles and said, "We can't just read about feeding the hungry, freeing the captives, and clothing the naked; we need to do what St. John says, put our words into actions." Father Foote chuckled when he described what happened next, rubbing his hands together in anticipation of the story.

"First they started visiting the many Indian families who are sent to the research hospitals at the University of Minnesota for serious medical treatment from area reservations. They would sit and pray with them, talking their native languages; we have Sioux—Lakota and Dakota—Winnebagoes, and Ojibwe-speaking people at Mazakute. But they saw that the families who came from the reservations to be with their loved ones often had no place to stay and no money to eat on, so they went home and started a food shelf. An unemployed member gave weeks of his
time and talent to beg and borrow money to buy food at rates he bargained for. He got a freezer, shelves, and everything needed to open a food shelf to help not only the families of the hospital patients, but also the poor in our neighborhood."

There are lots of poor in "Frogtown," the section of St. Paul where most Indian people live. Mazakute is a place they can come for help, for spiritual guidance, and for Father Foote's caring ways. "There are lots of different tribes, also Chicanos, Blacks, Asians, and white people who are a part of our church. Our doors are open to everyone. A month before the food shelf was even open, we had helped fifty families. But I liked watching the faces of our members when they were able to help. Don't ever take away from people the privilege of giving. Indian people especially are most themselves when they are giving. When I graduated from seminary, I had a giveaway. I gave gifts to those who helped me along my way. I did that because I am Lakota. I did it because I am a Christian. But most of all I did it because God had been so good to me."

Mazakute is now a part of a Jubilee Ministry designed to serve the more than 20,000 Indians living in "the urban reservation" of St. Paul and Minneapolis. It is a long way from St. John's, Bullhead, but the people give just as joyfully. "If there is anything I want to teach the people I serve, it is that the whole creation is sacred. It's all a gift from Wakantanka, Mauona, Gitchi Manitou [names of God in the Lakota, Winnebago and Ojibwe languages]. In our Sun Dance, in the Vision Quest, we seek guidance from God so we have a vision for how to live our lives as Christians, how to symbolize the gratitude we feel for the many gifts God has given us. That's how I understand the Eucharist, a way to symbolize the gratitude we all feel toward God for all we have. The earth, the altar, the people themselves, and the gifts they give of their time, money and talents—they're all sacred."
The Trapper

When I was a boy we had a beaver-trapping camp on the spit of land between those two ponds.” Father Doyle Turner’s eyes got misty as he slid back into memories of boyhood days spent with his father and brother in his beloved northern Minnesota woodlands of the White Earth Indian Reservation.

“I get refreshed every time I’m out here. When I walk through these woods I have such a strong sense that my God is here, and I can talk to God just like I would to anyone. I feel so competent and at home in this special place.” Doyle played Paul Winter’s evocative composition, "Missa Gaia" ("Earth Mass"), on his tape deck as his pickup bounced along the rutted logging road which led back to Samuel Memorial Church, one of the three reservation congregations he served. There is a peacefulness about the place and its priest which makes you just want to be near them. You feel comfortable just “being.” You need say nothing, just bask in the ambiance of this special person and special place.

The church reflects the care and love, as well as the innate generosity, of the Ojibwe Indian people who worship here. The frontals on the altar are buckskin, beaded in the colorful and ornate style of the Ojibwe. The stained glass was made by one of the revered elders, Mrs. Esther Horne, and Etsuko Schulenberg, the Japanese-born wife of one of the former vicars, and by many of the people from the church.

Months and months of painstaking and loving work went into the making of these stylized “branch and vine” windows, which embody the image from the Gospel, carried out in the richness of the Ojibwe artforms. The place literally reeks of the self-giving of the people who live and worship here.

The church is on the shore of North Twin Lake, and the beauty of the surroundings takes your breath away. Naytahwaush is a small village. The people are close-knit, and it is a community that works. While Indian education is troubled in
many parts of Indian country, Naytahwaush is a shining example of success. At a recent graduation celebration, Father Turner gave the invocation and benediction as Naytahwaush honored the alumni of their community grade school who were graduating from nearby Mahnomen Junior and Senior High Schools. While some reservation communities have a dropout rate of over 50 percent, none of the Naytahwaush kids dropped out. While Indian children in other area schools felt excluded from school activities, the awards ceremony took several hours for the two dozen Naytahwaush youth. Homecoming queen, editor of the school paper, captains of athletic teams, National Honor Society members, band and choir, drama and American Indian Club members: every kid seemed to excel. Where truancy remains a major problem elsewhere, nearly every child here had a perfect attendance award.

Why the difference? "Well," Doyle Turner speculated, "maybe it has to do with the sense of self-giving of the people of this church and community. They really act out of thanksgiving for all that God has given them." There are the parents, the grandparents, the kids themselves, older brothers and sisters, or aunts and uncles giving encouragement. Then there is the staff of the school, too. The janitor is such a support to so many. There are the cooks and, of course, Brent and Gayle Gish, the husband-and-wife team who are principal and lead teacher in the Naytahwaush school. They give not only their skills, talents, and considerable energies, but their love as Christian people to these children. They encourage parent and community involvement. Father Turner does weekly released-time instruction, and Gail Gish—and this should be no surprise—is the Sunday school superintendent. Brent works with the youth of the church all year round and instills a sense of pride in their Indian heritage and their identity as Christian people, whom God calls to give the very best they have to church, school, and community.

These kids know they are gifted by God, and as the sixth-graders graduate, Brent Gish takes them to the Boundary Waters Wilderness in northern Minnesota to rappel down sheer, 100-foot rock faces, depending on their peers to hold the ropes. They know that they have graduated, and that they are somebody loved by God, and to be contended with by the world. Failure is not a word heard much around Naytahwaush School. Is this stewardship? "No big deal, we are just doing what is right for
these kids. We give our time and our love. If that's Christian stewardship then, yeah, I guess we do give our best," Brent Gish said, matter-of-factly.

Doyle smoked his pipe thoughtfully, and remembered that shortly after graduating from Seabury-Western Seminary, he was called home to serve on the reservation. He knew the people and the place, for Samuel Memorial is his home church. He spoke, visibly moved by the memory of the people with whom he grew up with. "Everyone shared. My Dad worked on a road crew, and was away from home a lot. There were no cash jobs on the reservation. When he was away, we would often find a quarter of venison on the steps. No one would ever say who did it, but giving and sharing is a way of life to my people." Doyle would never tell the story himself, but he is a hunter of some note even among the Ojibwe, most of whom are excellent hunters. Since he has been serving on the reservation, more than once, deer meat has mysteriously appeared at the door of elderly members of one of his churches. He does this without a word but with great satisfaction, knowing that it is the way of his Ojibwe people and the way of the Christian.

Shortly after returning home to serve his reservation churches, there was a cold snap. A cold snap in northern Minnesota often means two weeks where the thermometer never reaches zero. "It was twenty-below, snowing and windy. I was presiding at Holy Eucharist. The snow was whipping around so that it was hard to see. Many people didn't venture out, so the normally full church was half-empty. Few cars started. Halfway through the service the door flew open, and wind blew a puff of snow through the door, and out of the cloud of snow emerged one of the old men of the church who lived some distance away. He was bundled up, and his glasses immediately fogged over. Several members jumped up to help him find a seat. He had a gunny sack with him, tied on with a rope. He dozed during the service. The warmth of the church made him drowsy after his mile walk through the blizzard and cold.

"After the service I approached him and asked if he needed a ride home. He said he did, but then he drew his bent frame up to its full height and reached into the gunny sack. He pulled out his billfold and fished out the only bill in it. It was a twenty. Now this man had worked in the woods all his life, and didn't even get social security. He lived a frugal life, cutting his own wood
for heat, and living without modern conveniences. He had little cash. But there was a fierce pride in his face as he handed me the twenty: 'Father, I read in the newsletter that our church needed help because the fuel bills are high. I wanted to do my part. I'd been here on time but my car didn't start and I walked here.'"

Blowing another puff of pipe smoke, Doyle just smiled. "Does that tell you a bit about stewardship around this place?"
Potlatch

In the late winter/early spring of the Tannana River basin of Alaska, people often get depressed. There is still little light, and it is cold, or at best sloppy weather prevails. Food supplies are almost exclusively canned goods, and tempers are short. In Fairbanks and Anchorage, "cabin fever clinics" do land-office business treating people seriously depressed, trapped indoors by the dark, long winter. But in Minto, a tiny, bush village, there are no cabin fever clinics.

Alcohol and drug abuse is always a problem, and it gets worse in the winter and spring. On one late winter night, one young family felt the pain and violence that the combination of cabin fever and alcohol can bring. A young wife and mother fatally stabbed and killed her husband in a domestic dispute brought on by desperation and drunkenness. The entire community was in shock. No one knew quite what to do or say. The families of the young couple had been close friends and neighbors for years. Now there were three small children without a father, and a grieving widow eaten up with remorse and guilt.

But the elders of Minto knew what was needed. Going door to door, several of the elders began to gather the community together to dry the tears and address the tragedy. A tiny but sturdy woman in her mid-sixties barked orders as the young men dressed for travel and oiled their guns. "Moose meat is needed," the old woman said.

The young men were ready to hunt, but they shook their heads and mumbled that no one had seen a moose in weeks; and the river was beginning to be dangerous along the cut banks as the weather warmed and the restless water eroded the ice that held it captive.

"No moose around here," one young man said in the hearing of the old woman.
“Where is your faith?” came the reply. “God has always provided for us in Minto because we respect the animals and fish and don’t waste their meat. Go on, there will be moose; follow your heart and you will find them.” Still mumbling, they headed away from the village, some on snow machines to the Minto Flats, some on foot to the nearby birch and pine woods.

Elsewhere, St. Barnabas Episcopal Church, the “main” church in Minto, was bustling. People of all ages poured their energies into preparing for the wake and funeral. In the homes of the grieving families, food piled up, visitors cried openly with the families, and plans were laid for the potlatch which would take place beginning that night. The quiet and peace of the village was gone. There was much activity. Relatives from Fairbanks began to arrive in the bush plane which served as the major link to the outside world while the road to Fairbanks was being completed. Telephone calls to the several available phones were ringing with questions about what happened, but also about what people could do to help.

As the early dark approached, there were shouts from the river flat below the village. The young men were returning. “Why so quickly?” people asked each other. Five moose had been “caught” in a matter of hours.

No one could ever remember such a thing. The moose had been shot uncharacteristically close to the village; they usually avoid Native villages in the winter, knowing that there is danger in browsing near a hungry group of people when food is scarce. The old woman seemed to be the only one not surprised. She smiled and went back to her preparations for the potlatch.

Down at the end of the snow-packed road which runs the length of the village, the oldest and wisest man in the village, the Chief Peter John, looked into the past through clouded eyes, long since nearly blind. But looking into the past, he could see very well, indeed. How the ravens had guided him to moose when the village was nearly starving. How his prayers had been answered in dream and vision when there was a need to be met for the people who depended upon him. He laughed out loud at the news that five moose had been caught so close to the village. “It’s because we depended on our Lord, not ourselves. Maybe these young guys will see that our help is in the name of the Lord. Pretty good, pretty good, five moose. That will feed all of us.” Chief Peter John, more of a mystic than anyone knew, had
“seen” the moose in his vision that day. He had known just where they would be. He gave thanks to God for this blessing, and laid down for his nap. The potlatch would keep him up all night for several days.

At the village hall, mounds of gifts were being stacked. Hunting rifles, pendleton blankets, handmade shawls, quilts, vests, finery, radios, televisions, toys, cases of ammunition, fishing nets, cartons of canned goods: all the goods that people possessed were represented in the piles. The piles continued to grow until the children could not see over them.

The whole village had been turned into a butcher shop. At the home of the young husband who had been killed, the moose were being cut up, some for huge kettles of stew, others for enormous roasts of the dark, aromatic, and tasty meat. The small children would run errands while the experienced younger men and women did the easier cuts. There was much sampling of the cooking meat, which sent wonderful smells throughout the village. Wood fires glowed in the dark. All the log houses glowed as well with electric or kerosene lamp light. The children were dashing between the houses and the outdoor fires. The sled dogs were thrown so many bones that even they, hungry and hard-working dogs, did not fight over the scraps thrown their way. There was enough for everyone.

The fathers of the ill-fated couple cut moose meat side by side. The mothers and sisters worked in the same kitchen. The brothers of both had shot moose. In their shock and pain, the old ways had been the best to deal with such an unthinkable loss.

The old men could be seen stopping at St. Barnabas to kneel in prayer. Many carried their shallow skin drums. Then they walked slowly to the community center. There were sounds of preparation, food being dished up, KoolAid being poured for the children; the pungent smells of moose stew, strong coffee, and herbal tea. Soon, the building was filled. There was an air of sadness, yet expectation. The priest, a native man in his fifties, opened the meal with prayer.

A younger native priest, who grew up in Minto and knew the families involved, spoke of the air of expectancy. He reminded them that as Christians this expectancy was justified. Many heads nodded, and there were no dry eyes as the young priest
dressed for the potlatch assured them all that the young man who had died was now basking in light perpetual in the arms of Jesus.

They then called for Chief Peter John to offer prayer. He rose to his full height, seemingly six inches taller than earlier in the day in his home, when he seemed almost weakened and fragile, his voice misty and soft. His voice now boomed in prayer in the Athabascan language. All chorused “amen” when he finished.

The meal went on for nearly two hours. Butcher paper was spread out on the gymnasium floor, and the whole population of the village was seated in rows to be fed. Everyone got some of each course; it was tradition. The families of the young couple were seated in the place of honor, members of one family interspersed with members of the other. They were subdued, but it was obvious that they grieved together, not separately.

The potlatch drummers and the elder men began to drum and to try out voices that seemed almost rusty. But when the first song began, there was no rust, but the power of the Creator, whom the people believe gave them these sacred songs. The priests were among the first to begin to dance and sing. Then the elder women and men. There was a strong sense that these songs and dances, so full of the sacred, of the dim past, of hunts long ago, and animals given voice by the Creator to help the people, were the most special gifts given in the potlatch that night. While all the many gifts were given away to each family in the community, the most precious gifts were in the voices and bodies of the dancers and singers.

The bereaved families danced, side by side. The community wrapped them in a blanket of songs, of love, of caring. The grief of a young life lost so tragically soon gave way to the healing and joy of knowing that God provides. God gave the song. God gave the dances. God gave the tribe and its traditions for just such times as this. God even gave the moose. The presence of the Holy Spirit was real. Old women, who earlier in the day seemed scarcely able to walk from their homes to the church, shed years of age as they danced and acted out the feats of hunting and fishing prowess of their ancestors. They laughed as they danced out humorous tales of the people. The old eyes, the white hair, the crippled bodies, the wrinkled faces: all faded, and the voices,
faces, bodies, and memories of young Athabascan girls replaced them. For hours they danced and sang the whole community back together.

The potlatch symbolizes the giving and caring which underlies the Athabascan culture. It also is seen as an expression of Christian stewardship: thanksgiving for the tribe, for the songs and dances and stories of the people, for the moose, and for the life of the departed young man; but most of all, thanksgiving for the incredible abundance God has given.
Storytellers

"In Time of Need"

The Rev. Philip Allen is a Pine Ridge Ogalala Lakota Sioux who serves All Saints Church in Minneapolis. He is a part of the urban Indian Jubilee Center in the Twin Cities. He is the president of the National Committee on Indian Work (NCIW) and serves on the National Episcopal Coalition on Alcoholism and Drugs. He is on the executive council of Province VI, and serves as a Fifth-Step therapist at New Visions Treatment Center in Minneapolis. A graduate of Berkeley Divinity School at Yale, he grew up on the Pine Ridge Reservation in South Dakota. He has perhaps the best firsthand experience of any person active in Indian ministries, having served for twenty-five years as a priest in such Indian ministry settings as Navajoland, Nevada, Utah, South Dakota, Minnesota, and as the director of Indian Studies at St. Olaf College. He loves nothing as much as spending time with his grandson and namesake, Philip.

"Pine Point"

Erma Vizenor is a White Earth Ojibwe who lives in Pine Point, Minn. She is a school superintendent in an experimental Indian School district. She is a past-president of the Minnesota Committee on Indian Work (MCIW), a delegate to General Convention, a traveler to Africa as a part of her work with Minnesota’s Companion Diocese program, and, in the words of a community leader, “the heart and soul of Pine Point.” Presently attending Harvard University to earn her Ph.D. as a recipient of the prestigious Bush Leadership Fellowship, she is also legally trained and is a leader in Indian education in Minnesota.
"There is Always Room for More"

The Rev. Ronald Campbell is a Sisseton-Wahpeton Dakota Sioux who lives in Sisseton, S. Dak. He serves churches on the Sisseton-Wahpeton Reservation, and has served on virtually every council and commission in the Diocese of South Dakota. Ron attended the Church Divinity School of the Pacific, and has served as a priest and community leader for many years at Sisseton, on the Pine Ridge Reservation (where he served nine churches at one time), and for a decade in a largely non-Indian university parish. He has developed a province-wide youth camping program at Enemy Swim Lake on the reservation; he is most proud of organizing a singing group of Indian and non-Indian youth, the "Jesus Sings Harmony" kids, who have made a recording and raised money to build several camp cabins and carry out many youth activities. He and his wife, Marlene, have nine children and fifteen grandchildren.

"Stewardship and the Old Ways"

The late Rev. Mitchell Whiterabbit was a Winnebago Indian from Wisconsin, who was raised by his traditional Winnebago grandmother. He attended Lancaster Seminary in Pennsylvania, and was ordained in the Evangelical and Reformed Church, which later merged with the Congregational Christian Church to become the United Church of Christ (U.C.C.). After serving as a Navy Chaplain in World War II, he served his own people as pastor of the Winnebago U.C.C. in Black River Fall, Wisc., for twenty-two years. He was executive director of the Council for American Indian Ministries, the national group which represents American Indians in the U.C.C. He was a founder of the Native American Theological Association (NATA), an ecumenical program to secure seminary training for Native people.

"Rising Sun"

Owanah Anderson was born in Oklahoma, reared on her Choctaw mother's 160-acre allotment in Choctaw County. A graduate of the University of Oklahoma, she has had a varied professional career, ranging from media to business management, and she was deeply involved in social and women's issues on the national scene and in Texas, where she resided most of her adult life; she currently sits on a committee for the Harvard Graduate School of Education. A resident of New York City, she
In contrast to the contemporary habit of accumulating, giving has historically been a way of life for the tribal peoples of North America. These true accounts, compiled by Howard R. Anderson, stewardship officer for the Diocese of Minnesota, were generated by a Native American Stewardship Conference; they form a picture of a culture which affords respect to those who live unselfish and consistently generous lives. This collection of sketches will encourage the meek and humble the proud, as the first Americans teach us much of what Christian stewardship can be—and why merely tithing isn't enough.