

Good morning everyone. So to start off, since during the mission trip I wrote down sort of a schedule outline type thing in my journal, I would like to share with you all a brief description of what our group did and experienced on our journey to and in Pine Ridge. We left Cross at a little after 6 am on Saturday, June 17th to begin our adventure into uncharted waters. It was about a 12 hour drive on the first day, but luckily we did take a few tourist stops to break it up a little. We stopped at the Green Giant statue and then kept driving until we got to a scenic overlook of the badlands. Next we grabbed lunch at a drive in that was kind of similar to the kiltie. Then, the other two cars progressed onward and upward, but as ours was having air conditioning problems, we decided to take a detour and visit the nearest car dealership. Finally, we all met up at Wall Drug that evening to do some shopping. We then made a quick decision to visit Mount Rushmore and see the lighting of it that night too which in my opinion was a just a TINY bit underwhelming. I'm not entirely sure a 35 minute speech/video that eventually talks about Martin Luther King Jr is really needed to precede someone just flipping on a switch. Anyways, after that, everyone, some faster than others, arrived at Outlaw Ranch in Custer, SD where we would be sleeping for just that night. Every car had their own little cabin and it felt a little bit like Lutherdale to me.

Bright and early the next morning we had a small group worship before we set out to do a little bit more touring. First we went to Crazy Horse, which for the record doesn't look a whole lot different than when I was there 5 years ago. Then we drove Needles Highway which is a pretty and slightly scary drive during the day. The views from the various pullouts were just spectacular. After getting some lunch, we proceeded to caravan on the wildlife loop inside Custer State Park. We saw a bunch of different animals including prairie dogs, coyotes, mule deer, buffalo, and some donkeys that were extremely friendly.

Unfortunately, our group didn't end up having enough time to go to Wind Cave as planned, but to be fair, we did do a whole lot of stuff in less than 48 hours! Lastly, that night the 12 of us arrived tired and exhausted at the Pine Ridge Retreat Center. Three people welcomed us, Mary, who would be absent most of the week and Larry and Sammy, who were going to be our counselors for our time on the reservation.

Our mission trip group stayed at the Pine Ridge Retreat Center for 4 days and 5 nights. On Monday morning, we had our first volunteer opportunity: to help build a coffee shop for a man Father Two Bulls (also known as Bob) and his daughter Twila. Our group had to drive about 45 minutes to arrive at the build site. When we got there, my first immediate thought was, "this place is in the middle of absolute nowhere!" And that's exactly where it was. Most of the group got to help build the base for the floor of the shop while Kayla, Nate, Sammy and I got to gruelingly dig a 4 foot hole for the water pipe. It was still great fun, though, I promise. We worked on the coffee shop for only Monday and Tuesday in the morning. In all honesty, I wish we would have gotten to spend more time on it. After we worked on the coffee shop on Monday, we returned to Pine Ridge, had lunch, and went straight to a place called the Suanne Center.

The Suanne Center was originally a boys and girls club, but has now become more of just a kids' place. It is a beautiful facility with a library, technology lab, Skate Park, full size gym, and a HUGE pool. Every afternoon from 1-5 our group got to be counselors for 15-20 elementary aged kids at the Suanne Center. It was so much fun to bond and hangout with all the kids and just have a good time. On some of the days, I even got the opportunity to teach everyone how to count to 10 in Chinese and that I could solve a Rubik's cube. They were all pretty surprised that I could do it and all wanted to try it for themselves. I also learned how to play bumper pool and beaten at it over and over by one

of the kids. I feel it's SLIGHTLY unfair when I don't even get to take a turn because the kid sinks all of his balls on his first turn.

Moving on to Tuesday, we pretty much did the same things as Monday, so I'm not going to go into as much detail. In the morning though, a group of us did go to the coffee place down the road from the Retreat Center, which just so you know, has the best Banana Rama Smoothie ever. We then drove to work on the coffee shop in the middle of nowhere, but on the way home we stopped at Father Two Bulls Episcopal Church. It definitely made our church here seem giant. After that we returned to Pine Ridge and had lunch with Bob and Twila. Next we helped out at the Suanne Center again like yesterday, and that was pretty much what did that day.

On Wednesday, instead of going to work on Bob and Twila's Coffee shop, we drove out to Wounded Knee which my mom (already explained about **OR** is going to explain more about). Then we visited Thunder Valley which is an up-and-coming self-sustaining Lakota community. Then on the way back to Pine Ridge we visited the Wounded Knee Massacre sight and Suanne, the girl who the center was named after's, grave. We again ran the day camp at the Suanne Center that afternoon and held a family night afterwards where we invited the kids and their parents to stay and have dinner. That evening, Larry took us on a tour of the city of White Clay and parts of Pine Ridge. What we witnessed on that drive was very humbling and devastating.

The next day, Thursday, was our last day on the Reservation. That morning, we drove to Red Cloud School and got a tour of the campus including the church and the cemetery. The school also had a cool art gallery and an assortment of authentic Native American made things that you could buy. After that, we volunteered at the Suanne Center one final day. It was sad to have to leave the kids that I had become

friends with over the past week. During evening, we got the chance to browse the local artists that were selling their handmade work in the basement of our retreat center. That was essentially our last event on our mission trip.

Friday morning we all woke up early and said our goodbyes. My mom and I set out on our own adventures while the rest of the group headed for home. Being in Pine Ridge was easily one of the best experiences of my life. When the idea was brought up I wasn't really sure I was going to enjoy the trip. I wasn't being open minded about it at all. I also didn't know what to expect, what I was going to see and do. All I knew is that I wanted to change someone's life and discover Jesus in a new way. When we arrived at the Retreat Center and Larry gave us a description of what our plan was for the week, I was beyond excited. I couldn't wait to get started. Throughout the week I made friends that I know I will remember forever. One that will always stand out in my mind is Sammy. Like I said before, he was one of our counselors for the week. He taught me so much from trick shots in pool to skateboarding (which I still can't quite get the hang of). It inspired me that he had only been in the States for 2 weeks and he was leading us in our mission trip like he'd been here for years.

Every night before we would all head off to bed, we gathered as a group in the basement of the Retreat center and had the talking circle. This was a time where we all got to share our personal experience for the day. There was even a cool talking stick and everything. I find that I learned a lot about myself in this time. I put a lot of thought into what I wanted to say each night the talking stick was handed to me. I found that time every night so amazing because I got to hear everyone else's thoughts and experiences and reflect on what I really learned that day.

Additionally on a few of the days we had bible study. The youth were in one group and the adults in the other. One particular day of bible study particularly stands out to me. We studied the story of Jesus walking on the water. In the story, Peter is unable to put enough trust in Jesus to walk on the water because of a gust of wind. This led us to discuss what the “wind” in our lives was. I then came up with a phrase that I know that I will keep with me, “Conquer your wind.” To me this sentence means that if you can overcome the challenges you face in life you can achieve the impossible.

I know I’ve talked too long, bear with me here. Each day we had a theme. Monday’s was hope, Tuesday’s was peace, Wednesday’s was strength, Thursday’s was love, and finally Friday’s was Faith. Hope was one that especially stuck out to me. Amidst the devastation and hopelessness in Pine Ridge, all throughout the week wherever we went we saw glimmers of hope. The Retreat Center, Thunder Valley, Red Cloud School, the Suanne Center, people that want to change the world... To me this is Jesus being present in the community of Pine Ridge. There might be so much struggle and violence and pure hopelessness in a place but there will always be hope shining through. All of those people in all of those places have Jesus working through them to be a source of hope and make a difference in other’s lives. I am beyond thankful that I have gotten to witness that during this trip. Thank you.