

The Report of the Dakota Partnership Committee

For more than 30 years Penn Central Conference has partnered with the nine churches of the Dakota Association of the United Church of Christ - Native American Churches on the Cheyenne River, Standing Rock, and Yankton Reservations in South Dakota. From afar, and close at hand, we have participated in many wonderful moments of shared ministry and mission. We have also witnessed the struggles of the churches as they try to meet the needs of a people who are confronted with staggering poverty, rampant drug and alcohol problems, a teenage suicide rate that is 10 times the national average, and a future that looks very bleak.

In the midst of this battle we meet Toni Buffalo. Many have come to know of Toni either through her work with CAIM (Council on American Indian Ministry) or her commitment to the national church (she was one of the contributors to the repudiation of the Doctrine of Discovery that passed General Synod in 2015). She was recently a featured speaker at General Synod in Baltimore. Two years ago, she was asked to fill the void left by the death of Freddie Boub, longtime director of the Dakota Association. She stepped into the breach and has, with much sacrifice, attempted to make the best of a very, very difficult situation.

One of the ministries that is near and dear to Toni's heart is a Horse Ministry geared to young adults. In a land where work is virtually non-existent, and young adults confront the daily curse of drugs, alcohol and suicide, there is a safe-haven for many with this special horse ministry. Conceived by Toni's husband, the Reverend Byron Buffalo, this ministry provides an opportunity for young people to gather, care for and ride horses, but more importantly it has become a refuge for these young adults to confront together the many challenges of reservation life. For these young adult natives this Horse Ministry is a source of hope in a land, which for too many, is a place of despair.

The Dakota Partnership Committee believes that this ministry is vital to the people of the Dakota Association, so much so that we will be asking you to support what we call the "Adopt a Horse" Fund. Because the cost to feed and care for horses, that number as many as 25, far exceeds the resources available to Toni and Byron we will be hoping that individuals and churches consider "Adopting a Horse" to offset costs. Our committee is still working out the details for this fundraising effort, but we are hopeful that they will be completed by the time we meet for our Conference Annual Meeting. So, please visit our display for more details.

The Dakota Association has greatly appreciated its partnership with Penn Central Conference over the years, and it is my hope that it will continue for many years to come. I pray that all of you will recognize that this is vital partnership as well, and that you will support it either through your financial gifts or by joining us on the Dakota Partnership Committee.

Finally, I encourage you, to continue to pray for the well-being and the ministry of Toni and Byron Buffalo, the lay ministers, the churches, as well as all our sisters and brothers in the Dakota Association.

Respectfully submitted by
Peter W. Emig, Dakota Partnership Chair