

This summer, I had the honor to lead groups of SEPA Synod youth and adults on two servant trips. One team traveled to South Dakota and another to Costa Rica. The people we met there, the memories that were made and the impact on each of our faith lives are hard to put into words. For those of you who journeyed with us and for those who did not, I wanted to share one servant's perspective of our amazing and life changing experience in South Dakota. There are 101 other stories like hers from South Dakota and 27 stories from the Costa Rica servants. I pray that if you know these other servants that you ask them to share their stories with you.

Molly Beck Dean

Youth Ministry Specialist

Changing the world, one person at a time

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Though poor in material possessions, the Lakota (Sioux) Indians I recently met and worked with are rich in spirit and love of their heritage.

In early July I joined 101 youth and adults on a 12-day trip to the Rosebud and Crow Creek reservations, sponsored by the Southeastern Pennsylvania Synod of the ELCA (Evangelical Lutheran Church of America). I was part of a group of 13 from St. Paul's Lutheran in Doylestown, who traveled to the Rosebud.

We spent the weekends before and after our reservation experience in Rapid City, bonding as a group while visiting Mt. Rushmore, Custer State Park, Crazy Horse Memorial, and the Badlands. But the intervening days are the ones we will always cherish.

While on the Rosebud, we lived in two houses belonging to Tree of Life, a Methodist mission, and we met each morning at 7:30 to get our assignments. Some worked with children at a day camp in the little community of Two Strike. The rest of us performed various construction jobs. Although most of us had little experience, we made up in enthusiasm what we lacked in expertise.

Some of us repaired the Powwow grounds in the town of Mission—and at the end of the week, the tribe honored us by inviting to dance with them at their annual powwow—a thrilling experience!

The work wasn't easy, but we knew it was important. We built a wheelchair ramp on a home for a young man who otherwise spent his days inside until someone could carry him down the steps. We dug a drainage ditch around the home of 76-year old Pauline Black Wolf because her home had actually slid out of place after several heavy rainstorms. We installed two thermal windows in Henrietta White Thunder's home and painted and did repairs to the Boys' and Girls' Club in Mission.

A highlight was the new playground we built for the children of Two Strike, across the street from the building where the day camp was held.

Little children everywhere have a way of wrapping their tiny fingers around your heart and pulling you into their lives. One boy, about 6 or 7, did just that to my daughter and one of her friends. Rylan Black Spotted Horse has chocolate brown eyes that sparkle under his jet black hair. He joked and played with our youth and always had a wide grin on his face. But his real life was brought home to Liz and the others when he noticed they all wore “different shirts every day.” They agreed with him and he said, “But I wear the same one because I lost my other one.”

His words and first-hand observations of life on the reservation have led many of our youth to start planning clothing and toy drives for their young Lakota friends.

At the end of each day, we came together in devotions and in small groups to discuss our days’ highs and lows.

When some of us expressed feelings that we weren’t helping enough, or thought out loud that we weren’t really making a difference, our leader, Molly Beck Dean, reminded us that the world is changed “one at a time...one at a time.”

And we realized that she was right. That our efforts, no matter how small we may have felt they were, were appreciated and did make a difference in someone’s life.

Pauline Black Wolf will no longer fear a heavy rainstorm, and Henrietta White Thunder’s home will be warmer this winter. And the children of Two Strike will perhaps remember the kids from Pennsylvania who built them a new playground, read with them, and played games with them for a few days. We know we will always remember them.