

Potlatch Ceremony

The Potlatch Ceremony is practiced by many Native American cultures. The ceremonies and certain aspects of the customs differentiate, however, the main reasons for these ceremonies are fairly similar, and usually consist of the following:

- Redistribution of wealth and rank within the community.
- The lesson of stewardship instead of ownership.
- A means of thwarting abuse of power or privilege.
- A means of keeping tribal unity and mutual respect.

The New Haven Native American Church may hold the Potlatch Ceremony from time to time. This will be a time of feasting, fellowship, and unity. The Ceremony will be held at a suitable location and may include other ceremonies as well. The importance of holding this Ceremony is to assist with those that are in need and to foster unity with our Church.

The Potlatch Ceremony will begin with the Medicine Person in charged speaking prayers of offering and of thanksgiving to the Creator. At this time, when necessary, the Elders will then stand before the people and announce the person selected to replace them. Any item associated with their title, such as a prayer pipe, will then be given to the new Elders. All are encouraged to give gifts to these new Elders as well.

After this transfer of leadership, all will form a circle and will face each other. This is the time of the Sacred Giveaway. Each person will contribute a gift and place it in the center of the circle, one at a time. This gift should be something that is sacrificial, or of great value to the one giving it away. Participants (oldest to the youngest) will then walk to the gifts in the center and choose something from the pile. This ceremony is meant to demonstrate the value of stewardship and that we do not own what we have, and are only entrusted, as a steward, to care for these things.

After this Ceremony is completed, there is typically a feast and dancing. There may be other ceremonies, such as the Sweat Lodge or Peyote Ceremony that are practiced in conjunction with the Potlatch Ceremony. This is a time of church unity and equality; therefore, all are encouraged to participate or assist in some manner.

We believe it is our right as to take care of ourselves, families, and Spiritual Community as we feel call upon by the Spirit to do so. We regard the taking care of ourselves, families, and Spiritual Community in health, sickness, or old age as our religious obligation. All members have claim upon the New Haven Native American Church for assistance when needed. Remember it is the Covenant Duty if all members to support the programs of the Church and they should not demand services of the Church that they are unwilling to support.

*There is no certificate for the Potlatch Ceremony and any Medicine Person can organize and perform this Ceremony.