

ELDERS, CULTURE, SCRIPTURE

How one church honours its Indigenous roots while
proclaiming the Word

SIX NATIONS OF THE GRAND RIVER IN ONTARIO is a culturally rich and diverse community with a strong identity, history and sense of place. Ohsweken Baptist Church is centrally located in the heart of Six Nations in the village of Ohsweken.

Tuscarora Baptist Church is the official name of Ohsweken Baptist Church and for much of its 178-year history, Indigenous culture was woven into how church was “done.” Hymns were sung in the Mohawk language. Indigenous headdresses were worn at special events such as at a sod-turning ceremony. A brass band once performed in total Indigenous attire.

The stained glass window includes an Indigenous person and upon entering the church you will find the Lord’s prayer written in an Indigenous language.

Today, Ohsweken Baptist Church is replanting while at the same time preserving the Indigenous soil in which its roots were planted. A

In 2018, Baptist Women gave a grant to the first phase of the cultural preservation program offered by Ohsweken Baptist Church. Grant funds were used to buy supplies, equipment, stipends for instructors and refreshments.

program of cultural preservation workshops with Scripture at its foundation is one piece in the church’s overall replanting.

“The first phase of this cultural preservation program gives our Elders the opportunity to share their wisdom and knowledge with younger generations,” says Theresa Mt. Pleasant, the program’s coordinator. “Our Elders have years of knowledge and wisdom gained through various avenues. Some have been taught by their Elders and these skills have been passed from generation to generation. Some are acclaimed artists, others are business entrepreneurs and some have been self-taught. Each Elder is greatly respected for sharing with us their special gifts and talents.”

As Theresa points out, honouring Elders as they share and teach younger generations at each workshop is a key part in helping preserve the community’s Indigenous culture. Each workshop also shares Scripture with all the participants. With these



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workshops, “Elders will be the focus and we will share God’s Word through Scripture and show God’s love through action.”

Each workshop was open to the community, advertised widely and on the day each workshop was held, the church’s doors were open for people to come in and take part. Most workshops opened in prayer. Elders taught the craft and Scripture was read aloud. Each participant left with a certificate showing that they had taken part in a cultural preservation workshop.

Organizers plan to roll out additional craft-focused workshops through 2019. Making moccasins, corn husk dolls, lacrosse sticks, adult Indigenous attire and deer hide pouches are a few of the activities planned.

Tipi Night Light

But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God’s special possession, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light (1 Peter 2:9).

There were 36 participants who came out to this first workshop, held during the town’s local community awareness week. Opening up the workshop to the entire community, combined with smart advertising and marketing, resulted in participants coming from different denominations within the village and beyond. Extended family members of reserve residents also came.

Pottery

Yet you, LORD, are our Father. We are the clay, you are the potter; we are all the work of your hand (Isaiah 64: 8).

Fifteen people of all ages participated, eight of them coming for the first time. Elders taught. The workshop opened in prayer, and as with the Tipi Night Light workshop, Scriptures were posted throughout the room and read aloud. Six people signed up for the next workshop (raised beadwork) before leaving!

Raised Beadwork Picture Frame

This workshop was smaller yet still reached out and supported community members. ■

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Thank you for giving so
generously

Thanks for giving to 2018’s
#GIVINGTUESDAY project—
International Justice Mission
Canada and its rescue
operations in the Dominican
Republic.

Baptist Women’s 2019-2021 theme:

Chosen | Holy | Called declaring the goodness of God

But you are a chosen people. You are royal priests, a holy nation, God’s very own possession. As a result, you can show others the goodness of God, for he called you out of the darkness into his wonderful light. 1 Peter 2:9 (NLT)

Conference details on page 21