

St. Luke's Native American Ministry Christmas visit to Hopi

The Hopi people live atop the mesas in north-eastern Arizona and have the longest authenticated history of occupation of a single area by any Native American tribe in the United States. Their Kachina figures and dances are ceremonial, made to represent spirits of deities: animals, nature, or even deceased ancestors. Most still practice an elaborate ceremonial cycle, many combining Christianity with their ancient beliefs. Like ALL Native American tribes, their current reservation represents a small fraction of their original land holdings.

In the late 1800s, the United States government seriously tried to eradicate the Hopi culture forcing men and boys to cut their hair, children to attend Anglo schools and all to convert to Catholicism. In 1895, when Chief Lagomorph and other leaders resisted, they were jailed at Alcatraz for several months.

Today many of the Hopi have become skilled subsistence farmers while others have taken mainstream jobs. Hopi artists paint, carve precious Kachina dolls, and create fine jewelry, all widely acclaimed for excellence. Located 50 miles from even small towns, the tribe doesn't participate in the casino industry and people have to drive a long way to purchase many of their household items.

After being introduced by Sherri Frances, I was privileged to get to know Fil Kewanyama before he spoke to us at one of our quarterly public St. Luke's Native American Ministry presentations. He told me about his life as a boy on the reservation. At seventeen, he joined the U.S. Army and served 21 years in the Infantry, retiring as a Master Sergeant. After his military service, his calling was to become an artist.

We were all deeply moved when Fil sang for us that day at St. Luke's, his eyes closed and his Hopi words flowing rhythmically. "Hopi life is religion," he told us. Since time immemorial, the Hopi have a sacred covenant with Maasaw, the Ancient Caretaker of this world whose way is that of peace, goodwill, spiritual knowledge, adherence to religious practices and responsibility as Earth stewards. He told us of Hopi history, including trials that none of us ever had to bear. He expressed the pride he felt for his people, who number about 13,000 today.

Lewis Tewanima was an American two-time Olympic distance runner and silver medalist in the 10,000-meter run in 1912. Eleven Hopi soldiers used their language as code talkers in WWII. An Appellate Court Judge for the Hopi Tribe, Diane Humetewa became the first Native American woman appointed as a Federal Judge. Nominated by President Obama in 2013, she was unanimously appointed by the U.S. Senate. Lori Ann Piestewa (1979-2003) was a United States Army soldier who was killed in the Iraq War. She was the first Native American woman to die in combat...and she was a Hopi.

We chose to help the Hopi kids at Christmas this year, so Sherri talked to Fil and he liked the idea. He offered to accompany us and introduce us to his family and friends and to show us the lay of the land. Early Sunday morning, December 9, Pat, Lynne, Sherri, Fil and I set out for Hopi land with a load of toys, art supplies and knitted hats and scarves lovingly made by a St. Luke's knitting group. We spread things out according to age inside the Eagle Claw Center. Then the kids filed in along with moms, dads, and grandparents.

It was nippy that morning and I took charge of dispensing the hats and scarves. The kids chose the designs and colors they liked and I would pull the caps down over their ears, the warmth usually eliciting a smile. A tall girl appeared, looking anxious and clinging to a woman whose face was creased, marking her advanced age. I gave the girl a hat and draped the scarf around her neck. Her response was to give

me one of the most beautiful smiles I've ever seen. The elder lady told me that the girl has muscular dystrophy.

After playing ball with some of the kids still hanging around the community building, we were invited to attend the Hopi Christmas parade. There were hundreds of people lining the half-mile course along the main street. As far as I could see, we were the only Anglos present. But that didn't matter. We felt completely welcomed. I noted that Fil was one of the most popular people there, his friends reaching out to greet him as we passed. It was like parades I knew from my childhood. Families sat together as kids ran around with their friends. A decorated tractor pulled a trailer decked out in Christmas colors followed by a group of cheerleaders. There were princesses and queens passing out candy to the crowd. Finally, Santa Claus arrived waving from atop a big red fire engine. As we made our way back to our cars after the parade, people would ask from the sidelines, "Did you like it?" We loved it.

There were two lovely sisters wearing stylish large-brim hats and seated behind the other spectators. I asked if I might take their picture and they welcomed Pat and Sherri to join them for the photograph. Louise informed Pat that she and Shirley were sisters and that she was wearing the hat because she had no hair. She was being treated for cancer.

The mission statement of our Native American Ministry is, "We build bridges of understanding through learning, caring, respecting and interacting with our Native American brothers and sisters." This is what we accomplished on December 9, and our lives were enriched.

While our pasts are greatly different from that of the Hopi, it strikes me that the Hopi covenant with Maasaw is, at least in spirit, what Christ was teaching us—peace, goodwill, feeling spiritually connected with God, and adherence to religious practices. The vision of the Native Americans we have met focus on family, stewardship of the Earth and away from material excess. Finally, the last lines of our Baptismal Covenant ask, "Will you strive for justice and peace among all people, and respect the dignity of every human Being?" In harmony with all of the wonderful ministries at St. Luke's, we proudly proclaim "We will, with God's help."

Monte Anderson



Figure 1 Ted Lee, Fil Kewanyama, Guest, at Saturday Quarterly Program



Figure 2 Hopi boy with his dad



Figure 3 Young princess with traditional Hopi hairdo



Figure 4 Shirley, Sherri, Louise, Pat



Figure 5 Hopi Santa