



The Sustain Oneida Summit: A Summary

By: The Oneida Trust and Enrollment Committee

This series of articles is designed to inform Oneida citizens about enrollment issues. The total number of Oneida enrolled members is expected to decline within the next 10 years. The goal of these articles is to generate community conversations about citizenship and belonging so that we may explore our options.

The Sustain Oneida Summit was held at the Radisson this past Saturday September 7, 2013 9 am – 4 pm. Approximately 100 people attended, with the majority of participants staying the whole day. A wide age range was represented from elders to youth. The purpose of the summit was to serve as a community conversation starter about issues of citizenship, belonging, membership criteria and its effect on Oneida sovereignty and long-term survival. Potential solutions to enrollment criteria will be discussed in future sessions such as this one.

The summit opened with a presentation on Oneida enrollment trends, with slides portraying past, current and future expected Oneida enrollment numbers. A decline in membership is expected over the next 50 years due in part to decreased Oneida birth rates as well as an expected reduction in the number of individuals who will have “enough” Oneida blood (1/4) to enroll.

Next, there was a presentation from Dr. Jill Doerfler, associate professor of American Indian Studies at University of Minnesota-Duluth. She discussed what blood quantum is, its history, and how it is calculated. Dr. Doerfler’s talk was especially relevant to Oneida as she has been instrumental in the White Earth tribe’s efforts to reform their enrollment requirements. An historic referendum vote on the proposed constitution of the White Earth nation is set for November 19, 2013

Dr. Doerfler’s talk was followed by a series of small group sessions, which discussed important identity questions such as: “What does it mean to be Oneida?” and “Share a story about when you “felt” Oneida” A facilitator captured responses on a flipchart which were later shared with the larger group.

Small group discussions were followed by a lunch lecture by Dr. Doug Kiel, a post-doctoral fellow in History at the University of Pennsylvania Center for Native American Studies. Dr. Kiel is also an enrolled Wisconsin Oneida. Doug discussed the importance

of citizenship over membership and encouraged Oneida to think about ways to contribute to their community rather than only focusing on what they can get out of it.

Next there was a “World Café” style discussion with stations set up around the room with different topics relevant to the concept of belonging. Questions included “What do you most value about Oneida?” and “How is Oneida unique?” At each station participants captured what their answers “looked” like on large sheets of paper. What resulted was an astounding variety of images, words, and colors. Among the images people drew were clan animals, corn soup, Duck Creek, sports, the Oneida Wampum Belt and community gathering places such as the longhouse. The artwork was then hung up on the wall and discussed.

There then followed a personal interview session in which participants broke into pairs and asked one another questions provided on a sheet such as “Three wishes I have for my grandchildren,” “The Oneida community is at its best when....” and “Being Oneida means...”

Oneida High School principal, Artley Skenandore, closed the summit with a summary of the day and a challenge to all Oneida to not just “survive” but to “sustain.” Although there is not a roadmap, he stated, there are compass directions which are the core values of Oneida:

Kahletsyalusla (Gah-lates-Jaw-loose-la) -The heart felt encouragement of the best in each of us;

Kanolukwasla (Gah-know-loonk-quuts-la) - Compassion, caring, identity, and joy of being;

Kanikuhliyo (Gah-knee-goo-lee-yo)- The openness of the good spirit and mind;

Ka tshatstasla (Gah-sah-stunts-sla) - The strength of belief and vision as a people;

Kaliwi yo (Gull-lee-wee-yo) -The use of the good words about ourselves, our Nation, and our future;

Yukwahwatsile (Yoon-kwa-wha-jeel) - Our family and our Nation;

Yukwatsistaya (Yoon-kwa-jeest-die-ya) - Our fire, our spirit within each one of us.

Now that we are on this journey of change - re-envisioning what it means to be Oneida - we need to think about what provisions we need to carry it out. The summit served as a starting point and we must continue the journey in a good way.

Please tune into our next article where we will provide a recap of participants’ reactions to the summit. Thank you to all who attended!

For more information about Sustain Oneida please visit:

<https://www.facebook.com/OneidaTrust>

<https://oneida-nsn.gov/bcc/TrustEnrollmentCommittee/>

For comments or questions please email: sustainoneida@oneidanation.org