Preserving the dignity and worth of the individual: A faith-based approach for working with indigenous peoples

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Introduction
Throughout history the world faith-based institutions have maintained a significant role in the education of indigenous people. Following in the footsteps of St. Francis, Franciscans have been one of the leading religious communities with a particular mission to go to the ends of the world in the name of the Church to “spread the good news of Jesus Christ for living a Gospel way of life”. However, the original spirit and intent of St. Francis and St. Clare also went through various transitions and interpretations as to how to minister to “the other” in “lived right-relationships.” This was especially true in the education of the indigenous people of the Americas and those we come to know today as Native Americans. (Morales, 1983)

Fortunately over the years a transformation and understanding of each other’s spirituality has brought faith-based approaches and Native Americans together. Through the mutual respect of the other’s Spirituality we have experienced more recently in history an enculturation of faith and culture creating a holistic approach to education for all, indigenous and non-indigenous involved in the process. It is this process of developing the individual person through a holistic educational approach that is the foundation for preparing the person to live right-relationships for integrity for all of creation. The integration of the individual spirit within the person to be balanced in mind, body and soul provides the basis for the further development and education of the person externally in other areas of life. (Raischl & Cirino, 2002)

Spirituality of Struggle
Joan Chittister, (2004) refers to a spirituality of struggle. This concept of the spirituality of struggle will be utilized in this paper to demonstrate an integration of Franciscan spirituality, Native American spirituality and spirituality of Sport. These spiritualities share a common focus point for moments of conversion in developing a turning around in the individual. Today in the education of Native Americans this has come to be a transitional factor for how we provide those significant transformations in the individual for all aspects in their life looking at the total person. The uniqueness of each one of these spiritualities as well as their similarities will be discussed in relationship to how this has affected the education of Native Americans.

According to Chittister (2004) spirituality of struggle can be defined as neither endurance nor denial. The essence of struggle is focused on the ability to become new rather than old. It is the opportunity to grow in a process of being either smaller or larger. It involves forced changes that become moments of beginnings again: conversion. We have been scarred by the struggles in life and changing challenges that have transformed us by hope from the growth of healing in our lives. These times of darkness and struggle in search of transformation for courage and hope to survive have existed in our personal lives, families, cultures, religions, nations and internationally. (Chittister, 2004)

Franciscan Tradition and Spirituality
The plight of Native Americans is very much a part of this spirituality of struggle. In order to study the struggle imposed on Native Americans it is essential to investigate the religious and social institutions that forced their ways and education onto the existing culture of the Native Americans. One such struggle was exhibited by the Franciscans that came to the Americas. Within the Franciscan Tradition one of the on-going challenges has been how to minister to people. This was an issue even in the time of Francis during the early 1200’s. The foundational chapters of The Rule, Regula Non Bullata, are all rooted in scripture for living the gospel way of life in Christ. The questions asked in the time of Francis are the same questions asked today: Who are we? How are we to live? And what are we to do? In Francis’s Letter to the Sisters and Brothers of Penance mutual respect for the other was the prime concern for all, “Let (them) have and show mercy to each of (their) sisters and brothers as (they) would want them to do too, (for) themselves were (they) in a similar position” (2Lft 43). The Franciscan community had internal struggles and divisions in answering and searching to live out this mission.

These were the same questions posed by the early Franciscans coming to the Americas as part of the Universal Mission of the Church to go to all the ends of the earth and convert the pagans (indigenous people of the world) to Christianity and specifically Catholicism. Franciscan Friars were part of those initial voyages by explorers to find a shorter route to Asia by travel west when the Americas were discovered. These first groups of friars were part of a religious contingency who believed that these indigenous people could be part of the ancestry of the lost tribes of Israel. They studied their language, customs and rituals. However the second wave of explorers and friars were part of a time in history when the focus was to obtain land and riches. They would brand the indigenous people with the left hand and baptize them with the right hand. It was a time of exploitation of the lands and the subjugation of the people as forced labor. Colonies were formed as these European countries claimed ownership of these new territories. (Englebert, 1956, Morales, 1983)
These European countries established settlements later called “colonials.” Within these compounds initially the servants (indigenous people) were forced to live in substandard conditions on one end of the compound and the Europeans at the other end with the Catholic Church established by the Franciscan Friars located on the European end of the compound. This eventually changed as the mission of the Friars changed to a perspective of working with the indigenous people as the new wave of friars realized the injustices that were imposed on the native people of these new territories. (DeNeve and Moholy, 1985)

It was not until Vatican II that the Catholic Church called for a Universal Mission of religious communities to share in the responsibility to go back to the needs of the indigenous people of the world. At the time, this was especially true for religious communities of women in North America who sent missionaries to Central and South America. The indigenous converts in these countries were now in need of personnel to continue to guide their faith journeys. Many missionaries who answered this call were educators. Their efforts gave rise to what we call today “Faith-Based Communities.” Also at this time in history was a new wave of “Liberation Theology” addressing the injustices of indigenous people of the world and a call to go as servants to the people of the world in the attitude of peace, justice and integrity of creation. Franciscans International, an NGO (non-government agancy) of the United Nations has led the way in this mission, their most recent efforts addressing the issues for the people in Darfur (Pope John Paul II, 2002).

Educators working with indigenous people in the world and new immigrants to other countries are called today to be people of compassion in an atmosphere of being-attitude for presence, dialogue, and witness to the needs of their students and their families. Tracing the inspirational roots of the Franciscan social justice movement today we see this was the original spirit and intent in the writings of Francis and Clare. In the words of Francis, “You are who you are before God and no more.” Today, we as educators in the Franciscan tradition are called to witness that mutual respect for all, exemplifying lived right-relationships for integrity for all of God’s creation. (Hellman, 2004)

The Churches and the Indian Schools 1888–1912

While there were struggles in regard to the Franciscans ministering to the needs and education of Native Americans on the West coast, other religious groups started programs serving the needs of the east coast of the United States. Tension and conflict existed between the Protestants and Catholics long before either denomination came in contact with Native Americans. There was a strong anti-Catholic atmosphere in the United States which in some ways continues today. This conflict existed when both denominations began work with Native Americans. The Protestant missionaries did not share the practice we will see in the Franciscan Missions, of enculturation of the customs and beliefs of the Native Americans. This only complicated the issues of the education in the mission schools due to the federal government regulations. Consequently this caused a split within the Indian Affairs Bureau as to how the Native Americans were to be educated by these religious denominations. (Prucha, 1964)

There were two separate offices of Indian Affairs—the Bureau of Catholic Indian Missions and the Indian Rights Association. Differences between these two groups were major topics of concern in Congress as well as issues being brought to the Supreme Court and the President. It wasn’t until after 1900 that the Catholic efforts started to take hold legally in services to Native Americans to protect the rights of Catholic Native Americans and Catholic mission schools. Mother Katherine Drexel, a very influential founder of the Sisters of the Blessed Sacrament, which conducted missions on the east coast and Midwest, was very influential in this Catholic reform movement for the rights of Native Americans. Various Supreme Court cases accounted for the continued church-state issues in regard to the contract schools on Native American Reservations. (Bodo, 1998; Prucha, 1979).

There were various Christian humanitarians and philanthropists who were the driving force behind the reforms of Indian affairs. We can look back at these reforms today, efforts to Americanize the Native Americans, as examples of injustice in the suppression of indigenous cultures. To this day Native Americans bear the scars of these reform efforts. These Native American policies cannot be treated in isolation but are examples of the dominant cultural and intellectual trends of the time. The primary influence on these American policies and the reform spirit at that time was evangelical Christians. This was part of the extension and significant challenges of Christian reform groups attempting to make amends for the past. It was a way to approach the present concern in society to live right-relationships for peace, justice and integrity of creation with Native Americans. In the words of Joan Chittister (2004), “We are living in an era more in need of a spirituality of struggle than perhaps any other time in history.” This certainly would apply to the groups we have oppressed and cultures we have suppressed to make amends for our past policies and treatment of Native Americans. (Bordewich, 1996)

Native American Spirituality

Native American spirituality, as we have come to know it, has been shaped by the leadership figures in the various tribes and nations of the Native Americans. Some of the well-known spiritual guides past and present referred to in this research are Black Elk, Chief Seattle, Agnes Yellowtail Deernose, and Duce Bowen. They helped shape the spirituality of their people to prepare the next generation. Their stories are those of struggle for themselves and their people to maintain the beliefs that have shaped their culture and to continue to practice and educate the next generation to carry on the traditions of their culture and people.

In Neihardt's (1961), Black Elk Speaks, the inspirational story and writings of the Holy Man of the Oglala Sioux are told through his shared visions. In The Sacred Pipe, Black Elk recounts the seven rites of the Oglala Sioux. Black Elk was also known as the Lakota Sioux sage, Hehaka Sapa, maintaining the journey of the Plains ceremonial red stone pipe that is part of the sacred tradition for Native Americans. Likewise, Black Elk expresses the responsibility he bears to “bring to life the flowering tree of his people.” Holler (1995) provides the perspective of Black Elk’s religion and the adaptation of...
the Sun Dance with Lakota Catholicism. It represents an expressive religion in rituals and storytelling rather than in sacred scripture. This Sun Dance brought to life through religious change and adaptation an incredible cross-cultural religious experience with the Christian faith. (Black Elk & Lyon, 1990)

Likewise, Chief Seattle (1991) was a Suquamish Indian Chief whose message portrays his people’s respect and love for the earth, and a concern for its destruction. Chief Seattle describes the beliefs and practices common to all indigenous peoples and in this case all Native American people. It is symbolic of indigenous beliefs “Respect for ‘Mother Earth’ and the ‘Great Spirit’ our Creator”. Every creature and all the earth are sacred. It is the belief of the Native American people that to waste or destroy nature is destroying life itself. (Bordewich, 1996)

The contemporary Native American “Keepers of the Tradition” are represented by a woman of the Crow Tribe, Agnes Yellowtail Deernose and a member of the Seneca Nation “Duce” Bowen. Voget (1995) explains how Agnes represents a matriarchal tribe in which the women have empowered themselves to be the “Keepers of the Tradition.” Agnes, baptized Baptist found ways to adapt the traditional Christian religion with the Crow belief of Akbatatdea, the Creator. The Crow Tribes led by Chief Plenty-coups in Montana were very ingenious in pacifying the government officials by seemingly abiding by their request to learn the white man’s ways and to integrate their Crow religion, family structure, political and social activities, the distribution of wealth and education within the system that now controlled their lives. (Linderman, 1970)

What seemed to keep them together is the spirituality of struggle- the effort to find a path to the future with personal meaning despite the challenges to balance Crow traditions with American traditions. The Crows were one of the few tribes who were able to stay on their own lands because of their cooperation with the government. Their children were still forced to travel and attend boarding schools during the week but at least it was on the reservation. Agnes’s family was part of one of the Crow worship groups called the Tobacco Society. Her parents were open to learning more about the Catholic Church but became members of the Baptist Church on the reservation.

Over the years, they learned to integrate both forms of worship to be able to practice their Crow beliefs. Initially the Catholic Church was not open to the Crow practices until the Franciscans took over the Catholic mission schools and Churches with a new perspective on mutual enculturation. Agnes became a forerunner integrating the traditions of her people, Absarokee, with the Christian and American traditions. In the 1950’s the Sun Dance changed as the women joined the men in dance and prayer with eagle-bone whistles and continue that tradition today of leading the dance and prayer of their people. This, you might say, is very similar to how St. Clare continued the Franciscan Traditions that Francis had hoped the brothers would follow but it was Clare who led the way for the Franciscan Tradition to continue as we know it today.

Duce Bowen (1991) shares the gift of story-telling and keeping the tradition for the Seneca Nation of New York. Duce brings a different perspective than what we would consider a traditional Native American keeper of the faith. The unique contribution for the Seneca Nation is that Duce has an education with biblical courses from Emmaus Bible School in Oak Park, IL as well as degrees in other areas that have helped provide the Seneca Nation with legal assistance, in addition to keeping Seneca Nation traditions. Duce shares the spirituality of struggle with his people most recently from the violation of the Pickering Treaty which forced the removal of the Seneca People in the 1960’s for the construction of the Kinzua Dam.

Through the telling of the Seneca Tales, Duce has attempted to help his people be transformed by hope. Duce, until his recent passing, was an active writer and member of the Seneca Nation Red House Memorial Church. Duce’s stories of the supernatural are Native American stories, told by and passed down in tradition of the Seneca people of the Seneca Nation. Since the gift of the stories being told by an elder are being lost, these written tales are composites from past storytelling elders sharing the Seneca tales. It is hoped that these now written tales of the supernatural will live on in the generations to follow of the Seneca Nation.

The storytelling and inspirational writings of Native American spirituality is similar to the Franciscan spirituality of using the oral tradition. There are many examples of this similarity that could be given. This is just one example expressed through the writings of two great spiritual leaders, “Creation is the first revelation of God,” (Bonaventure) and the second quote, “What we do to earth we do to children of Earth,” (Chief Seattle). Both were men of faith from two different generations, two different cultures yet similar in realizing the goodness of God. Two different approaches to the same realization and this is the unique blend of Franciscanism and Native American Culture. Likewise, Chief Seattle’s message in Brother Eagle, Sister Sky (1991), parallels St. Francis’s Canticle of the Sun. Both are an expression of thanksgiving and praise to God and at the same time a concern for the integrity of all creation (Saint Sing, 1985).

**Similarities of Spirituality of Sport, Franciscan Spirituality and Native American Spirituality**

The common link between Franciscan spirituality, Native American spirituality and spirituality of sport has to do with what Joan Chittister (2004) refers to as spirituality of struggle. From struggle in our lives we give birth to new life and conversion. The hope that we find within us in the struggle helps us on our life’s journey to grow to the challenges of the future. Francis had struggles in life that grounded his moments of conversion and the conversion we speak of in Franciscan spirituality. In Spirituality of Sport Susan Saint Sing (2004) refers to arête—the Greek ideal of an equilateral balance of mind, body and spirit. This goal within each person of seeking balance of mind, body and spirit is best exemplified in the spirit of an Olympian. In Native American spirituality this balance is found in an attempt to be in balance with all of creation (Holmes, 1907). This is a key link between Franciscan Heritage and Native American Heritage: the balance of the individual. One might say this link is the base for recognizing the place for the Spirituality of Sport. As part of creation human beings are prone to play. It is in the practice and act of play that we find balance of our mind, body and spirit which impacts relationships ourselves, others, nature and our God. God created the world as a
playground—The Garden of Eden. We are all part of that playground. Susan Saint Sing (2004) refers to play as an archetype of goodness and joy: that perfect human state and union with God. Similarly Bonaventure and Scotus refer to the Goodness of God and Francis used the greeting Pax et Bonum– Peace and All Good to express our union with the Creator.

Hastings and DelleMonache (2007) explain a connection of Francis’ spirit with the Spirituality of Sport exhibited through the concept of *Haecceitas, Cortesia*, and play.

*Haecceitas* is Scotus’s concept of the “thisness” of everything by which Francis sought and found the beauty of God’s love in the world around him. *Cortesia* is defined as “courteous behavior.” In the words of Francis, “Courtesie is one of the properties of God…. ” It is characterized by heartfelt feeling and an attitude of deep respect, courtesy, honor, love, compassion, humility and a recreation of “soulful” life on Earth. Play was very much part of Francis’s life. Play to Francis was a positive energy of creation exhibited by his imaginary violin playing, singing and dancing through the Umbrian countryside. You might say this is where Franciscans today have gained a reputation for being “free spirits,” having a very open attitude to life in general. This attitude to live is something Franciscan also to pass on to their students and athletes today. (Saint Sing, 2004; Hastings & DelleMonache, 2007; McDowell 1995; Delio, 2004)

Other religious denominations, especially the Protestant missionaries, did not share this concept of play as evidence of Goodness of God. Some Protestant groups found play to be a detriment to the development of the person. Therefore this is one example why the Franciscan spirituality has such strong affinity to Native American spirituality and spirituality of sport.

Franciscan spirituality like Native American spiritualities and spirituality of Sport is based on the perception of beauty when the mind, body and spirit are in balance. In this balance we produce a product and a human spirit that is beautiful, useful, enduring. Bonaventure explains the reason that God made the soul rational, namely that of its own accord, it might: praise God, serve God, and find delight in God and be at rest. The soul’s balance develops through charity: those who abide in charity, abide in God, and God in them. The body is in balance, Susan Saint Sing (2004) explains, when the energy of the act, its beauty and grace delivers us, takes us it momentarily to a higher level of existence, a place closer to God, a centralizing focus. (Hayes, 1996)

In our Native American spirituality everything goes back to giving thanks and praise to The Great Spirit. The sacred dances are a form of sacred play. It is the execution of the dance when the body gives praise to the Great Spirit centered expressing creation myths or imaginative stories about the beginning of the earth and the beliefs and practices of particular tribes and regions. The whole meaning of human existence is universally symbolized by the pipe in all tribal cultural religions in Native American spirituality. The gift of the sacred pipe represents the building of various levels of relationships with self, others and with the Great Spirit. Native Americans have traditionally expressed their relationship to the Great Spirit through songs, dances, games and the visual arts. (Brown, 1989; Don, 2006; Tinker, 1992; Wyman, 1957)

What is central in each form of spirituality is the beauty in the transformation that takes place in the person. The beauty Francis found embracing the leper in seeing past the outcast to the beauty within the person. The beauty an athlete exhibits in the execution and movement of the body-being one in mind, body, spirit, grace and strength. The beauty is in God’s creation and respect for the earth that is gift from the Great Spirit. Various Native American tribes have ceremonial rituals to respect life and the spirituality of the land. These ceremonies are a form of prayer and understanding a relationship with the land. This is the unique aspect that Franciscans eventually came to know and appreciate, living right relationships through the beauty of the spirituality of the people they lived and worked among. (Hoffman, 1992, 2006)

**Journey Stories**

The word conversion has been used in this paper to signify the internal journey of change and awareness in a person. The early settlers and religious groups used the word conversion in terms of baptizing the pagan savages and teaching them the white man’s ways of Christianity and civilization. The reason some Franciscan missionaries were able to make progress in building positive relationships with the Native Americans is because they were interested in the mutual conversion and understanding of cultures, customs and religions. Part of this mutual conversion involved integrating the customs, rituals and stories for both groups. There are similarities for Franciscans and Native Americans. One of the gifts both Franciscans and Native Americans share is story-telling. The heritage of both cultures has been passed down through the ages through the stories told of the founding members and their origin and the many stories of moments of conversion. Some of these stories are the journeys of conversion that were shared experiences with similar symbols, such as the San Damiano Cross and the wolf.

The voice heard by Francis before the San Damiano Cross was a significant moment of conversion in his life. The San Damiano Cross has come to be a universal symbol of conversion for Franciscans, as well as for people who have come to know the Franciscan charism. For Native Americans the symbol of the shape of the San Damiano Cross has become prevalent throughout history in their pottery, sandpainting and other pieces of art work. The interconnection of sandpainting and the San Damiano Cross is used particularly by Medicine men and elders as a form of healing and expressing the interweaving of the inner journey of self discovery for the person. The external colors symbolize the pain, sickness, depression and other internal struggles that the person is experiencing. (Saint Sing, 2006)

Likewise, Franciscans have noted the one mystery in the Christian religion that is found to be very significant is the Feast of Corpus Christi. The feast commemorates the reenactment of the mystery of the body and blood of Christ. For Francis the body was very significant and precious. Although at times Francis abused his body calling it Brother Ass, he also
reverenced the body calling it Brother Body. The care and reverence for the body is something shared in Franciscan spirituality, Native American spirituality and spirituality of Sport. The common element is the belief that the body is the caretaker of the soul. There are graced moments in which the gift of the body expresses the mystical presence of the spirit within the person. The Navahos have their own San Damiano Cross, called the Tóháahí Cross, with a Navaho Christ figure on the cross. This symbolizes the intertwining of the Franciscan, Native American and Sport spiritualities as a fabric of human experience. This mystical union of flesh and spirit was experienced by Christ. It is the same as Francis experiencing the transformation by the Stigmata. Native Americans experience this union in their rituals for purification and respect for the Creator by cleansing the body. At the same time it is experienced in a graced peak performance in sport. (Saint Sing, 2004, 2006; Black Elk & Lyon, 1990)

Another shared conversion story is the theme of beauty that is part of Franciscan spirituality and Native American spirituality in the image of the wolf. For Franciscans this is illustrated using the story of The Wolf of Gubbio, to demonstrate how Francis saw the beauty within "Brother Wolf" (Godet-Calogeras, 2002). Bonaventure describes the relationships that Francis developed by experiencing God’s love in the visible beauty of the relationships that he encountered, such as the beauty in the Brother Wolf. Bonaventure wrote that Francis would call creatures, no matter how small, by the name of brother or sister because he knew they shared with him the same beginning of the beauty of God’s love (Armstrong, et. al., 1999).

Likewise in Native American spirituality the wolf is a symbol of beauty, richness, goodness and how we tame that inner wolf of our own journeys to be a reflection of who we are on the outside. This symbolism is told in the story by a Cherokee to his grandson. In the Crow tribe it was an honor to be part of the Wolves. They were the scouts and protectors of the tribe from the enemy. The wolf is a highly respected animal for its wisdom and stories are told how, if wounded, the wolf was brought to the Medicine man for healing. (Littell, 2006; Linderman, 1962)

Franciscan Mission as Educators

In St. Bonaventure’s (2001) best-known writing, *The Soul's Journey to God*, he points out that: Reading is not sufficient without fervor, Speculation without devotion, Investigation without wonder, Observation without joy, Work without piety, Knowledge without love, Understanding without humility, Endeavor without divine grace, Reflection as a mirror without divinely inspired wisdom. Franciscans today, like their predecessors, believe that knowledge must be joined with compassion, with joy, and with faith in God (Raischi & Cirino, 2002). A few examples of Franciscans who have worked to develop this compassionate relationship with Native Americans from different eras would be Br. Junipero Serra (1769-1853) and Br. Bernard Halle (1900–1961), along with other various missionaries from different religious communities.

Br. Junipero Serra is one of the well-known courageous and inspiring missionaries who helped settled California and is considered the Franciscan Founder of California Missions. Junipero shared the spirit of Francis and Clare laboring for the conversion of others in the eyes of God. Junipero worked with Native Americans to understand Christianity motivated by a sincere concern for their well-being first and to learn from the people. Junipero’s strong will overcame political and physical adversity for establishing missions that provided a lifestyle with dignity for the people. Junipero and other Franciscan missionaries at the time fought heavy odds dealing with environmental conditions and oppressive conditions imposed by the foreign governments who claimed the territory. They also protected the people from the Conquistadors and the Spanish military who ruthlessly tried to enforce these suppressive mandates by the California governors. (Englebert, 1956; DeNivi & Moholy, 1985; King, 1956; Kocher, 1976)

The next generation of Franciscan friars who were known for placing the welfare of the Native American first is represented by Br. Bernard Halle. He was one of three well-known friars who initiated works on the Navajo Reservations in Arizona and New Mexico from 1889 to 1921. Their success was due to the true spirit and intent of living a Gospel way of life in the footsteps of Francis and Clare. Br. Bernard’s, and his companions Anselm’s and Placidus’s first concern was to enculturate themselves to learn from the people their culture, language and religion. This was also supported in an interview (personal communication December 27, 2007) with Sr. Savina, FMM, a Franciscan Missionary of Mary, who worked at St. Michael’s Mission in Arizona for almost 30 years during the 1930’s and 40’s. The building of relationships was the gift this trio of dedicated missionaries brought to the education of Navajo/Navaho or “Dineh.” (Bahr, 2004)

These Franciscan Missionaries became trusted friends and advocates for the Navajo people. This trust and friendship was so strong that when Protestant groups came they were not accepted by the Navajo people because, like other groups of missionaries with other indigenous people their concern was to convert pagans and savages to the Christian way of life instead of learning the culture, customs and religion that already existed. This group of Franciscans experienced a mutual conversion with the Navajos. One councilman commented that Fr Bernard, the apostle with the gift of story-telling, was sent to the Navaholand to make Christians of the Navajos but they made a Navajo of Fr. Bernard. Fr. Bernard spoke fluent Navaho and is known for his work in linguistics and writing the first book: *An Ethnologic Dictionary of the Navaho Language*. (Bodo, 1998)

Most recently, from 1960’s until the present, stories are shared by Franciscan missionaries who are picking up the pieces from experiences that left Native Americans scarred by their past. They are looking for the transformation of hope in the present and future lifestyle of Native Americans and the education systems they encounter today. Franciscan women’s communities more recently have taken over the early enculturation efforts that were started by the earlier friars. Sr. Claver, OSF, (personal communication, December 7, 2007) a Sister of St. Francis from Oldenburg, Indiana shared stories from being a Franciscan missionary for twenty-four years in the school of St. Xavier Mission in St. Xavier, Montana on the Crow reservation. The Jesuits were the group to open the mission and the school on the reservation with the traditional approach to education—to Americanize the children and Christianize the members of the Crow tribes. It wasn’t until the Franciscans started work in the missions that the children in the reservation school were allowed to learn
and practice the Crow culture and customs as part of their education. Now most of the teachers are members of the Crow Tribe. It is a matrarchal tribe and the women have led the tribe into this century, developing and maintaining programs needed for personal growth and development that is lacking in so many Native Americans of the younger generation. The intent of the Franciscans today is to empower the people to continue the mission work of their own people.

Educating students today has us asking some very important questions for this generation of educators in regard to working with diverse groups. The foundational questions, from a Franciscan perspective for our mission in education are: Who are we? Where are we going? Who are we taking with us? What does it mean to be part of a Catholic Franciscan education program? Catholic—we are Universal in our thinking. Franciscan—we are open to diversity. Compassion—can it be taught, caught and/or learned when encountering the “other”? These moments of compassion—are they graced choice moments for true change and conversion? St. Clare’s significance, in terms of developing the Franciscan person is to challenge our students today to develop the critical ability to examine the beliefs and assumptions that shape their lives. Can we prepare our educators of this generation to be open to the diversity of those they minister to and to accept the ways of “the other”? (Coughlin, 2007)

Constance Foure (2004) suggests in her book, Journey to justice: Transforming hearts and schools with Catholic social teaching, a series of issues to be addressed in preparing the next generation to be open to the integrity of all of creation. These topics range from Catholic social teaching, distinguishing charity and justice, moving from charity to justice, teaching basic justice awareness, teaching advocacy skills, infusing the principles throughout the curriculum, design and evaluation of programs, service learning and education for justice, maintaining an attitude of nonviolence, modeling convictions and getting support, and to the ability of students today to set boundaries and choice-making. The common link continues to be the conversion found in the spirituality of struggle. It is the ability of a person to make the changes within themselves to compliment the external journey for changes in programs. St. Francis and St. Clare rooted this conversion in Scripture. For St. Francis and St. Clare life is living the Gospel radically. St. Clare used mostly the Gospels of Matthew, Luke referring to the Sermon on the Mount, and the Beatitudes. In an attitude of being, we reach out to the other. Likewise, the Beatitudes were used by Francis in his Admonitions of how we are to live. This is the message to our students and the future educators of tomorrow for a conversion to a be-attitude for others and themselves. This is similar in Native American spirituality in the rite of purification as the young person prepares for adulthood. The wholeness of this sacred time of conversion is complimented with the spirituality of sport. One of the last rituals involves Tapa Wanka Yaq, the throwing of the ball, which represents the universe and the desire to recover the ball (universe) is the wisdom from the four Powers of the universe. (Brown, 1989)

Conclusion

The spirit and intent of Francis and Clare in the Franciscan Charism that compliments Native American spirituality and the spirituality of Sport can be summarized concisely in Nan Merrill’s (2000) Psalms for praying: An invitation to wholeness. In an inclusive version of Psalm 132 lived right-relationships: “…Wise are those who learn through silence; Learn then to listen well. For beyond the silence and stillness within, you will come to know, … Blessings of the Great Silence be with you as you help to rebuild the heart of the world with love!” This was Francis’s message and intent from the very beginning. “Pax et Bonum” – Peace and all Good. Francis and Clare exhibited that humility from the message to us that, “You are what you are in the eyes of God.” Francis’s last words with his brothers was, “I have done what is mine to do; now Christ teach you what is yours to do.” Likewise Clare provides guidelines for us so that we, too, can find our way from the known to the unknown, from brokenness of the one, to hope in lived right-relationships with the other through community. (Armstrong, et al. 2000)

In Clare’s Testament we are reminded to live by example of our actions, “The Lord has called us to this greatness that those who are to be effective mirrors and examples for others should see themselves mirrored in us…. Therefore if we have lived according to this form of life which I have spoken about, we shall leave a noble example to others” (Armstrong, 2006). Furthermore, Francis asked that we “preach the Gospel at all times and if necessary use words.” This was Bonaventure’s Sermon of 1255 about Francis as teacher, “… taught what he had learned without forgetting it, because he put it into practice… he did not acquire his knowledge by reflecting in general terms on a limited number of truths, but by individual experience over a wide range of life.” (Coughlin, 2007)

In conclusion, the spirituality of struggle has interwoven the Franciscan spirituality, Native American spirituality and the spirituality of Sport through the moments of wholeness of conversion in the individual person. It is in those moments of conversion for living right-relationships with all. This is one faith-based approach for preserving the dignity and worth of the individual for working with indigenous peoples. St. Francis and St. Clare created an alternative lifestyle, which many followed and had an impact on the merciless social structure of their time. What alternative lifestyle can we offer in our generation? Today can we be counter-cultural and be a culture with compassion?

References


West

Refereed papers

AIESEP 2008 World Congress—Sport pedagogy research, policy & practice: International perspectives in physical education and sports coaching


