

American Memorial Chapel Travel Grant Report

The Revd. Danny Pegg

Visiting the Diocese of South Dakota

12th Sept – 30th Sept 2022

Introduction

As someone with American citizenship who has never lived in the USA, I was always interested to explore that part of my personal heritage. My opportunity came in a unique way when I managed to secure a placement in South Dakota with The Revd. Dr. Lauren Stanley exploring Native American ministries in the Episcopal Church. I had never experienced Christian ministry in such a unique context before, nor had I learned deeply about Christianity embedded in a non-white Western culture before. My time on the Rosebud Reservation with Mthr. Lauren was nothing short of life changing, especially in terms of observing creative and sensitive incarnational mission. I saw ministers truly embodying servant ministry in a context in which the church had previously done serious damage and finding spiritual fruit there.¹



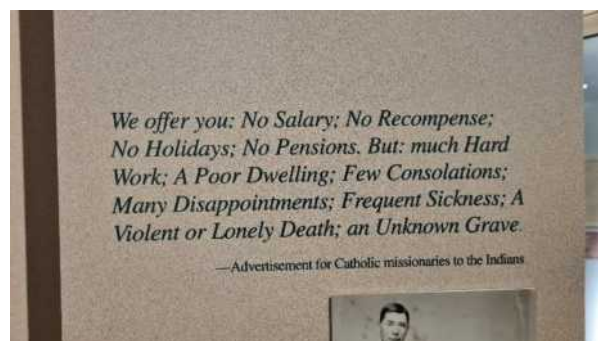
¹ To read about Lakota history, see Appendix. 1. I am not explaining this in this report as it was on my first trip in which I discovered some of this story, and the purpose of this trip was not to discover Lakota history. However, one cannot appreciate fully the experiences I had without at least a small understanding of some of the history that shapes this people and this place, and so I commend this to you as an act of respect constituting only a brief, basic introduction.

Now ordained, I wanted to further explore this mission across the Diocese that has such experience of it in a much broader way than only on one reservation. I was also looking to understand mission contextually in this way, given my new role as Associate Vicar for Mission and Discipleship in two parishes, that began in January 2022.

These two parishes would be connected through an ‘apostolic partnership’: a sort of covenant of working together. This is not a legal arrangement, beyond sharing clergy. My task there is – in line with the Holy Spirit at work - to adapt to this new context, enabling and growing the mission and discipleship in those places. Exploring Anglican mission in such a different context would allow for a fruitful examination of what could work in my parishes. I didn’t know at the time of my application that there were parishes in the Diocese of South Dakota considering a similar ‘partnership’ type model.

The Church of England is having something of an ecclesiological identity crisis today, with Diocesan restructuring and parochial change coming. In my parishes, and in my diocese beyond this, we need to relearn what it means to be truly contextual and to seek and meet the need in our congregations and communities at large. In the indigenous context, mission and ministry can never be undertaken according to a pre-existing model, and the Diocese of South Dakota understands this. I believe that lesson has application in the Church of England too, especially now. I wanted to spend time learning from and being with these new communities, before I could begin to enable them, and to discern with them the future God has in store for them. It seemed to me that exploring contemporary mission and ministry in a church that whilst different, has shared roots with my own, and practises precisely this in a deeply rooted committed fashion will be invaluable for my future ministry.

The plan was to spend time around as much of the Diocese as I could manage (as opposed to my previous trip based on one reservation) and witness the mission activities on the Reservations and in the parishes/cathedral, along with meeting the Bishop of the Episcopal Diocese of South Dakota, the Rt. Rev. Dr. Jonathan H. Folts and joining him at the Diocesan conference. My host would be the (now) Canon to the Ordinary, the Rev. Dr. Lauren R. Stanley, with whom I served while doing my seminarian immersion experience in 2016. Mthr. Lauren enabled me to visit the various clergy and develop a schedule, which included ecumenical partners as well as episcopal clergy.



Sept. 13 - 14: Pierre

Upon arrival I got settled in with Mthr. Lauren in Pierre, the state capital. It is not the largest city in the state, but it contains the Capitol Building and the Governor's House. It is small by U.K. city standards.

One of the episcopal parishes in Pierre is Trinity Church, which is opposite the Governor's House, among the housing and near the school. It was interesting to discover that not too much of this link was being utilised, when one considers the slight pseudo-state-church



nature the ECUSA occasionally has (one thinks of the Presidential Cathedral visits in DC). The politics of the Republican Governor and State however are hardly palatable to the ECUSA, it would be fair to say, which may account for this.

Figure 1. The Capitol Building in Pierre, SD

This parish recently also received the Bishop and his staff (of three) into their offices as their buildings have a lot of space. Mthr. Lauren as Canon to the Ordinary works out of these offices. I had met Bishop Jonathan very briefly at the Lambeth Conference (in preparation for this trip) and it was great to connect again with him on his 'home turf' and have that access to understand some of the Diocese's current vision and priorities. More of this will be mentioned below.



Figure 2. Mthr. Lauren and myself

Sept 15 – 18: Sioux Falls



Figure 3. The Falls

I then travelled to the largest city in the State, Sioux Falls, to visit a parish and the cathedral there. I visited Mthr. Christina at the Parish of the Good Shepherd, Sioux Falls² and got to hear a bit of ‘normal parish life’ off-reservation in the Diocese. I was able to experience a study group there, and Mthr. Christina kindly showed me the eponymous falls and gave me

a tour of the city. It was particularly good to hear about their outreach to their local community especially with fellowship and food using their green space there to maximise on the geography of the church complex *among* those it seeks to serve.

I spent most of my time in Sioux Falls with Dean Ward at Calvary Cathedral.³ The Cathedral itself hosts Tiospaye Wakan which is a Lakota congregation (led by Lakota clergy) as well as its mixed congregation. The Tiospaye Wakan have their own chapel and liturgy, which was fascinating to see and explore as a true, fleshed-out example of contextual Anglicanism.⁴ The congregations came together for the Cathedral’s 150th Anniversary service which I was welcomed to, and invited to share in leading a small section of the liturgy, which was an honour. I also stayed



Figure 5. Tiospaye Wakan chapel at the Cathedral



Figure 4. Me participating in the Cathedral's 150th Anniversary service

in Sioux Falls long enough to help at the cathedral’s yearly big sale which often furnishes many with affordable school uniform and Christmas gifts and so on. In doing this I had the time to speak with many of the congregation and see the service-side of the cathedral along with its formal liturgical side.

² <http://sfgoodshepherd.org>

³ <https://calvarycathedral.net>

⁴ See Appendix 2. for a commentated Tiospaye Wakan liturgy. See their YouTube channel for examples of worship. E.g. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nHnFON03dqk>

On my previous trip, I had only briefly been into the Pine Ridge Reservation to stop at the site of the Wounded Knee Massacre⁵ so I was glad to be able to experience ministry there this time. I stayed at the Reconciliation Centre and worked with the Lutheran Pastor, Dan.⁶ The Pine Ridge reservation is home to some of the poorest in the entire state and is plagued with substance abuse issues because of the sheer lack of opportunity and employment, along with historical oppression and racism. The Reconciliation Centre works very much on the coal face of that ministry. Pastor Dan explained the challenges of



Figure 6. The Kitchen in the Reconciliation Centre

working with all the most vulnerable in the community at once. I got to see this for myself when I helped out at the after-school club provision, which consists of feeding the kids after school (they are bussed in from over the Reservation) and giving them a safe place to spend some time

after school with each other. Sometimes, this is the only hot meal the children get. When I was helping at this group, outside some of the homeless men were consuming hand sanitiser. These men were also the beneficiaries of the ministry of the centre and known to Pastor Dan. Clearly, trying to serve these diverse groups at the same time was a considerable challenge.

There is also much hope. I heard about Pastor Dan's work among the communities; his sharing in the ministry of the Episcopal Church (their new priest, Mthr. Michelle had just arrived and I got to have dinner with her and her husband also) and his work with anyone locally who were interested in building up hope. One of those partners was Iglutheca, the vision project of a young man called Abram, who I got to meet. Iglutheca exists 'to provide a pathway for homeless Lakotas out of addictions and poverty'⁷ and has also worked on shelters during the freezing winters and run AA groups alongside bible studies.

⁵ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wounded_Knee_Massacre

⁶ <https://www.pineridgereconciliationcenter.org>

⁷ <https://www.iglutheca.org/about>



Figure 7. Many churches on the Reservations are derelict now

Whilst I was on the Pine Ridge Reservation, I got to visit many churches along with the Red Cloud School and its heritage centre museum and art space.⁸ Nearby is a Lakota cemetery and I got to visit the grave of Red Cloud himself. The positive work there was marred by the reasonably recent discovery of child graves⁹ from when the Christian schools were

powerful and dominant on the reservations, abusing and killing many young Lakota. It was an important part of Christian history in that place for me to stare in the face. In a totally awful way, it shows the damage that Christian ‘mission’ can cause, and even perhaps raise the question of the validity of Christian presence on Reservations today. The utter commitment to servant-hearted, humble co-operative and contextual ministry that I have witnessed among the episcopal parishes and partners there seems like the best that the churches could be doing there, whilst acknowledging the sins of the past and asking for forgiveness.

Sept 22 – 24: The Diocesan Clergy Conference and Convention

Following this, I went back to Pierre for the Diocesan clergy conference followed by the Diocesan Convention (which is a full household of faith gathering, with lay and ordained representatives). By comparison, my current diocese has something like approx. 300 stipendiary clergy in it. South Dakota has approx. 40, for an area many, many times the size of my diocese. Thus, this was truly an opportunity to get to know the diocese, in as much as this was possible.

I assisted with the administration for the events and welcomed too, which was a slightly perplexing



Figure 8. Bishop Jonathan and I at the Convention

⁸ <https://www.redcloudschool.org/museum>

⁹ <https://www.lakotatimes.com/articles/buried-secrets-at-red-cloud>

experience for many South Dakotans at the entrance to their conference / convention!

We first had the clergy conference at which I got to hear about all sorts of projects going on in the diocese, from eco-projects concerning the indigenous carbon-sink plants found locally to parishes that were entering a new phase as ‘yoked’ with one another. It was from this latter point, that Mthr. Lauren and I realised that we were engaging in similar ‘partnership’ ministries and have decided to write ‘epistles’ from partnership to partnership to learn from one another as we engage in this new way of being church together. We have also invited my theological college Westcott House to offer placements (like the one I undertook in 2016) in partnership with the Diocese of South Dakota.



Figure 9. The Diocesan Convention

The theme of the conference and the convention was ‘Telling the Story’ which gave me much food for thought concerning contextual community-based ministry. We had presentations on how all could be framed in this way – even the finances and the budget!

I was welcomed warmly to the Diocesan Convention and invited to address them by way of introduction and thanksgiving. I was humbled to be asked to participate in the Convention worship and offer the ministries of anointing and the laying on of hands.

Sept 25: Lower Brule

The day after the Convention, Mthr. Lauren took me along to the small Reservation of Lower Brule, where she was due to celebrate the eucharist, preach and introduce the congregation to the process of selecting their next priest as they were entering vacancy.



Figure 10. Holy Comforter, Lower Brule

This process was incredibly collaborative and empowering for the congregation. Mthr. Lauren assured them that it really was their choice. She explained that she would visit often, and they would give thanks to God for the past and discern together the future. They would make videos of ‘vox pop’ style comments so prospective priests could ‘meet’ some of the people and understand what they were seeking before coming out for an interview process. It is certainly the case that not just any priest can serve on a Reservation!¹⁰

Sept 26 – 30: Cheyenne River

For my last few days I went to the Cheyenne River reservation and stayed with Mthr. Ellen and Fr. Kurt, a married couple ministering together there. In addition to the pastoral work and worship schedule, they run the Black Horse Ranch youth equine projects as an outreach ministry. Many young Lakota children have never ridden horses, which were a part of the culture historically. This provided me with a really tangible contextual example of ‘getting alongside’, that strangely made me think of St Wilfrid teaching the Sussex folk to fish better when he arrived here, in my part of the UK. It also gave me the excuse to brave a horse myself after having had a traumatic childhood experience with one!



Figure 11. Braving a horse!

In addition to this and to fund it, they regularly host mission teams. This is a common feature of reservation ministry and Mthr. Lauren used to do this too on the Rosebud reservation when I visited in 2016. Groups from churches around the USA would financially contribute to mission efforts as well as send teams of people to work on a project and learn about Lakota culture. Whilst I was there a team was up from West Texas and I

¹⁰ One challenge is the fact that many communities would like Lakota clergy (out a fear of not being understood) and there simply are not enough to go around all the Lakota-majority parishes. This requires a huge degree of sensitivity and a willingness to learn and serve on the part of non-indigenous incumbents. When this goes wrong pastorally, it can set a congregation back years.

assisted them in rebuilding a derelict church. I shadowed them in their cultural experiences too, and got to speak with them about why they were doing it and what their impressions



Figure 12. Myself getting stuck in

of the Lakota and the Diocese were. There is a delicate balance in these situations being held between it being a valuable incentive to the missionaries whilst being respectful and genuinely fruitful for the people who live on the reservation too. Mthr. Ellen and Fr. Kurt were keen to remind groups that on the reservation, whatever they did would reflect on them and be testimony about them, long after the mission group had left.



Figure 13. New roof, new paint, new porch!

Whilst I was on the Cheyenne River reservation I stayed with a local journalist and it was helpful to shadow her for a time in the newspaper office (which most reservations and frankly, towns, in the state do not have) to learn about the community. It had been a very white town in the past, which explained its 'main street' layout with slightly more infrastructure than I was used to seeing on a reservation, along with the investment in chain supermarkets and such. Often chain stores will not open on a reservation, even though people there are desperate for work. The difficulty then is finding anyone with the ability and funds to start a small business. This vicious cycle was a common pattern on reservations.



Figure 14. An Altar in one of the churches in Cheyenne River. Wakan means Holy.

It had just been 'Orange Shirt Day' when I arrived.¹¹ This day is a day of commemoration and reconciliation surrounding the harm done by residential (often church run) schools. There had been a parade down the main street for it and people were still wearing their shirts and displaying

their bumper stickers. I was glad to hear the church had held an evening of sharing and listening and was at the heart of those efforts of reconciliation in this town. Similarly, an important day among the indigenous populations is Red Dress Day¹² which raises awareness of the ongoing crisis of violence against indigenous women, girls and two-spirit people.¹³

There is rightly much in the cycle of the year to commemorate and remember the violence, oppression and abuse that tragically mark the history of the Lakota and it is difficult as church to face up to the historical responsibility and work for the good and renewal of hope in such communities. Whilst it is difficult, it is a task many I saw there undertaking and trying incredibly hard to measure up to. Many Lakota are Christian by birth now and are second, third or fourth generation Christians. Often, they do not know their language or their traditional ways. There is a community there now that needs serving in this immediate sense, and there is the wider community that has much need and has been grievously harmed. Engaging in this difficult mission field with grace, humility and commitment is the least, it seems to me, that can be done in the name of Christ there.



Figure 15. A mural on the Cheyenne River reservation. Mitakuye Oyasin means we are all related, or family.

¹¹ <https://orangeshirtday.org>

¹² <https://humanrights.novascotia.ca/news-events/news/2023/red-dress-day#:~:text=Red%20Dress%20Day%20is%20a,have%20been%20harmed%20or%20lost>

¹³ <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Two-spirit>

Final Remarks

Witnessing such different ministries across the state and Diocese of South Dakota has given me a much wider understanding of the contemporary Lakota situation as well as the situation of the ECUSA in this unique context. I am so very grateful for the rich time and the many opportunities that the American Memorial Travel Grant afforded me on this trip. Witnessing and experiencing contextual mission, outreach and service in a non-white majority landscape has been deeply formative and has certainly impacted my understanding of mission in my own context.

I am grateful for the legacy opportunities emerging from this trip such as parish and diocesan talks (which have allowed for missional giving to the Black Horse Ranch project thus far), the placement exchange with my theological college and ongoing relationships and communications between the Dioceses and their yoked parishes. This will no doubt bear fruit that cannot yet be fully imagined. It is entirely possible I end up serving out there myself one day!



Figure 16. Statue entitled 'Dignity'



Figure 17. The buffalo or tatanka in Lakota, traditionally revered as a holy animal



Figure 18. The Black Hills near Pine Ridge



Figure 19. A stunning mural in the Cathedral in Sioux Falls showing the transmission of the Gospel from Christ through Paul, Alban, Cranmer and others through to Fr. Deloria the first Lakota priest