



April 2, 2019

COUNCIL FIRE

Council Fires have a long tradition of being a place to gather to hear news, tell stories and to consider what lies ahead. It is a good title for these letters. When I first began this ministry in October 2017 I began to repeatedly pray one prayer “Lord, send out laborers into your harvest,” particularly, Native men with a call to plant churches. I continue to pray the same every day. There is a harvest ready among our North American Indian neighbors.

I first met Greg at General Assembly June of 2018. We met for breakfast. It was then I came to learn that in the fall of 2017 (right around the time I had first begun praying in earnest for the Lord to raise up Native church planters) the Lord began working on the heart of this man from Tennessee.

Greg Baney is a Teaching Elder living in the Chattanooga area with his family where he is an Assistant Pastor at Hixson, PCA. Greg’s father was Cherokee/Choctaw and his Mom is Anglo. Greg is very familiar with Indian ways. After his graduation from Covenant Seminary prior to beginning his ministry Greg didn’t make much of his Indian heritage since he didn’t look distinctively Native. (You don’t need to look distinctively Native to still be Native.) Nonetheless, God was at work in Greg’s heart calling him to work among his people. Greg shared the details of his story with me and told me of his desire to plant a church in the Tennessee Valley somewhere around Soddy Daisy where there is a demographic of North American Indians. Since then, we have been in regular contact and have grown close as brothers in the Lord. Pictured (right) is Greg standing alongside a large memorial at Brainerd Mission. Brainerd Mission was established in 1817 as a school for Cherokee children and was in operation until 1839 when the US Government ordered the removal of the Cherokee from their ancestral homeland. It was in this area of Tennessee that the terrible displacement to Indian Territory (Oklahoma) began what is known today as the



“Trail of Tears.” Pray for Greg and his wife Trisha and their 3 children as a family they begin this new walk of faith following the Lord’s call. Greg and Trisha will be going through our Church Planter Assessment later this month. God is answering prayer in remarkable ways by calling Native men to labor with us among North American Indians. Permit me reflect on the significance of this story, principally because of the clear answer to prayer that this was. How good is our God that He hears and answers prayer? When I met Greg that first morning I was distracted in my own soul just thinking about how much glory God gets in answered prayer. I had nothing to



do with this us but to ask God in prayer to raise up workers to go into the harvest. Truthfully, I should have slipped off my shoes since I was fairly sure I was on holy ground. God is good.

God continues to answer this prayer as there is now another Native man and his family, with whom I have been in contact, who is currently finishing up seminary education and Internship with the goal of planting an indigenous church. This will be a story for another COUNCIL FIRE. Please keep these men and their families in prayer.

SMOKE SIGNALS

- April 3-5, 2019 Gail and I will travel out to Dubuque, Iowa. I have the opportunity to meet Bonnie Sue Lewis who wrote a book about the history of Native American Pastors in the Presbyterian Church between the 1860's and the 1930's. She recounts a significant period of time in history where ordained Native Pastors were reaching into their Nations with the gospel. At one time there were 60 Native Pastors working among the Nez Perce and the Dakotas. In my study of her work, I came away with many questions and the desire to know more. We exchanged a couple of emails and arranged a time to meet. I'm looking forward to this meeting as well as having Gail along for the trip.
- April 25-30, 2019 I will travel out to Billings, Montana to spend time at Great Plains Gathering with Josh Charette and his family. Although we keep in regular contact by phone I still like to be out there 3 times a year. We will review progress on the renovation work that is being done on the 2 houses the church purchased. These are homes that will be used to house Interns. One house is complete and ready for occupancy. The 2nd house is still in repair. You may recall that is the house with foundation problems. We continue to raise funds for the completion of that home.



- In May, I will attend graduation ceremonies for Jonas Patterson who will be receiving his Master of Divinity degree from Westminster Seminary. Upon graduation Jonas and his wife Melissa and their family will travel out to Billings where he will Intern at Great Plains Gathering. During his internship he will also prepare for ordination. Jonas is a Native Hawaiian and is considering planting an Indigenous Church on the island of Kauai, where he was raised. I met Jonas and his family at their home in Pennsylvania last year at Thanksgiving time and have continued keeping in touch with him. Pictured left is Jonas and Melissa at a Mission Conference that was held at Westminster Presbyterian Church in Lancaster, PA, where they visited with me at my booth.
- May 19th I will visit Christ Presbyterian Church in Beaver Falls, PA for their Evening Service. This will be our first meeting this church that has supported since we began.

Please continue to pray for us as we raise our support. If you are in a position to make contribution to our work, we could sure use the help. Please visit our website at pcamna.org click on Church Planting or you can visit our personal website at bravehope.org

Can I just add another thought on prayer? When we ask God to send out laborers into the harvest, we are really praying with a look to the building of God's Kingdom. Isn't this how we are taught to pray... "Thy Kingdom come, Thy will be done on earth as it is in Heaven." This is prayer that gets up to Christ Himself. It takes our eyes away from ourselves, our wants, our needs or our trials. In these blessed moments of prayer our hearts are turned to Christ, seeking His glory, His coming Kingdom. These are the prayers that our Lord inhabits. The day will come when people from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, will stand before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, crying out with a loud voice, "Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!"

So far in Him,

Jeb and Gail Bland