

November 2008, *Equipping* #91

## Celebration Story

*We invite you to share with your congregation the following story from Neill and Edith von Gunten, co-directors of Mennonite Church Canada Native Ministry. The story should take no more than 2 minutes to read aloud. You might also wish to include it in your church newsletter.*

### Power of forgiveness transcends generations



Forgiveness and reconciliation have a compelling, enduring effect. Just ask Cheyenne Peace Chief and Mennonite pastor, Lawrence Hart, or the group from MC Canada Native Ministry with whom he shared his story during Native Assembly in Clinton, Oklahoma this summer.

A tour of local historical sites prompted Hart to tell his guests about an incident that he says taught him the true significance of being a Peace Chief.

The town of Cheyenne early re-enacted the Battle of Washita which took place in the winter of 1868 when General Custer and the Seventh US Cavalry attacked

the camp of Cheyenne Peace Chief Black Kettle. They announced their assault by playing “Garry Owens,” their unofficial marching song.

Although the re-enactment had always taken place without the local native community, on the 100th anniversary, the town invited Hart and his people, including other Peace Chiefs, to join them. Hart refused until they agreed to the reburial of native bones, at that time on display in the Black Kettle Museum.

As the re-enactment began, Hart learned that the cavalry re-enactors were actually descendants of the men who had killed his ancestors. He was furious that he had not been told. He was even more furious when they took part in the reburial ceremony following the event.

But during the funeral procession, a Cheyenne woman removed a beautiful blanket, from her shoulders and placed it on the coffin in tribute to her ancestors. Tradition demanded that the blanket should be given away rather than buried with the coffin. In an act of reconciliation, the elder Peace Chiefs decided to give the blanket to the Captain of the regiment despite Hart’s resistance.

The effect was profound. “Throughout the crowd in the cold and snow, there was not a dry eye,” Hart recalled.

After the funeral, the Captain presented Hart with a small oval pin from his uniform lapel – a “Garry Owens pin,” a symbol of the dreaded marching song.

“Lawrence,” he said, “I want you to have this. Accept it on behalf of all your people. I want you to be assured that never again will your people hear the ‘Garry Owens.’”

Edith and Neill von Gunten, co-directors of MC Canada Native Ministry, noted that everyone who heard Hart retell his story was moved by it. Hart admitted that people often respond with tears.

May God continue to use us as messengers of peace among all people by empowering us to reconcile our differences!

*“For no one can lay any foundation other than the one that has been laid; that foundation is Jesus Christ.” 1 Cor. 3:11*