**5 Thresholds for Native Students**

These thresholds are a supplemental perspective rather than a complete reworking of the overall concepts of the 5 thresholds. They highlight Native-specific issues that come up at each stage, especially the relational aspects.

**1. Trust a Christian** *(“from distrust to trusting a Christian” in White post-modern culture)*

A friend who grew up on the Navajo Nation commented that most parents would rather see their children grow up to be addicts than Christians. Because many missionaries taught Native people that they had to give up all of their culture to follow Jesus, the result has been huge divisions within families. And sadly, that division is often more a result of the Christians’ behaviors and judgmentalism than from the traditionalists.

**2. Trust a group of Christians** *(from complacent to curious)*

Again, there is a lot of missionary history that has created a foundation of distrust. The impressions Native people have about Jesus may be distorted and their experiences with groups of Christians hurtful.

It is one thing to trust an individual, but what happens when all those “church people” get together? Will I still be respected? Will there be pressure, judgment, unasked for prayers, alienation?

A Native small group at a New Mexico university recently did an outreach event that included dinner at a local restaurant. One of the group’s attendees brought a friend with him who isn’t a Jesus-follower — and apparently hadn’t been clear about just what it was he was inviting her to. When she figured out that she was at a “Christian event” she leaned over to her friend asking harshly, “Why did you bring me here?!”

While a good part of the event was social, the group did share about who they were and what they were about. One student gave a short testimony about how being a part of Native InterVarsity had been good for her. Then the staff shared a Gospel presentation that spoke to the needs and concerns of Native students and invited students to fill out a response card indicating where they were in their spiritual journey.

This student came in not trusting a group of Christians. She was welcomed so well (and given an opportunity to hear an accurate and culturally relevant Gospel presentation) that came on her own initiative to a gathering the group had the following week.

A group that is deliberately trying to be both Native and Christian is (unfortunately) so rare that it provokes curiosity just by existing. That’s why our big conference is called “Would Jesus Eat Frybread?” -- the juxtaposition almost always brings a curious smile.

**3. Participate in the spiritual life of the community** *(from closed to change to open to change)*

It is one thing to share a meal and participate in other social activities with a group of Christians, it is another to participate in their spiritual activities such as Bible study, worship and prayer. When a Native student enters into these activities with the community, they are showing that they are open to change. Keep in mind that the big conversion change is not so much in intellectual assent for a Native student, but rather in a sense of belonging and in behavior.

**4. The BIG question: “What would my decision to follow Jesus mean to my community back home?”** *(from meandering to seeking)*

Remember from threshold 1 how parents would rather see their children become addicts than Christians? All people, when they come to this point in their faith journey toward Jesus, have to count the cost and have some difficult questions to answer.

This question seems to be the biggest and most common question we see Native students asking.

**5. Take Steps to Follow Jesus and Receive His Healing** *(entering the kingdom)*

Picturing a circular path of discipleship rather than a linear progression is helpful in understanding Native conversion. While a linear progression might have a clear point of “crossing the line,” the circular path is more about life actions than about an abstract act of the will. It is like a circle that spirals inwards. That a seeker may come around to a willingness to take risks or serve in Jesus’ name are notable steps of growth in loyalty to Jesus. What “family” means is now broader to include Christian brothers and sisters, aunties and mentors. For “all of me” to be “fully welcomed” into God’s family and valued (without the internalized shame of being a Native or “part Native”) can look like a conversion and a healing. It is a significant healing of one of the primary barriers Native people experience in coming to follow Jesus.