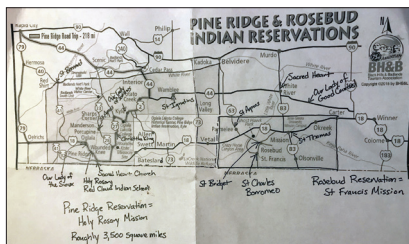


Pine Ridge Road Trip Monday, October 7, 2019



We were on the High Plains at an elevation of about 3,500 feet. The air was warm and dry and the sun was

bright in the blue, nearly cloudless sky. We planned to travel about 218 miles, a formidable itinerary that included several churches and cemeteries across the eastern side of the Pine Ridge Reservation, which totals 3,500 square miles.



*Fr. Brad Held, SJ,
Pastor of Holy Rosary
Mission Churches (SD)*

Fr. Brad Held, SJ served as our tour guide, host and one of our three vehicle drivers, departing from the Terra Sancta Retreat Center in Rapid City, South Dakota, where the UMI pastoral summit was being held. We were a curious and eager group with

many participants coming to South Dakota and the Pine Ridge Reservation for the first time, while a few Jesuits were returning to a place of ministry and love, as well as heartache.

The “Res” is populated primarily by the Oglala, or the “Scatter Their Own” tribe, one of the seven bands of the Lakota division of the Sioux Nation. The three Sioux dialects are: Lakota, Nakota and Dakota.

First, we entered the Badlands, named as such because the land is just that—bad, not good for farming, ranching or living. It has its own beauty but is desolate, made up of uneven



The group made an unofficial stop at this “ghost town” along the way.



Monday's travelers posed for a photo inside of St. Agnes Church: Christine Curran; Tom Drexler; Fr. Pat Fairbanks, SJ; Anzley Harmon; Fr. Brad Held, SJ; Amy Hoover; Rick Krivanka; Erin Maiorca; Stephen Poat; Donna Ridella; Fr. Warren Sazama, SJ; Jordan Skarr; Fr. Dave Shields, SJ; Anne Smith; and Joyce Lynn Tibbitts.

rock formations that make it look somewhat “other-worldly.” This was the land where the Native people were sent, expected to make it their home. The more



The Badlands

we learned, the more difficult the story was to hold and to reconcile.

The Jesuits are working to care for the people. The blended governance is messy. There is the Federal Bureau of Indian Affairs that, to a degree, administers the treaty rights that established federal support of healthcare, education, roads and public safety. There

are also Tribal leaders. There is a push from the Tribe for sovereignty rights but there does not seem to be the strength in leadership or infrastructure to support it. There is significant poverty and widespread addiction, which leads to violence and more crime than can be controlled or even responded to.

In 1898 the Holy Rosary Mission was established to focus on pastoral care. The Jesuits also serve at nearby St. Francis Mission on the Rosebud Reservation.

(Continued on next page)



St. Peter's is one of five abandoned churches on the Res.

First stop: St. Peter's Church

St. Peter's
was built in
the 1800s.
It has been
abandoned

for about 20 years, and the community around the church has since moved away. There are five other churches like it on the Res, creating a challenge for the Catholic Church. A church like St. Peter's is beloved by those who have prayed there, but what does its current condition symbolically say about our Church? Do we move it and restore it? Do we tear it down? For now it remains as it is.

Second Stop: St. Agnes Church

St. Agnes Church was built in 1911 and Nicholas Black Elk was part of the community that contributed to its founding. In the parish center we were delighted by two presentations, the first from Bill White, Postulator for the Cause for Sainthood. Bill shared the story of Nicholas Black Elk's life, how he came to be nominated for canonization and approved for the first stage, called "Servant of God."



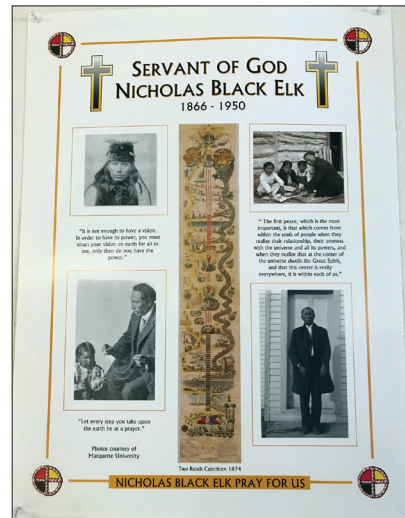
Bill White spoke to the group about Black Elk.

When Black Elk decided to become a Catholic, he chose the name Nicholas in honor of St. Nicholas because he was inspired by his love of and care for children. Nicholas was a renowned catechist on the reservation, travelling hundreds of miles between parishes. He had 113 godchildren! One of his Eucharistic Adoration processions included over 1,000 native people. Nicholas wisely explained

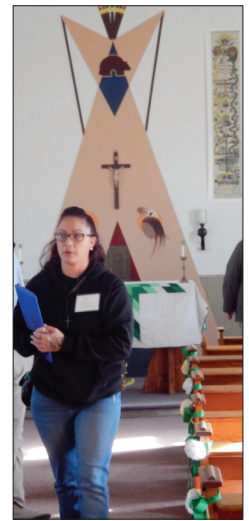


St. Agnes Church remains a vibrant community today.

to the people how native beliefs/teachings and Catholicism mutually enrich each other.



Joyce Tibbitts (pictured at right, in front of the altar in St. Agnes Church, designed the poster the Diocese is using to help promote the cause for canonization. It shows many images of Black Elk and the "Two Roads Pictorial Ladder" model of Catechism.



The second presentation was by Joyce Tibbitts, who spoke about the path to canonization. The next three stages in the canonization process are "Venerable," "Blessed" and "Saint." Joyce is a catechist at St. Agnes, following in the footsteps of Nicholas Black Elk, and is also serving as a pastoral assistant to the Holy Rosary Mission. She described the miracle of the naming of Black Elk Peak, the highest point in South Dakota, and the annual pilgrimage to it on the last weekend of June. Nicholas still has living relatives today; a grandson and great-granddaughter continue to attend Mass at St. Agnes.

Third Stop: Nicholas Black Elk's Grave

The visit to Nicholas Black Elk's gravesite was moving. A cloud formation overhead looked like a bird—perhaps a sign of blessing! There were many graves, marked in a variety of ways—wood crosses, pipe crosses, headstones, bright white service stones . . . There was a large white cross for the one Jesuit buried in the cemetery. Black Elk's headstone incorrectly named him "Chief" and the dates of his birth and death are also in error; however, Black Elk's relatives graciously accepted the headstone as it was, donated by a family from Rapid City. Although



We prayed the canonization prayer together at the gravesite of Nicholas Black Elk.



We saw many medicine wheels with colors of red, white, yellow and black representing the four directions of north, south, east and west as well as the sacred path of life on our journey toward God as depicted in this prayer wheel for Nicholas Black Elk: wisdom, courage, fortitude and generosity.

Ribbons the colors of the medicine wheel were tied to the fences that surrounded the graves, some with messages: "I pray we could love all colors of skin. We are all human. Love for all. Peace and kindness are a must." "My heart aches . . . my prayers are with the Lakota."

We added our own prayers in silence.



"Chief" was not his official title, Nicholas Black Elk was certainly known and honored as a great leader of his people. Fr. Brad said that the oversight and documentation process of graves on the Res is challenging. Although the adjacent churches own most of the cemeteries, individuals are sometimes buried without mapping the sites. Further, grass fires burn the wood crosses so, as with many situations on the Res, graves become a challenge to navigate.

Fourth Stop: Wounded Knee Massacre Site

To some degree, the facts became more than one could take in. The massacre of innocents on December 29,



1890: families huddled together to keep warm from the bitter cold were shot down by the 7th Cavalry Regiment of the United States Army. We read the posted history and then climbed the hill to the graves, the place from which the shots were fired.



The graves on the hill at Wounded Knee.

Fifth Stop: Sacred Heart Church

Sacred Heart was the first church founded on the Res and is currently their largest faith community. Angie Stover, who works for the church, greeted us graciously and then described the delicious homemade hot lunch she, her son and some volunteers had prepared for us.



Angie invites us to lunch: buffalo, squash, and corn soup; wild rice with fruit; goibibo (hand made fry bread); and choke cherry and buffalo berry sauces for dessert!

We enjoyed Angie's gracious hospitality and met some of the volunteers that helped at the parish.



After lunch Angie gave us a tour of the community and sacred spaces in the parish building.



The altar and surroundings in Sacred Heart Church.



Sixth Stop – Holy Rosary Mission Church, Cemetery and Red Cloud School Complex



Marcus spoke about the baptismal font, which survived the 1996 fire that destroyed the original Mission Church. The scent of smoke inside the font still remains strong.



Part of Red Cloud School is in the background.

Marcus, a former student of Red Cloud, was our tour guide. After receiving his Bachelor's degree, he returned to work at the school. We visited on the 131st anniversary of the founding of the Mission by the Franciscan Sisters, Chief Red Cloud and the Jesuits. The School and Mission became a blend of practices and cultures since the 1978 American Indian Religious Freedom Act. This

act legalized traditional native ceremonies and practices. Holy Rosary is a beautiful church with gorgeous stained-glass windows and Stations of the Cross painted by three different, very talented native artists.



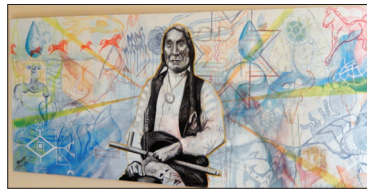
Above left: Fr. Brad Held talks to the group in front of Holy Rosary Mission Church on the Red Cloud campus.



Above right: One of the many stained glass windows inside the church.



We walked the hill to visit the grave of Red Cloud. (at right).



Inside of the school were many artistic renderings of Red Cloud, like the one shown on the left.

Seventh Stop: St. Elizabeth's/Our Lady of the Sioux



altar cloth, beaded with the words “Wakan, Wakan, Wakan” (Holy, Holy, Holy).

Sr. Barbara, an energetic Dominican sister from Springfield, Illinois, is the parish life coordinator—and clearly the chief cook and grounds keeper as well. She is a mighty and loving caregiver to the community. Before preparing for the Mass, Sr. Barbara shared the story of the community and rebuilding of the church and local homes after recent devastating storms.

As we arrived at Our Lady of the Sioux, a wake for a young woman was just concluding—another reminder of the depth of sadness in this part of our country and another opportunity for prayer. We gathered in the church for Mass and appreciated the beautiful space described by Sr. Barbara. Of particular note was the

During Mass Joyce Tibbitts prepared a bowl of sage that was lit and carried to each person for them to fan the smoke toward them in an offering of prayer. During the Consecration, beats from a native drum solemnly

sounded at the elevation of the Eucharistic Bread, and again at the elevation of the Chalice.

After Mass we were treated to a dinner of Indian tacos that Sr. Barbara had prepared and served to us with her visiting friend, another member of the Dominican order.



As we assembled for Mass, Sr. Barbara described the beaded altar cloth: Wakan, Wakan, Wakan!

Eighth Stop: Red Shirt Table

As we drove off of the Res and through the Badlands the sun was setting. We drove past Cooney Table to a Black Hills overlook at Red Shirt Table. The colors of the sunset against the vast horizon provided another breathtaking sight.



Good and gracious God, bless the works of the Jesuits around the world and draw your people close to you!

*~ article by Erin Maiorca
~ photos by Erin Maiorca and Anne Smith*