



WALKING OUT THE GOSPEL AMONG THE PEOPLE

Bill Gowey

It was April, 2001 in Cottonwood, Arizona. For the first time in our lives, my wife Jan and I experienced a worship service where Native American instruments and traditional regalia were allowed. The worship was so powerful that many Native people shared how this newfound freedom, freedom to worship Jesus as the people God created them to be, had touched their hearts. This three-day conference with Richard Twiss, Mary Glazier and the guys from Broken Walls changed the course of my life and our ministry.

and work to make our ministry a part of our local Native community, believing that we are to be walking out our faith among the unchurched Native people. Over the past 11 years I have met many Native Christians who take part in powwows and other Native American traditions as well.

One focus of our ministry “Reztoration” is reconciliation. We’re working to bring healing and break down the old walls of offense between many Native Americans and the Church because



Pastor Bill Gowey walking out the gospel in Oaxaca, Mexico

What started as a unique ministry in a small reservation church has grown into walking out the gospel of Jesus among Native peoples from Montana to the Zapotec people of the southern Mexican state of Oaxaca. Using Native dancing, drums, flutes and other instruments to worship our Creator has touched the hearts of many people, both Native and non-Native alike.

We attend powwows and other Native gatherings

of the Indian boarding schools and other issues. While at a local high school powwow I felt led of the Lord to offer a financial gift to support the youngest powwow dancers, recognizing the Church’s involvement with taking away language and culture from Native people in the past. The powwow committee allowed us to do this, but told me that I would have to give each child the gift and explain why we were doing this. I was announced as Rev. Bill Gowey, and it became



very quiet. I shared that we were offering this support and encouragement for these young ones to be proud of who God had created them to be, recognizing the physical, emotional and sexual abuse that happened at the boarding schools and asking forgiveness for the Church's part in it. As I walked out of the powwow arena, a 92-year-old Navajo grandmother took my hand and said, with tears in her eyes, "Thank you, that needed to be done a long time ago." For many non-Native people these are just offenses from the past, but to this grandmother it had been her life.

Over the past eight years I have been given permission to dance in the powwow circle. For me personally, some of my closest times with the Lord have been while I am dancing unto Him, offering my prayers for the people.

All of this has led our ministry to put on an annual traditional powwow in Flagstaff, Arizona. We work together with traditional Native people to make this happen. Through this bringing together of peoples, we are seeing many people touched and healed. We recognize the hurts of the past while working together to see hope for the future. We have seen Native and non-Native people touched by the Holy Spirit through the songs and dances. One woman came up to me after a service where we had some traditional powwow singers sing drum songs for us. The woman said, "Those songs made

me want to worship God, is that OK?" From Montana to Mexico and at our Native Christian gatherings in Flagstaff we are seeing lives changed. The dancing and traditional songs are helping to break down the barriers that keep many Native people away from the Church.

Offering gifts in a traditionally respectful way, seeking the blessing of tribal elders before we hold an event or even going to pray on the land has given us so many open doors to share the love of Jesus with unchurched people. God is restoring families, setting people free from drugs and alcohol and giving hope to hopeless people because the people in our ministry are willing to walk out the gospel of Jesus among the people in a culturally relevant and sensitive way. A traditional elder who attends our annual powwow wrote this in a letter:

This powwow is a way to have people experience God's love, a love that has compassion and no fear, and peace and no alienation between people(s). In this peaceful way, the teaching abilities of the powwow circle are empowered to flow. The capacity to touch people's hearts is mobilized in such peaceful and compassionate ways. 🌐

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