

Healing Old Wounds

On Feb. 25, 1860, 220 people of the Wiyot Nation were massacred on a small island in Humboldt Bay in Eureka, Calif. No one was ever charged or brought to trial for this crime, though in a small town such as Eureka the guilty individuals' identities, over time, were no secret, even to the local church people.

In May of this year, 141 years later, the body of Christ in Humboldt County not only acknowledged this sin before Wiyot tribal leaders, but they also were led by God to do something about it. As part of our Many Nations One Voice Celebration held in the Arcata-Eureka area, 15-20 pastors and leaders of Christian ministries meaningfully participated in the event. They expressed their desire to build honorable relationships with the Wiyot Nation, and to help heal old wounds and bring spiritual renewal to their area.

Arcata First Baptist, the host church for our gathering, is built on historical Wiyot land. As senior pastor Clay Ford, representing the Humboldt Evangelical Alliance (HEAL), stood before Wiyot Tribal Chairwoman Cheryl Seidner—a born-again believer—and most of her tribal council, he read a moving proclamation stating HEAL's intentions.

He then presented Seidner with a check for \$1,000 as seed money toward building a center of remembrance on the massacre site. The church intends to continue giving to the Wiyot Nation until the center is built. As Seidner accepted the check and, through tears of joy, sang a traditional song of thanksgiving, something broke in the spiritual realm, and the presence of the Lord filled the packed-out gymnasium.

The next Sunday, all of our Native speakers were invited by local churches to share in their pulpits. This marked the first time a Native speaker had preached in many of these churches.

President David Kilmer of HEAL said of the historic day: "Each of the 12 pastors I talked to that hosted Nations thrilled with the content of the messages, the the speakers, and the response of the people."

Although much ignorance and misunderstanding about Native people remains in the body of Christ at large, the work of the Holy Spirit in Arcata-Eureka reveals the power of unity.

Says Kilmer, who represents some 40 evangelical churches as president of HEAL: "Initially there was a wide range of responses from the pastors regarding their participation in . Some were suspicious and didn't participate. Others were cautious but were full of praise afterward.

"Others said they had been wanting to connect with First Nations people and issues for a long time but didn't know where to begin. Those who something very powerful happened here that changed the whole spiritual climate in our region."

Pastor Ford stated: "The Holy Spirit moved in incredible ways as we worshiped Jesus Christ, Native and non-Native together. Walls of hurt and mistrust melted as we saw the Spirit of God bring forgiveness and restoration."

One First Nations gentleman in the community said about the Native and non-Native unity that he witnessed: "I've never

thought much about Jesus, and I certainly haven't cared for Christians. But if these Christians heard Jesus tell them to do these things, then Jesus must be all right."

A prominent local Christian businessman who had loaned us his sound system for the celebration had eyed our gathering mostly with indifference. His belief was that Christians shouldn't be focused on the past.

"All these atrocities are in the past, and we should leave them behind and move on," he had said. After attending one meeting his belief had changed.

"I came to the Friday night meeting to make sure the sound system was working OK," he said.

"The Holy Spirit got hold of me and melted my heart. I was totally transformed."

Historical tragedies cannot be changed, but the pain of their legacies can.

When our hearts are open to allowing the Holy Spirit to heal old wounds among us, the result will be a new bond of unity in Christ that will bring His presence to any people, anywhere.

Richard Twiss is Rosebud Lakota/Sioux and the president of Wiconi International. He is a popular speaker and the author of One Church, Many Tribes (Regal). The next MN1V celebrations will be held in Portland, Ore., Oct. 18-21, and Dallas, Nov. 8-10.