

***Cross-Cultural Experience for Seminary Students
at Our Saviour's Lutheran Church
on the Rocky Boy's Reservation, Montana
by Pastor Linda Webster***

First, it is important to know that I am non-Native, but felt called to serve within the Native American community and feel very blessed to have received this call to be pastor at Our Saviour's Lutheran Church on the Rocky Boy's Reservation. Throughout my time in seminary and now in parish ministry, I received and continue to receive strong support from many with the ELCA Native community, including Marilyn Sorenson the former director of the American Indian-Alaska Native Ministry of the ELCA and Marlene Whiterabbit Helgemo (pastor at All Nations Indian Church in Minneapolis, MN). Both have been wonderful mentors to me.

While in seminary, I did an extended cross-cultural experience (6 weeks) and my internship on the Pine Ridge Reservation in South Dakota. There I worked with the Rev. Larry Peterson, a non-Native, Lutheran pastor, at the Pine Ridge Retreat Center in the town of Pine Ridge, and the Rev. Asa (Maricopa-Pima) and Tresita (Standing Rock Sioux) Wilson, who serve at Makasan Presbyterian Church in the town of Oglala. These three people were wonderful mentors and role-models for me in Native ministry.

Our Saviour's Lutheran Church is on the Rocky Boy's Reservation in north central Montana. This is the home of the Chippewa Cree Tribe. This is the smallest and most recently established of the reservations in Montana. It was established by an Act of Congress in 1916.

Worship follows traditional Lutheran liturgy, using the ELW, but we are working to incorporate more Native American elements. The congregation that worships is small and of mixed ethnicity - Native and non-Native. Because of the long-term Lutheran presence on this reservation, about 1/3 to 1/2 of the 5,000 residents of Rocky Boy's claim Lutheran heritage (baptized, but not attending worship).

Our Saviour's is currently the only predominantly Native congregation on a reservation in the state of Montana. There are other congregations on reservations, but they are mostly non-Native.

Travel to our site may be by car, by train, arriving in Havre, MT, which is 25 miles north of us, or by flying into either Havre or Great Falls, MT, which is 105 miles south of us. We can provide shuttle service to Havre or Great Falls. If we provide this for you, it is good to have groups arrive together in order to alleviate too much driving and the expense involved in that.

As I am the coordinator of this experience, I will be with the students everyday for part of the day, sharing devotions, reflections, educational opportunities, and discussion/processing time.

Upon arriving on site, students receive an orientation, which - when given by me - gives a non-Indian perspective to things. This includes what it means to be on an Indian Reservation, some historical insights and perspectives, ways of being here within this culture, etc. There will be some racism/anti-racism discussion.

While the students are here they will participate in the daily life of the congregation, which means working along side the ladies of our congregation in our Thrift Store and putting together layettes that are handed out to families of newborns. There are possibilities of volunteering at the Tribal Headstart and Daycare (with appropriate background checks on file at the Seminary), visiting elders in their homes and/or talking with them at the Senior Center, going door-to-door to deliver quilts given to Our Saviour's by congregations across the country and invite people to come to services.

Tribal members are invited to speak to the group on Chippewa Cree history and language. Others are invited to share bead working and frybread making and have the students experience these things along side those sharing their culture. A mini pow-wow is arranged, where students and others from the community come and enjoy a dance and drumming demonstration by members of the community. Tours of Stone Child College and the Tribe's Clinic and Wellness Center may be part of the experience. Participating in a sweat lodge is an option (there would be an additional cost associated with this).

Several trips off-site are included, particularly to the Blaine County Museum in conjunction with a trip to the Bear Paw Battlefield, which is where Chief Joseph of the Nez Perce surrendered. Visits to the Havre Buffalo Jump, an archeological dig, and to the site of the original Fort Assiniboine are possibilities. Students are asked to bring along their passports, as a trip into southern Canada may be taken.

The Tribe's Wellness Center is open to everyone to use for free. It has an indoor pool and jacuzzi, basketball court, indoor walking track, exercise/weight room, men's and women's locker rooms with sauna, steam room, and showers.

Our Saviour's Lutheran Church is a congregation of the ELCA. Our website is found at www.oslcrb.org.

Our ministry has several parts. These include the following. As a congregation, we provide a Lutheran presence on the Rocky Boy's Reservation through the light of the Gospel, which we believe is for all people. As a congregation, we seek to work with the Tribal government to provide programs that will help alleviate hunger and poverty, particularly through the ELCA Domestic Hunger Grant program. Individually and collectively, we work at promoting dialogue and acceptance between traditions and faiths. To the wider Church, the congregation sees its ministry as being a place to provide cross-cultural learning opportunities through mission/servant groups and immersion events.

Several books will be required reading in this learning experience. Those currently on the list include: Montana Cree by Dusenberry, Defending Mother Earth: Native American Perspectives on Environmental Justice edited by Vandevelder, and Chief Joseph by Nerburn. Students should be prepared to discuss these in small or large groups.

Several books on Native American theology will be required with readings divided among the students for discussion purposes. These are: A Native American Theology by Clara Sue Kidwell, et al., Native and Christian edited by James Treat, and The Soul of the Indian by Charles Alexander Eastman (Ohiyesa). Several fiction books are also recommended to give insight to different Native writers and tribes. Students should be prepared to read at least two of these books, give a synopsis, and lead discussion and/or Q&A.

Sherman Alexie - Flight and The Absolute True Diary of a Part-time Indian.
Ella Cara Deloria - Waterlily. Forrest Carter - The Education of Little Tree.
Velma Wallis - Two Old Women. D'Arcy McNickle - The Surrounded. James Welch -
Winter in the Blood.

Depending on the seminary that each student is attending (as this may be a mixed group), other requirements for papers, etc. may vary. Journaling this experience is recommended. Wi-Fi is available in the Mission House. Cell phone coverage on the Reservation is spotty and fairly non-existence on Our Saviour's site, so everyone should come prepared with a phone card to use for long-distance calls.

Dates for 2011 are: August 13, 2011 (Saturday) to August 27, 2011 (Saturday)
[These dates may vary slightly depending on train/airline arrival/departure schedule, etc.]

Tuition: \$400

(This is for the work at Our Saviour's. This does not include the tuition required by the seminary.)

Lodging, On-site Transportation, and at least one meal with the community: \$400
Bedding and towels are provided. (This cost may vary slightly depending on the price of gasoline.)

Food: To determined by the group

The group is responsible for its own meals. Students are expected to plan, shop, and cook together (always planning for some extras, as people drop by). One of Our Saviour's vans can be used for shopping in Havre. Depending on the size of the group, the Big Church or Mission House kitchen will be used.

Travel: Students are responsible for travel to Havre or Great Falls, Montana. Shuttle transportation to/from either the train station or airport can be provided by Our Saviour's Lutheran Church. Some mileage cost would be involved in this and split between the number of people riding at one time.

To Havre - Those coming by train or plane should plan to arrive on August 13.

To Great Falls - Those coming by plane should arrive on August 13. Flights into and out of Great Falls are limited. Plan accordingly - do not plan to arrive later than 8 pm. If nothing is available, arrange to arrive on August 12.

All departures should be in the afternoon on Friday, August 26th or on Saturday, August 27th.

Number of Students: Minimum - 6, Maximum - 14 (These numbers are negotiable)

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