

CONVERSATION STARTERS - YUPIK CULTURAL SECTION
MENTORSHIP PROGRAM for ECCAK CHURCHES

TEMPTATION

In years gone by, there were not as many rules and regulations in the Yupik Eskimo community as there are now. It was not seen as wrong to give in to temptation. However, when the white man came and Native evangelists arrived, new believers were admonished to do things the “right way” and not give in to temptation. The Word of God was put forth as the way to travel in the world and the way to go was shown forth in the Holy Bible. Covenanters learned to live a much more positive life by following these directions.

GRIEF

Expressing sorrow in the Yupik community was a very quiet type of grief. In our own experiences, we were never really allowed to grieve and give voice to the deep feelings of hurt when a loved one had passed away. We held in those emotions which were deemed to be negative and they popped up later on in life in the form of addictions. The future generations need to be allowed to express sorrow when a loved one dies as it is a very important segment of the healing process from past trauma.

HEALING

In past generations, the Yupik shaman was seen as the source of healing in illness and this was eliminated when the Word of God was given to our communities. We, as a Yupik Nation, have not really paid much attention to the Word of God in reference to the miraculous healings put forth there for us to peruse. I believe we have been regarding the acts of miraculous healing as only being possible in Jesus’ time. However, there was always a freedom to ask Our Lord for healing when a loved one was ill and this ability brought comfort to those dealing with illness in themselves or in loved ones. Presently, we are starting to discuss healing prayer much more and are trying to learn more about it although there are still some questions applied to it as there is so much negativity brought forth about it due to television evangelists and some Pentecostal churches making it into a “circus” of sorts.

LUST

In the past, there were rarely illegitimate babies being born and when it did happen, it was seen as an impossible event by Yupik young children. “How could this be? So and so isn’t even married!” In our Yupik communities today, there is much sexual immorality and it seems to be accepted as the normal way of life. This behavior needs to be admonished loud and clear by our Covenant pastors. Our young Native people are worthy of this saving admonition from our pastors and elders. I do see more and more young people getting married, as they are being encouraged by our pastors and elders to do so.

PRAISE

There seemed to be a shortage of positive words from our elders as we were growing up. As our parents were regarded and treated when they were growing up, so they continued on with that way of communicating with their offspring. This was mainly silent observation.

In the past, just as it is in the present time, praising the Creator was definitely a part of the Yupik culture. In acknowledging our Creator, there was the ability to express personal helplessness, but also strength in having someone/thing to praise for blessings in life. The favorite song during times of bereavement is "Praise Ye the Lord." This song seems to be the favorite during all seasons and times of the year.

PRIDE

In a Yupik village, there was a close knit atmosphere of helping one another in all aspects of life. If there was need in one family, others came around to help provide whatever was needed, whether it was food, shelter or provision for the winter. There was no room for prideful selfishness. There was not much boasting from anyone and most villagers were extremely humble and quiet.

REPENTANCE

During the early services in Yupik Covenant Churches, there was always an altar call after every service. Therefore, the concept of repenting of one's sins was a weekly event. Just this past Sunday, a friend mentioned that he was instructed by a well-respected Covenant church pastor to go up to the altar every time an altar call is given. So he does every time an altar call is given and repents of his sins at the altar.

SALVATION

When a Yupik person did what the early missionaries instructed them to do, they were considered "saved." The Yupik term for salvation is "turning to God" and leaving behind practices such as Native dancing, interacting with the shaman, etc. It was a slow process of learning exactly what actions needed to be taken to be considered to be "saved." In the present day, there is a more biblical approach and cultural activities is not considered a sin; however, the shaman is still regarded as an unchristian entity and to be stayed away from.

ANGER

Just about the only "anger" we saw exhibited by our Yupik elders were the early preachers who spewed out hell, fire and brimstone at the pulpit. This was not all of them but probably one or two of them and they scared us plenty. They seemed extremely angry so we usually went forward at the altar calls due to our fear which was in reaction to the hollering method of preaching. I did see my Lay Pastor dad angry when I went Halloween trick or treating rather than go to Wednesday night service. We were admonished to memorize the verse "In your anger, do not sin" which was a great puzzlement to many Covenant youngsters but we hold that admonishment in our hearts and that helps us deal with our anger when it comes up.

DEATH

The Christian Yupik culture rejoices when a saint has departed to their heavenly home and it was reiterated to family that that was what happened at death or “leaving this world.” Those who did not have that hope exhibited much more sorrow than those in the Covenant family. Again, “Praise Ye The Lord” was a favorite song when a loved one departed this earth and continues to be a favorite to this day. A common phrase circulated when people died and that was “It was their time,” which exhibited an acceptance of the death of a person.

DEPRESSION

The Yupik community was so gentle and quiet that it was difficult to detect depression in a villager. There doesn't seem to be a word for depression other than “real sad.” Being extremely sad is to be expected when a loved one dies but prolonged sadness was not really a part of the mood characteristics in the villages. In the present day and age, depression, I believe, is one of the core roots of the causes of alcoholism in our people. Grief has not been dealt with and our leaders need to recognize this and have more workshops dealing with grief.

FAITH

It has been passed down in Yupik generations that there was always belief in a supreme being. There was a pointing to the sky which was a part of the belief implying that this supreme being was in the heavenly realms. The Yupik word for Our Lord is translated into “Our Father Who Art in Heaven,” just as stated in the Lord's Prayer which was taught to children in Sunday School. Therefore, faith in the Creator has always been a part of the Yupik culture as far back as our elders can remember.

FORGIVENESS

Since relationships in a Yupik village were predominantly peaceful, there was usually no need for the act of forgiveness. In the Covenant Native community, the villagers leaned about the need to be “on good terms” with all they came in contact with every day. The Lords Prayer was memorized which includes “Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us.” In my observation growing up in a small village, I was amazed that a certain person would still continue to speak with someone who had hurt them badly. This was forgiveness exhibited and modeled for us as Covenant children growing up in a village with a Covenant Church.

MONEY

The concept of giving 10% of income was one that was hard to understand for the Yupik Alaska Native. Income was extremely minuscule and therefore, the offering plate was passed around but usually it was coins that were dropped in there. We were taught to always put something in the offering plate, however, no matter how little it was. We were taught to give to the church and therefore, give to the Lord. Everything, house, snow machine, 4-wheeler, boat, are all given to us by Our Lord and He can take them anytime He wants.

ADDICTION

In one of the Yupik villages, there was evidence of alcoholism prior to the missionaries arrival. After Covenant pastors arrived, these addicted individuals were able, with God's and fellow new believers help, to overcome this addiction. Alcoholism has never really stopped up to the present time. There continues to be people abusing alcohol and now other drugs have been introduced to the villages. There are many Covenanters who have become overcomers through Christ Jesus' help and these testimonies need to be presented to our young people today.

ENCOURAGEMENT

We, as Christians, are instructed to "spur one another on" in our faith. The act of coming together in fellowship on Sundays gives us encouragement and strength to meet the upcoming weeks of hardships of life and the darts of the evil one. Our Yupik elders always walked the path to the Covenant Church on Sunday morning and night as well as Wednesday night no matter what the weather was. We must continue to pray for one another and let each other know that we're praying for each other. The small group setting is also a wonderful opportunity to have this type of encouraging one another one.

FEAR

The Yupik elders sought to instill respectful and appropriate fear in their offspring to attempt to assist them to be stay alive and healthy in this world. For instance, there needed to be a healthy fear of nature, such as the vast ocean. If one wasn't careful, they would succumb to the extremely powerful movement of the giant waves in inclement weather. Covenanters were also taught to respect and have a healthy fear of all-powerful God. This was a healthy fear similar to one of a child's fear of a loving parent.

GOSSIP

Growing up in an extremely small and isolated Yupik village, we never heard much of a type of conversation labeled "gossip" or slandering of others. If there was talk of someone doing wrong in the village, I do recall a village council member coming to speak with the lay pastor of the Covenant Church. Negative issues were handled in a quiet Yupik fashion in those days in a one-on-one setting.

OBEDIENCE

If a Yupik child did not obey their parents or another elder, they were immediately reprimanded by any adult present. Honoring your father and you mother were taught along with the other 10 commandments and thus, Yupik children grew up with this ingrained in the brain. These children were also instructed to listen to and obey the school teacher whom the village elders regarded as those trying to help improve the lives of villagers.

PRAYER

In Yupik Covenant churches, there was always a time set aside for prayer in the Yupik language to Our Father who is Above. The Yupik language was a comfortable means of communicating with the Savior who heard and understood every word, intent and request.

Even children were encouraged to pray and we thus learned early on not to be ashamed of voicing our thoughts, requests and thanks to Our Lord. Getting on ones knees in private has been the way to pray taught to us in Covenant churches and we continue to do so.