Church Family

At the beginning of this year, Holy Spirit laid on my heart the story of Nehemiah. Nehemiah was broken over the state of Jerusalem; the walls had been torn down, the city and its people left unprotected and desolate. In his brokenness, he cried out to God, and God gave him the task of rebuilding the wall and restoring the City of David, the royal city of Israel. The task was not easy and came with much opposition from both within the congregation of Israel and from outside foreigners. The daily persecution, threats, and strife got so intense that Nehemiah had to deliver the following instructions to those building the wall:

“The laborers carried on their work with one hand supporting their load and one hand holding a weapon.” Nehemiah 4:17

They had to be vigilant in their guard, persistent in their work, and faithful to their God, if ever the great task was to be completed. And it was completed. Within 52 days (an impossible timeframe), the burned down, torn apart wall was completely rebuilt, the city of David was restored, and God received all the Glory!

“When our enemies and the surrounding nations heard about it, they were frightened and humiliated. They realized this work had been done with the help of our God.” Nehemiah 6:16

I believe the words of Nehemiah 4:17 are God’s instructions to our Church Family for this year. Over the last several years, we have been tasked with the grand goal of building His Church here in Oglala, and we have been diligent in this endeavor. Through our small groups, Agape Sundays, prayer meetings, etc., we have been “building this wall.” But just like with Nehemiah, as we have been about the work, persecutions, threats, and trials have increased. Over the last few months alone, we have been attacked in the media, lost a dear Brother to alcoholism at the age of 27, and felt the sting of rejection from those we count as Brothers and Sisters in Christ. But at the same time, God has been faithful to bring growth to those we count as Brothers and Sisters in Christ. But at the age of 27, and felt the sting of rejection from both within the congregation of Israel and from outside foreigners. The daily persecution, threats, and strife got so intense that Nehemiah had to deliver the following instructions to those building the wall:

So we will stay vigilant in our guard, persistent in our work, and faithful to our Jesus, “with one hand supporting their load and one hand holding a weapon.” And doing so, we know that He will remain Faithful (because Faithful is Who He Is), and that He will finish the work He started here in Oglala, in the Church and in the community. With that, as God does the impossible, only He will get the Glory!

We appreciate you all your faithful praying, your loving support and your constant encouragement have lifted our heads and strengthened our hearts more often than you realize. Please continue to pray that Holy Spirit will accomplish His great work of convicting of sin and revealing Jesus as He is. May Jesus show the people in our community that they were created for a purpose, to love and be loved by Him, and to worship and glorify Him forever.

Sincerely in Jesus, Pastor Eric & Elsa and Matilda Sutton

Youth Ministry

Youth ministry takes on many different roles. I just finished my first year of teaching the Bible to the 2nd/3rd & 5th-7th graders at Oyate Christian School in Oglala. While biblical “head knowledge” might be important academically speaking, turning that into “heart knowledge” of Christ is my true and ultimate goal for the classroom. I am praying for ever better ways and godly anointing to impact the students with God’s truth. We actually just got back from a 4-day field trip to Colorado where nothing happened as planned. Mary and I thought though that amidst all these crazinesses of life, our students were able to witness how God works out bad for good to those who love Him. Teaching His Word definitely becomes the most impactful by our Christ-like, real-life example.

Coming up soon again is the Warrior Leadership Summit summer youth camp. Please pray for this event (July 1-6, 2019) and also for all our other upcoming summer outreaches in the Oglala community.

Leon & Mary Schwartz, Youth Leaders

Kids’ Church and Royal Rangers

The Oglala children are looking forward to summer with upcoming VBSs, camp outs, and swim trips. Over the long, cold winter, the Royal Ranger boys have perfected their archery skills and built Pine Wood Derby cars. The Kids’ Church kids participated in our annual Christmas musical, enjoyed cozy sleepovers, and were taught God’s Truth & Love in so many ways.

Please continue to pray with us for laborers in the field. We will have a couple interns this summer to help with daily open gym etc. but are still looking for new staff to join us in this precious ministry, to reach the Oglala community (from the young ones on) for Christ!

Outreach

Greetings & blessings from the Morales family. We’re coming close to 2 years now serving as Outreach pastors at the Rec Center and 5 years on the reservation. It hasn’t been easy or always joyful, but God has been faithful to provide and use us in various ways.

As some of you know, I (Elliot) minister every Thursday to the inmates in Pine Ridge jail along with one of the members of our church, David Blacksmith. Occasionally we have really good meetings where the men seem engaged and touched by God, and other times not so much. Nonetheless we trust that God is working, whether we can see it or not. With the help of the other pastors, I’ve been training David and another member of our church, Lewis Crazy Thunder, to lead this jail outreach as well as the hospital prayer ministry and door-to-door evangelism in Oglala. I was really proud of them recently when they led a team from Germany in the above mentioned outreaches. These brothers have really grown in their ability to minister as well as lead. David has preached several times in jail and even at our Sunday church service. We have also been meeting with an inmate who desires to follow Jesus and to find complete freedom from drug addiction and alcoholism. He even wants to go to bible college after treatment and become an evangelist to reach his own Native people for Christ.

Please pray for these ministries and for the Ladies’ Bible Study my wife co-leads with Elsa. Thank you!

Elliot & Crystal Morales
Heidi’s Notes

In fall of 2018, an older Lakota lady from our church family, Kate Kindle, asked me if I would start taking her to the Oglala Sioux Lakota nursing home once in a while so she could share the Gospel with the elders in their own Lakota language. She shared with me that the Scripture comes even more alive when they hear in their (and her) native tongue. I felt like I should do this, and so we went there one day and arranged to visit regularly. We wanted to visit in the rooms, so because we are not family members, they made us do background checks. We laughed about that with each other because between her being a former Wesleyan pastor and my Mennonite background, these must have been the easiest background checks ever!

At first I thought I would just be Kate’s driver and hang out while she visited with people, but God had other plans. Pretty soon we were ministering together, with her reading Scriptures and praying in Lakota, sometimes in English, and me singing in Lakota (to my best ability). We don’t have anything planned for our visits ahead of time except what Scripture verses we will use that day; the Holy Spirit leads us in sharing His Word together. Every week we meet new people who would like us to visit with them also, and it is neat to get to know them and listen to their stories. Although I was apprehensive at first to do this outreach, I am thankful now that the Lord gave Kate and I this opportunity. Please pray for the salvation of our Lakota elders who do not know Him yet.

Gardening is off to a slow start this year as it just won’t stop snowing. But spring along with warm weather will come, and I and the kids will get to business as soon as we can, praying that we will get no hail storms this summer! Moisture should be plentiful as the snow drifts were higher than my garden fence more than once this winter.

Thank you all for your encouragement, prayers, and financial support in this work God has given me.

Heidi Martin