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ANCC stresses education from Native view

Walking slowly, singing a journeying song, members of the Grand Council of the All Native Circle Conference (ANCC) began their annual meeting with a procession of 120 across a field to circle the sacred fire site. When the flames caught, participants were invited to place ashes from last year's fire in it, thus continuing the tradition begun at the first meeting in Goodfish Lake, Alta., in 1989.

The Council met in late June on the Samson Reserve in Muskwatchees (Bear Hills), Alta. Muskwatchees isn't on a map. A century ago a railroad executive changed the Cree name to Hobbema.

The four Presbyteries comprising the ANCC represent nine languages, including French and English. The theme, "Respecting Each Other in our own Journey" (1 Cor 12:1-13), was lived out as different languages and traditions were shared among delegates.

In the tradition of First Nations peoples, listening to one another is vital. Hymns in various languages, the rustle of the poplar leaves shading the meeting place, children playing nearby, the crackle of the sacred fire mingled with prayer, debate, stories and teachings from the Elders. The listening took place in a circle around the sacred bundle, in a circle around the sacred fire, or in wet weather, in Howard Buffalo Memorial Centre.

ANCC installs a man and a woman to serve as Leading Elders for two-year terms, positions similar to Conference presidents. Retiring Leading Elders

Lloyd McDougall of Wasagamach, Man., and Edith Memnook of Goodfish Lake, Alta., passed the flame to Moses Wood and Agnes Bull.

Wood, of Garden Hill Reserve in Manitoba, is known for his strong stand against alcohol. Bull, of Goodfish Lake, has fostered children for 25 years, is a

UCW member and community activist.

Rev. Grafton Antone was installed as Speaker, replacing acting co-Speakers, Peggy Monague and Rev. John Thompson. Antone was smudged by four local men. Rev. Sanday Scott presented him with an eagle wing. From Oneida-of-the-Thames, Ont., Antone is

of the Onyota'a:ka Nation which means "People of the Standing Stone."

The annual Native Day of Prayer began at midnight the first day. Some participants chose to fast for 24 hours. Throughout the next day, Scripture was read, teachings shared and prayers offered by the sacred fire.

Rev. Gerry Hutchinson, known in Alberta for his work at Rundle's Mission and historical church research, addressed delegates Monday. His particular passion is bringing to light the history of the Native Christian (Methodist) Church and the leadership provided by people such as Rev. Henry Bird Steinhauer, the first Christian Cree pastor in Alberta. Hutchinson was invited to share his knowledge at the sacred fire. "It is a great pleasure," he said, "to be able to hand over this information. It rightly belongs to you."

Throughout the week, the Elder and Youth Councils and the Councils on Healing and Respect, Sharing, and Learning met. A recurring theme was that priority must be given to helping the United Church and Canadians generally understand the true history of this country from the perspective of First Nation peoples.

Moderator Rt. Rev. Stan Mckay also addressed the issue Friday. "Racism can only be confronted by telling the true history of this land. My suggestion is that all children need to be exposed to the real story. What they learn now fills their hearts with great hatred. They see cartoons and old John Wayne movies, and they despise us."

The Grand Council ordained Arlene Granbois of File Hills, Sask., who will serve Regina Native Ministries and Judy Moneybird of Green Lake, Sask., who will work for Saskatoon Moosewoods Native Ministries.

"They've come through a lot of struggle and pain . . . balancing the United Church with our way," said Peggy Monague of Winnipeg. "It was an honor for me to present them for ordination."

Added Janet Sigurdson of Plains Presbytery: "It was good to see the Elders play a major part. It's an affirmation that the United Church is accepting the indigenous spiritual way of life. In this service, you could see the Apology at work."

Carolyn Pogue