

On the Spiritual Side

SEPA volunteers learn during South Dakota mission trip

Brenda Lange

Working on the Rosebud (Lakota Sioux) Reservation in south central South Dakota three years ago was a remarkable opportunity, which I was fortunate to reprise this summer.

My 19-year-old daughter, Liz, and I joined 12 other teens and adults from 27 churches of the Southeastern Pennsylvania Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of America (SEPA Synod of the ELCA). Most of us hadn't known each other before we started planning this trip, but we all shared an eagerness to make a difference to the Native Americans of South Dakota.

We spent the weekends before and after our reservation experience in Rapid City, living in the Parish Hall of South Canyon Lutheran Church and bonding as a group while visiting Mt. Rushmore, Crazy Horse and the Badlands. But the intervening days are the ones we truly cherish.

Repeat visitors

This 12-day servant trip was originally dreamed up by Molly Beck Dean, SEPA's youth ministry specialist, who was reared in North Dakota, and wanted to share her love and respect for Native Americans with the Pennsylvania youth. The group splits between the Rosebud and Crow Creek reservations, and this is her third trek in nine years.

Tree of Life, a Methodist relief organization based in Mission, S.D., was our host, and directed our workdays. We did whatever was asked of us with an enthusiasm that made up for any missing expertise.

Duties on Rosebud included painting a house, building a wheelchair ramp, working in the Boys and Girls Club, and visiting residents of a nearby nursing facility. One day, my work crew and I helped prepare the Sun Dance grounds outside S. Francis for the upcoming ceremony. Michael Carlson, senior pastor of Good Shepherd Lutheran Church in Southampton and acting chaplain for the Rosebud group, was part of that crew.

"We came here to do whatever we could. An added benefit is that our kids are learning firsthand that the most valuable things are those you give away," said Carlson. "We've planted the seed. They will remember this time and place and know the truth of what they've done. And they'll build on this knowledge throughout their lives."

Others worked in a day camp at Two Strike, where SEPA volunteers had constructed a playground three years earlier. The children of this

tiny community wasted no time in wriggling their way into the hearts of those who read and played with them and most importantly, showed them with love.

Bonds of affection grew strong in a few short days. When the last day came, hugs and tears were plentiful as the children carried home special bags full of school supplies and toiletries.

The SEPA youth were subdued after delivering each child back to his or her house. Liz who also worked with these kids three years ago, summed it up:

"I leave these trips with a broken heart. I know I've made a difference and I'm proud of the work we've done and know we've made the kids happy for a short while, but then we leave them and go back to our own lives and we can only imagine what they are going home to. We can only hope that we have made as much of an impact on them as they have made on us."

About a third of the participants did maintenance and repair work on the Crow Creek Reservation. Some prepared trash-filled empty lots for new trailer homes. Others cleaned and sanitized two mobile homes that serve as the reservation's day care center. Other crews did plumbing and electrical work at the town's greenhouse and beautified the common gardens.

Tree of Life Mission

Groups like SEPA are vital to the Tree of Life Ministry. The agency has been directed by United Methodist minister Russell Masartis and his wife, Donna, for six of the organization's 26 years. They have built a trusting partnership with the tribal leaders, and repair and maintain up to 100 homes each year with their staff of 17 and the help of more than 1,500 volunteers.

Those of us who had worked there before were gratified and encouraged to see the growth of the mission, enabling it to serve increasing numbers of those in need.

"The people on the reservations were taken from their traditional teepees and put into structures without being taught how to take care of them. Imagine being given a rocket ship and told you were leaving for Mars the next day without being given information on how to fly it," Masartis said to the SEPA group one morning, using that analogy to clarify the foreign nature of simple things we take for granted.

In addition to ensuring homes are safe, the agency operates community centers and works with local churches. The Warm Welcome Center on Rosebud serves as many as 250 meals each day. For the \$1



Fourth of July was celebrated at a Lakota powwow on Rosebud Reservation.



The group from St. Paul's, Doylestown, enjoyed the Badlands after their work week ended.

fee, each person also is allowed to choose up to 15 items of clothing and a bag of food. Masartis believes that each interaction between volunteers and the people of the reservation help create a better future by breaking down racial divides and ending discrimination.

Lessons learned

Sleeping on a church floor, preparing meals for nearly a hundred hungry teens, and coping with the myriad emotional, mental and physical challenges over the course of nearly two weeks opened our eyes to just what we could do when we set our minds to it.

But what struck us all is the fact that we got to return to our homes here and our lives of relative comfort and stability, leaving behind the natives to continue to struggle with poverty, unemployment (approx-

Photographs by Brenda Lange

mately 85 percent) and other crippling social issues.

The depth of these concerns are beyond what we were able to fully address or comprehend in one week's time, but as our leader Molly, reminded us, "We make a difference one life at a time."

"This year's theme was God's work, our hands," she added. "Our

faith calls us to serve others, but with this trip I know we will always be blessed as much as we are a blessing."

To donate to Tree of Life, send a check Tree of Life Ministry, 140 S. Roosevelt St., P.O. Box 149, Mission, SD 57555-0149, call 605-856-4266 or visit treeoflifereief.org.

Hiroshima, Nagasaki commemoration planned

A weekend of activities is planned Aug. 6 to 9 to commemorate the nuclear bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki by local peace organizations.

The memorial starts at 7:30 p.m. Friday, Aug. 6, with an outdoor service at BuxMont Unitarian Universalist Fellowship, 2040 Street Road, Warrington.

Hiroshima survivors and children from the Peace Center's Peace Camp will be part of this service.

The Peace Center, 102 W. Maple Ave., Langhorne, will screen the movie "Black Rain" at 3 p.m. Saturday, Aug. 7.

At BuxMont fellowship, Jerry Jones will present the service, "Disarming God," at 10:15 a.m.

Sunday, Aug. 8. There will be a discussion after the service about positive steps to take so nuclear weapons are not used again.

A service commemorating the bombing at Nagasaki will be held at 7:30 p.m. Monday, Aug. 9, in the BuxMont UU sanctuary that will feature reflection and meditation.

Princeton Jewish congregation hosts High Holiday events

String of Pearls, a Jewish Reconstructionist congregation in Princeton, N.J., will offer a month-long program leading up to the Days of Awe, the 10 days between Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur.

The program begins Aug. 5, with a screening of Elia Kazan's "East of Eden." The film is intended to inspire thoughts on this year's theme of perfection and imperfection in the Jewish

tradition, and will be followed by three salon-style evenings of conversation on subsequent Thursdays in August. All programs will begin at 7 p.m.

Rosh Hashanah services will be held on Sept. 8, at 7:30 p.m. and Sept. 9, at 10 a.m. A meatless potluck lunch and a brief Tashlich ceremony will follow.

Yom Kippur services will begin with Kol Nidre at 7:30 p.m. Sept. 17, and continue the next day at

10 a.m. String of Pearls will host three workshops: Gentle Yoga, the Mussar Tradition and Talmud Teachings. There will be a reading and discussion on the Book of Jonah at 5 p.m. Ne'elilah will begin at 6:15 p.m.

High Holiday services and the events are free with donations accepted. Elul events and High Holiday services will take place at the Unitarian Universalist Congregation of Princeton.

Worship Directory

Rolling Hills United Methodist

Sunday Worship 8:30am
Sunday Worship 10:30am

7028 Easton Rd. Pipersville, PA
215-766-8150
rollinghillsumc.org



St. John the Evangelist Anglican Church
1150 Bristol Road
Churchville, PA
(Jesus Focus Ministry)
215-396-1970

8:00 a.m. Holy Communion
9:30 a.m. Holy Communion
(With Morning Prayer 2nd & 4th Sunday)
Sunday School 10:30 a.m.
The Rev. Mark E. Rudolph, Rector
www.toknowchrist.org

PLEASANT RIDGE CHURCH OF DANBORO
Everyone Welcome

Worship service 9:30 am during July and August
Sunday School will resume in the Fall
Pastor Dawn Alpaugh
908-310-0698

Pt. Pleasant Pike & Bergstrom Rd., (Danboro) Doylestown, PA
www.prc4877.org • PRC4877@yahoo.com
215-766-7353



DOYLESTOWN SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST CHURCH

Saturday Christian Services

Worship Service 11:00 am - Sabbath School 9:30 am

Meeting at the Pleasant Ridge Church of Danboro
4877 Bergstrom Road, Doylestown, Pa 18902
(Pt. Pleasant Pike & Bergstrom Road Danboro)

www.doylestownsa.org - 215-933-9191 - All are welcome