

What an adventure! Not only did I get graced with the beautiful Montana landscape on the drive up from Billings but when I arrived, I was met with a beautiful culture, wonderful stories, and the opportunity to restore some hope where it had been lost. The devastating floods in June 2010 wiped out the newly constructed basement of the Mission House. After Pastor Linda Webster put out the call for support to the ELCA, Cliff Holland, the Lutheran Disaster Response, sprung into action with financial support. Then a group here in Billings decided to bring together the corporate churches and staff of St. John's Lutheran Ministries to respond with some volunteers to begin rebuilding the basement.

This is where I come in. My name is Alison Williams and I'm a pastoral intern from the Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago and I'll be in Billings until August 2011. I split my time between St. John's and a local church, Messiah Lutheran. So my days are spent leading devotions, visiting with people, preaching and leading services, and just learning how to do ministry. So I jumped at the opportunity to spend time on Rocky Boy's Reservation. Not only would I get to serve and know my neighbors better, but I'd learn what ministry and faith look like on a reservation. I've had a passion for this ministry since 2004 when I went to an Apache reservation in Arizona and was eager to explore it more.

So I helped facilitate the trip north! Over 500 hours of volunteer work later, we had installed new insulation, new drywall, taped, mudded, sanded, and painted the Mission House basement. With Pastor Linda and several local residents, we cooked together, ate together, cleaned together, worshipped together, and experienced the culture of the Chippewa Cree tribe. Though I can speak only for myself, I know the sentiment was shared - we were not just rebuilding walls in a basement, we were building community. This does not mean that we simply got closer as a work group, but that we were able to experience the culture of the tribe - the passion that is behind beadwork and dancing, the stories that are handed down through the generations, and the concerns close to everyone's hearts. Like the Israelites working with their neighbors to build Solomon's temple (1 Kings 5), we were reminded that God builds community in many ways. The experience has also shaped how I see the commandment to love the stranger - we were the strangers in a strange land and were welcomed in with open arms. May God be with you as you greet neighbor and invite the stranger in.

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