

2009 Pine Ridge Mission Trip

Enclosed are a few interesting statistics about Pine Ridge. Pine Ridge is the second largest reservation in the United States. The average lifespan is between the ages of 48 to 52. There is 80-85% unemployment on the reservation. Sixty-seven percent live in third world poverty. The average income is between \$4000 to \$6000 per year. There are 38 gangs on the reservation. Half of people suffer from diabetes; there is an incredible rate of alcoholism and dysfunction, infant mortality and teenage suicide. There are 64 nonprofit groups in Pine Ridge trying to make a positive difference. The Lakota people are known for their generosity and hospitality.

Friday evening we went to a wake. It's common in Indian culture to have 2 or 3 night vigils where they stay with the body all night. They think it's an honor for strangers to come to the funeral. Some funerals last all day. Family members have to find their own transportation of the body to the gravesite and the family also digs the grave.

We painted all day Saturday at the Lutheran Center. We did a bathroom, bedroom and a living room wall. The center is about ten years old.

Saturday evening we traveled NW toward Hermosa on the Red Shirt Table. We bordered the Badlands and experienced a beautiful and awesome view of the canyons. We met Pastor Robert and Delores Two Bulls at the memorial site for Asanpi Bleza. He was an Indian who was shot killed by a couple of ranchers at the time of the Wounded Knee Massacre. We had supper with them and their daughters at the meeting hall of nearby Episcopal Church. We had a wonderful visit with the family. Robert grew up on the Red Shirt Table and ranched with his father, uncles, and brothers before becoming an Episcopal priest.

Sunday, we went to the Makasan Presbyterian church. Indian time is different than white time. Church was supposed to start at 10:30. It started at 11:00 and went to 12:30. We had lunch with Pastor Asa Wilson's family and some other people in the congregation. Everybody brought food. I ate squid for the first time. One lady told me that when I go home and tell people that I had squid on the res they're never going to believe it. We got a tour of the Guild Hall which we had worked on it during our 2006 visit to Pine Ridge. It's finished now and looks great. It's got a big meeting hall, large kitchen facilities, bathrooms, and a living area for an intern.

In the afternoon, we got to feed the buffaloes. Darrin Merrival operates a bison ranch on Pine Ridge. He had stuffed white bison calf on display, and he told us a Legend about the white buffalo. We also experienced a smudging, a purifying ceremony using prairie sage.

Sunday evening we drove to Wounded Knee, and Pastor Karen told us the story of the events that took place at Wounded Knee in the late 1800's. She told us that we were being watched and that we should be very respectful of the site. We walked behind the monument and said a short prayer in silence.

Many people came to the Lutheran Center looking for food and help. The people that came looked worn out, tough and desperate. I came back with a special admiration for Pastor Karen and all those people that work with the destitute and poor every day.

Comments by Jane Albrecht and Fred Rist