

Unificationists Bond with First Americans on Trail of Tears Journey

Peacemakers for Sacred Healing: Claire Daugherty, Katherine Cromwell and Brenda Miller

June 14, 2013

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Statue called "Legacies," which depicts Native Americans in Chickasaw Memorial Park

The following is a travelogue from the Peacemakers for Sacred Healings Trail of Tears Prayer journey from Saturday June 8 to Friday June 14, 2013.

The journey of seven pilgrims of the Peacemakers for Sacred Healing is coming to a close.

On the evening of June 8, 2013, the seven pilgrims arrived in Chattanooga, Tennessee, at the location where the Native Americans were gathered in internment camps before they were forcibly removed from their homeland and marched along a trail that is known today as the "Trail of Tears." In Chattanooga, the Peacemakers went to Audubon Acres to a preserved path from the Trail of Tears. They then visited the Brainerd Mission Cemetery, where missionaries were tasked with establishing relations with the Cherokees in order to prepare them to integrate peaceably with westward-moving white settlers before their removal in 1838. Then the Peacemakers visited the construction site of a planned Trail-of-Tears museum. There they listened to talks and viewed statues. Afterwards, they visited the boyhood home of John Ross, a Cherokee chief.



Brainerd Mission

On Sunday night, June 9th, the pilgrims drove to Bon Aqua, outside of Nashville. They visited the home of Venus Brightstar, a Cherokee lady. Venus Brightstar's house is made of native materials and has a tin roof. Her house has one huge room with a divided space. The pilgrims gathered at Venus Brightstar's house in order to take part in a pipe ceremony led by Chief White Eagle.

For the ceremony, the participants gathered in a circle in the outdoors, introduced themselves, and shared the sacred pipe. Chief White Eagle prayed throughout the ceremony. At the end of the ceremony, each participant offered his or her own prayer. There was a slight drizzle, then a sudden downpour at the end of the ceremony. "We felt we were cleansed by heaven, soaked to the skin," said Claire Daugherty, the

spokeswoman for the Peacemakers of Sacred Healing. “We were all moved and felt closer to God and could see the urgency in the need for healing our nation’s history. In addition, we felt the presence of our ancestors with us, especially those who wanted to make amends for the past.” Following the ceremony, all the participants shared a meal and exchanged gifts.



Brainerd Mission Cemetery

The next morning, Venus Brightstar took the pilgrims on a hike on a red clay road. For the hike, Chief White Eagle prepared six bright, cotton medicine bags in different colors that would be placed in certain areas in order to serve as a token of protection for the land and nature. The land that Venus Brightstar lives on was donated to her, and she explained to the group her vision to create greenhouses and to work with victims of domestic violence from the reservations and to teach them to grow their own food. Brightstar said she felt that God had urged her to start this project. The Peacemakers offered a financial gift for her vision.

Hosted by Tennessee Parks and Greenway Foundation

On Monday June 10th, the pilgrims drove to Bolivar, Tennessee where the pilgrims called at an office of the Chamber of Commerce. Their hostess rushed them to the local TV station and then spoke on WMOD radio. In return for the hospitality, the Peacemakers gifted True Father’s autobiography *As a Peace Loving Global Citizen*. The pilgrims arrived in Memphis Monday night and stayed in a chalet hosted by the Tennessee Parks and Greenway Foundation, which protects the natural waterways.

On Tuesday June 11th, the Peacemakers visited Chickasaw Memorial Park and saw a beautiful statue called “Legacies,” which depicts Native Americans and other minorities who built this nation. The park has two Indian ceremonial mounds -- sacred to Chickasaws and Muskogee Creeks.

“The Cherokee were unique because they were bilingual, that is, they could read and write in English and their own Cherokee language,” said Daugherty. “Therefore, they could record events of their removal, whereas the other tribes had only oral tradition that didn’t go beyond their own families. We realized from stories passed down through families that the official histories of the number of people walking the trail are understated.”



Chucalissa Archeological Park and Museum

Afterwards, the pilgrims visited Chucalissa Archeological Park and Museum, which was an abandoned site of the Chickasaw tribe near Memphis. At the museum, the pilgrims saw evidence of how the Chickasaws territory kept shrinking as white settlement pushed westward. Their Cherokee lifestyle became totally assimilated. They wore western clothing, settled on farms and in towns, and became Southern Baptists.

That night, the pilgrims visited the church of Rev. William Allen, a longtime friend of the American Clergy Leadership Conference. At the Corinthian MBC Fellowship hall, a dinner was prepared for us the guests. At the dinner, Minister Reiko Jenkins explained about the trip, and Daugherty explained about the relationship of Esau and Jacob and its significance to the trip.

Rev. Allen then told stories about how his grandfather had told him about the great-great-grandfather and great-grandfather, who were Choctaw slaves, and who died on the Trail of Tears. “Because the Indian nations were considered sovereign by the American government, they were not U.S. citizens at that time, until around 1920,” according to Daugherty. She continued: “When slavery was abolished in the United States in 1863 with the Emancipation Proclamation, it didn’t affect the Indian slaves. Therefore Choctaws didn’t free their slaves until 1880. Rev. Allen was very knowledgeable about the Trail of Tears and the violations of the U.S. Constitution by the Indian Removal Act.”

Singing Honor Songs for the Victims

On Wednesday June 12th, the group traveled to Marion, Arkansas and continued on to Village Creek State Park. At the park the pilgrims walked the Trail of Tears on the Old Military Road.



Village Creek State Park

According to Rev. Allen, his grandfather told him there were closer to 8,000 or 9,000 Native Americans who died along the way. Forced out of their homes at gunpoint, the natives couldn’t even grab shoes or wraps for the weather. They often had no shelter and did not have enough wagons for provisions, which often were putrid. “At the trail we had a deep prayer on the actual preserved trail,” reported Daugherty. “We introduced ourselves to the spirit world and prayed about our hope for the pilgrimage. We also threw holy wine to the four directions.”

On Thursday June 13th the pilgrims had a meal at the Mt. Fuji restaurant with Unificationist Pastor John Jackson and his family.

Friday, June 14th, the Peacemakers visited the grave of Qatie, Cherokee Chief John Ross’s wife, who died during the Trail of Tears journey. Her grave is in Little Rock, Arkansas at a cemetery in which several governors and other historical personages are buried.

The itinerary for Friday evening includes the pilgrims traveling to Fort Smith, Arkansas to visit the Riverfront Park.

“For the end of our pilgrimage, we invited the spirits that gathered in our prayer circle to come to the Saturday ceremony so they can move on,” reported Daugherty. “In native tradition it’s important to have an honor song sung for them. Those who died on the Trail never had a song sung for them. Rev. Dr. Linda Lucero-Nishikawa was inspired to sing an honor song for them; we could feel that many had been waiting to sing a song for them so they could depart.”

Daugherty continued: “The message we want to send through this pilgrimage is, if we don’t educate our children about this national sin of such magnitude there will be consequences. The first step is to hear the story from the Native people, and then we need to repent and tell that story in order to make any kind of restitution we can.”

Throughout the journey the Pilgrims have received words of encouragement. “Wherever we’ve gone, people have expressed, ‘We’ve been waiting for this. Thank God somebody is finally doing this.’ Maybe once a year similar events can happen in different parts of the country,” said Daugherty.