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Pine Ridge May Term

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PINE RIDGE MAY TERM

Learning and Serving Among the Oglala Lakota: Conversations About Faith, Culture, and Worldview

Course Basics

The Pine Ridge May Term is a service-learning course on the Pine Ridge Reservation in South Dakota. The reservation is home to the Oglala Lakota (Sioux), with a tribal membership that totals 17,775. After a one week on-campus orientation, participants will spend two weeks on the reservation, engaged in an ongoing service project, a variety of encounters with residents of the reservation, travel to important sites, the study of Lakota history and religion, and guided conversation to bring our own culture, faith and experience into conversation with life on the reservation. Our host is be the staff of an organization called Re-member. Their mission statement reads “Guided by the aspirations of the Oglala Lakota Indian communities we serve, RE-MEMBER seeks to improve the quality of Indian reservation life through relationships, shared resources and volunteer services. Through site visits and cultural immersion, we continue to develop a growing circle of advocates standing in solidarity with the Indian people of Pine Ridge, South Dakota.”

Objectives

1. To increase our understanding of the religion, culture, and worldview of Oglala Lakota people, both historically, and in contemporary reservation life.
2. To raise awareness of and engage in critical reflection on our own faith, culture and worldview as we bring it into conversation with what we learn about the faith, culture and worldview of the Oglala Lakota.
3. To provide meaningful forms of service to tribal residents through the service programs of Re-Member, our host organization on the Pine Ridge Reservation.
4. To be served by tribal members and residents of the reservation by being open to what they have to teach us through their stories and other forms of interactions while we live among them as guests.

Texts

Nicholas Black Elk, John G. Neihardt. *Black Elk Speaks: Being the Life Story of a Holy Man of the Oglala Sioux.*

Dee Brown, *Bury My Heart at Wounded Knee*

Mathew King, *Noble Red Man: Lakota Wisdom Keeper*, Hillsboro, Oregon: Beyond Words Publishing. 1994.

Kent Nerburn. *Neither Wolf Nor Dog: On Forgotten Roads with an Indian Elder*. Novato, California: New World Library, 2002

Pine Ridge Statistics

Over 80% Unemployment
Per capita income of \$4,000
52 % of the households single parented
Temperatures from 40 below to 120 above
8 times the United States rate of diabetes
5 times the rate of cervical cancer
Twice the rate of heart disease and 8 times the rate of TB
Suicide rate more than twice the national rate
Teen suicide 4 times the national rate
Three times the infant mortality rate
The lowest life expectancy in the U.S. and the 2nd lowest in the western hemisphere.
68 % school dropout rate
The third poorest of USA's 3,143 counties in the 2000 and 2010 U.S. Census
50% live below the poverty level
Often 20 or more people crammed into houses as small as 400 sq. feet
1/3 of the houses without electricity
1/3 of the houses without running water or sewer

Service

Wheel chair ramps



Skirting mobile homes (more efficient heating)



Bunk Beds...

building and installing

Outhouses - building and installing



Roofing



Porcupine School



Learning



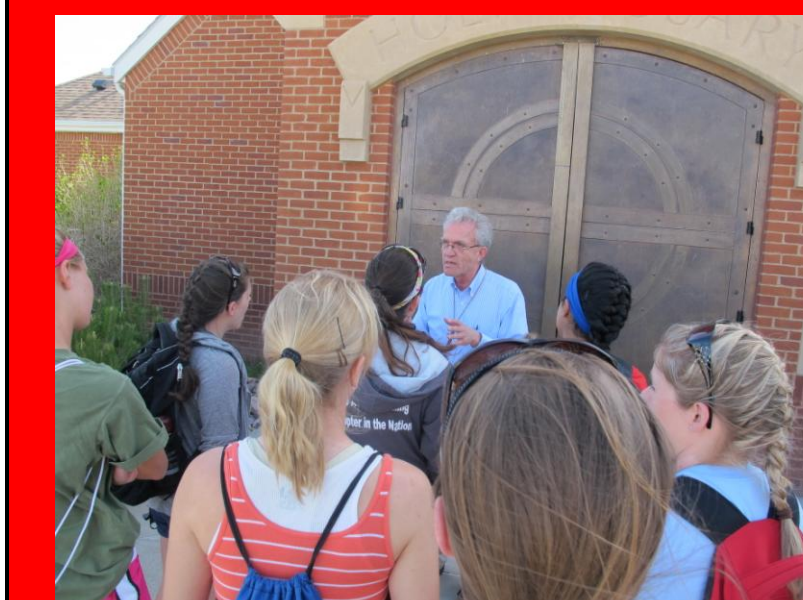
Inila Wakan – our guide to Stronghold Table



Corbin Conroy, Artist



Will Peters, Educator



Father Peter Klink, SJ



Ed Iron Cloud

In the words of students...

The tools I brought with me soon felt like using a pair of scissors to cut the lawn. But I learned that wisdom is listening and acknowledging that you don't know everything. As I allowed myself to admit that I was ignorant, I was able to more fully take in the wisdom from the people around me.

Either people appear to be oblivious or simply are not concerned about knowing the true Lakota identity. As for those few who actually care to listen, where do I even possibly begin? What do I even tell them? How will they even begin to understand when the little they know is built on historical dishonesties and ethnocentric prejudice?

Ignorance is a two-way road that impoverishes those at either end. It impoverishes the Lakota of their beautiful culture, and mainstream society from ever recognizing that such beauty can exist and be appreciated outside of their own cultural practices and beliefs.

Amidst crippling poverty I found unexpected joy and resilience, not total hopelessness. I found individuals striving for their community, working hard to counteract decades of oppression and forced cultural destruction and assimilation, to bring their people back to a life of self respect and self-sufficiency.

There are times I have felt judged by others who didn't understand my beliefs. The sweatlodge ceremony touched me in a way no church service ever had. Prayers were being offered in three different traditions – Christian, Lakota, and Sikh – and there was no judgment passed on anyone – only a shared hope for healing. God was laying an abundance of love and peace on my heart.

Activities and Site Visits



Site of The Wounded Knee Massacre and Mass Grave



Harney Peak – Black Elk Wilderness



White Clay, Nebraska



Feather Tying

Pine Ridge High School



Stronghold Table

With Guide Inila Wakan



Larry Swalley, (Sweat Lodge Host) with TA Shannon McTigue