



## THANKING GOD, LOOKING AHEAD

January, 2008

### ACTIVITY HIGHLIGHTS

In July, 2004 six strangers joined together for a short-term mission trip to the Pine Ridge Reservation in South Dakota. Our goal was to see Jesus proclaimed on the reservation...and we would do that by building relationships. Through unusual circumstances, we met Pastors Franklin (Seminole) and Charity (Lakota) Hill of the Native Voice of Deliverance Church. We learned Franklin and Charity were Christians ministering to the Lakota tribe - not an easy walk since Christianity is still considered white man's religion. We spent the week talking and praying with them. Towards the end of our trip, during a time of prayer with the Hills, a crime was committed against one of their family members. Through the trauma, they asked us to stay and hold them in prayer. We did and, as a result, were honored when they referred to us as family.

Pastor Charity also asked us to visit and pray with her uncle, Tony Black Feather, who was ill. We prayed with him several times during our stay. That week a traditional Lakota honoring ceremony was being held for him. Because he served as an indigenous representative to the United Nations, the UN sent a delegation to attend the ceremony. We were privileged to be invited. Later we learned that when others asked Tony who those strangers were he replied, "They're my prayer warriors."

We also were introduced to Mary and Varden Fast Wolf & family. Mary and Varden aren't pastors but are a walking example of Jesus' love and compassion. They take reservation children into their home who are parent-less due to incarceration, alcoholism, abuse, etc. Currently, 14 children live there. This family doesn't have much wealth but overflow with love and patience.

We had gone on this first trip with the intention of building relationships and God had miraculously opened doors for us. Native people are often suspicious of outsiders' intentions but we were privileged to be welcomed by all these families.

It was on this first trip we felt God would have us form our own ministry whose purpose is promoting reconciliation, healing and relationship between Native Americans and the Church. A pretty tall order for six people who really didn't know how to make that happen. But God had guided us so far and we trusted Him to continue doing so.

In June 2005 we headed back to Pine Ridge to continue building relationships. Franklin Hill had become seriously ill the previous week. We ministered to him and the Hill family at the hospital. We, also, mowed lawns at their home and church, and distributed clothing in their community. The Lord took Franklin home in July of that year but we will always remember him. At home, we spent months working on the necessary paperwork and became incorporated by the State of Ohio.

July, 2006 found us again on Pine Ridge Reservation. The previous years, our mission trips were sponsored by another organization but this year, RIVER OF JOY (ROJ) sponsored its' first mission trip. This year's goal was to support Pastor Charity as she hosted their annual camp meeting - a week's worth of services, twice a day, preaching the Gospel in 100°+ heat under a hot canvas canopy!

During one of the services, Charity publicly acknowledged us - opening another door of acceptance. We were asked to give our testimonies and were befriended by Larry Harrison, the

Assistant Chief of the Seminole Tribe (from Oklahoma) who was also there to support Charity.

During one of the last days of the camp meeting, a memorial for Franklin was conducted. It was a Lakota end-of-mourning ceremony and we were asked to participate. Our ministry was the only non-Native people included.

We learned of and visited two other ministries working to help the reservation's children - Oyate Concern and the Oglala Re-Creation Center. At home, we developed business procedures and practices to insure a responsible, accountable ministry.

June 2007 was our fourth year at Pine Ridge and we spent time with all those we had met before. In addition, we visited Rags to Riches, a quilt ministry to Native women (quilting techniques with a Bible study). We spent time with the pastors of the Lakota Baptist Church and Wounded Knee Church of God.

We visited 555 Whiteclay a ministry in Whiteclay, Nebraska (a one-street town consisting mostly of bars selling cheap beer on the southern border of the reservation). Lost Native men and women wile away the hours drinking but 555 Whiteclay is striving to change that area. On the home front we wrote an article about Pastor Charity published in Charisma magazine (January, 2007), and received our own tax-exempt status from the IRS.

Over the past four years we have learned our way around the reservation and have seen first-hand some of the problems: 86% of the population unemployed; a teen suicide rate 150% higher than the national average. Alcoholism and diabetes runs rampant. Less than 5% of the U.S. Native American population knows Jesus as Savior and traditional Lakota spiritual practices still include the use of medicine men, vision quests, and the Sundance.

God seems to be showing us the most favor with ministry leaders who are overwhelmed and under financed. Not all Indians are getting rich from casinos so, through its fund-raising efforts, ROJ is assisting these leaders by supplementing their living expenses such as groceries, propane for heating, gasoline gift cards, etc. We stay in contact

throughout the year providing encouragement and praying for them.

This year, we also supported a Christmas Blessing outreach. We provided Walmart gift cards to the Fast Wolf family and Pastor Charity for groceries and gifts. We also sent donations to the Lakota Baptist Church and Wounded Knee Church of God.

These gifts are deeply appreciated as shown by Mary Fast Wolf's recent letter. "If it wasn't for RIVER OF JOY, we wouldn't of had Christmas and I wouldn't of known how to explain to my children. So I want to thank all of you for making my children happy on Christmas day. My daughter, Lakota Breeze, asked me, 'will they help us next year?' I told her don't worry about next year. God will be there for us."

### **THIS YEAR**

We look forward to 2008 and where God will be leading us. The needs are great but so is the God in whom we trust.

We are anticipating 1-2 ministry trips to Pine Ridge. As we are able, we will continue helping meet daily living expenses. Another Christmas Blessing is in order for the Fast Wolf children (and others). And lastly, the Wounded Knee Church of God pastor dreams of having a wind turbine on his property. It will generate electricity and, hopefully, interest serving as a prototype for the tribe. We will be defining requirements and costs, and searching out funding sources for this effort.

We appreciate your interest, prayer and/or financial support. And thanks to the IRS, your financial support is tax deductible. (Checks can be made out to RIVER OF JOY).

It looks to be a wonderful year!

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