

## **Sweat Lodge Prayers Banned... (by Christian Native Americans)**

### **Christianity Today article**

Native Christians wrestle with faith and tradition. Trevor Persaud| April 13, 2011

A largely Christian community of Native North Americans in Quebec has banned a spiritual practice traditional to their people, the Cree. The decision has disappointed some ministers in native communities in the United States and Canada.

The Band Council of Oujé-Bougoumou, a village of about 600 James Bay Cree, voted in October to dismantle a sweat lodge some residents had constructed. The council decided that Oujé-Bougoumou's Christian founding elders had not intended the community to partake in "native spirituality or practices."

"The practice of the sweat lodge and its rituals are not restricted to merely medical [pursuit] of healing, but [are] in essence a way to contact and communicate with the spirit world through shamanism," the resolution declared.

Jerry Yellowhawk, a Lakota Wesleyan minister from South Dakota, sees Oujé-Bougoumou's choice as "a backwards step."

"It's been very hard to try to bring the love of Christ ... to the Native American people," Yellowhawk says. "Things like this, when they happen it just makes it that much more difficult."

Only about 5 percent of Native Americans are born-again believers, experts say. Many, notes Yellowhawk, still think of Christianity as a "white man's religion."

Today, Christians in Native American and Canadian First Nations communities sometimes use traditional practices. For Cree Christian Reformed Church pastor Harold Roscher, the sweat lodge remains sacred space.

"It's four rounds of prayer," says Roscher, "an opportunity to pray to Jesus, to God. So I find it invaluable, especially working amongst my Cree people ... it's a good way to make a good connection."

Some native Christians object to this. "Where in the Bible can you go where sacred

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