

# SPR 2019 MISSION TRIP JOURNAL

*In August 2019, the St. Paul & the Redeemer youth group traveled to Minneapolis and St. Paul, Minnesota, to learn from urban Indigenous community organizations and explore Native American history, policy, and self-determination. Each night, the youth took turns writing reflections on the day's events.*

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## **Day 1: What Is Our History?**

**Sunday, August 18, 2019**

**Teagan Bigger**

We're off! Today was our first official mission trip day, and the topic was discussing history. What history were we taught? What history do we "know"? What is our history?

After a wonderful sendoff from all the people at St. Paul & the Redeemer, we hopped into our cars to start on the wonderful journey that is and will be this week here in the Twin Cities. During the approximately six-hour drive from the church, we dove into the week by listening to podcasts on Indigenous people and language revitalization efforts. We listened and learned about how native Hawaiians have reclaimed their language and made strides to increase the number of fluent speakers in an episode of NPR's *Code Switch*. Then, after a short—all right, hours-long—discussion break, we started listening to Crooked Media's *This Land*, a podcast about the Supreme Court case of the murder of a Native man by a Native man on Native land. (More to come from this series!)

After we arrived and got settled in at our wonderful host church, St. John the Evangelist Episcopal Church, we ate a scrumptious meal at Bole Ethiopian Cuisine in St. Paul. For the night's devotion, we started by watching a video made by

the Episcopal Church about Indigenous people and the church's interaction with them. After a thought-provoking and rich conversation on the history of the Doctrine of Discovery and what it means for us today, we finished our devotions and "went to bed."

## **Day 2: Restorative Justice**

**Monday, August 19, 2019**

**Ari Karafiol**

The group kicked off our first day by visiting Restorative Justice Community Action. We met them at St. Mark's Episcopal Cathedral. RJCA is an organization centered on implementing restorative justice practices in Minnesota as an alternative to the traditional criminal justice system, focused on healing and restoration rather than punishment. While there, we participated in a training in restorative justice practices.

At the beginning of our training, we did an exercise where each person took a stone from the middle of our group circle and wrote a value that we recognize as critical either in ourselves or in the people we encounter: examples included Caring, Compassion, Strength, Generosity, and Humor. We then agreed on Trust and Hope as being two additional values important to center in our dialogue and work throughout the week, and

placed the stones in an inner circle so that they were literally centered within our group.

We listened to community and administrative members of RJCA and explored questions such as “What role does community play in justice?” and “When you were harmed, what did you need?”

Following our training with RJCA, the group got lunch at a Palestinian restaurant (woot woot, centering Indigenous and occupied communities around the world!) and went for a tour of the Minnesota Indian Women’s Resource Center, an organization which centers Native women through a variety of programs, from Two-Spirit support groups to daycare services to an outpatient clinic for chemical dependency. Talking to the leaders at the center (one of whom had her one-year-old daughter with her because she’s allowed to bring her baby to work as an alternative to parental leave!), we learned more about seeking pan-Indian liberation while maintaining boundaries across cultural and geographic differences, how the MIWRC centers Native people without violating their role as a public organization, and more!

We then went to a Hmong (a group indigenous to Vietnam, China, and Laos, and a people largely represented in the Twin Cities) restaurant to get pho before heading back to our host church to watch and discuss the *Wyatt Cenac’s Problem Areas* episode on restorative justice.

One thing that I’ve been grappling with a lot is the idea of trust in restorative justice, since the practice by nature is outside of the criminal justice system, which all of us living in the United States have been taught is the only existing and possible system of justice. It’s incredibly challenging to put trust in a world that doesn’t currently exist and that we can’t

perfectly envision. I, for all my faith, still cannot crisply envision a world without prisons, without police.

But then I remember that we as humans put trust in things we cannot see all the time. You put trust in something you can’t see when you choose to have and raise a child. You trust in the strength of your relationship with your partner if you choose to marry them, even though you can’t see the future. Even the garden at SPR is an act of trust, trusting in the community and the environment to collaborate and allow produce to grow.

We cannot perfectly see any of these futures, and so we commit to working hard and continuing to adapt in order to maintain that trust. And it doesn’t always work out: Children and parents become estranged, partners separate, and plants wither. But we continue to believe that making those commitments and investing that trust is better than nothing at all.

Restorative justice will never be perfect, but it doesn’t have to be for us to believe in dismantling the criminal justice system and starting something new. We must believe that coming to the table from a place of faith and of trust, not just in spite of but *because* of the inherent imperfections of humanity, is better than doing nothing at all.

### **Day 3: Native Arts & Culture**

**Tuesday, August 20, 2019**

**Julia Rademacher-Wedd**

Today we had a nice, slow morning. We did not leave our church basement home until almost noon, and I think it says something about the day that sleeping in wasn’t even the best part. Our first stop was the Gatherings Cafe at the Minneapolis

American Indian Center, where we ate deliciously prepared Indigenous foods and some of us tried bison meat for the first time. While waiting for our lunch, we also visited Two Rivers Gallery (also housed in the MAIC), where a collection entitled *Remembrance* depicted Native people in vibrant watercolors, engaged in traditional practices that are important to the artist. Back at the cafe, we got to meet a chef named Ben, who graciously spoke to us about the importance of healthy and locally sourced foods that continually sustain people and communities.

We used our delicata-squash-sauteed-in-maple-syrup-and-cinnamon (you should try it!)-derived energy to walk the very short distance to the Native American Community Development Institute and meet with Robert Lilligren, the president of NACDI, and Angela Two Stars, the arts director for the All My Relations Gallery. They prepared the gallery (which is in the NACDI building) for our conversation by burning sage in an abalone shell to cleanse the space. We sat in a circle all afternoon and listened to Robert and Angela talk about Native history in Minnesota, Indigenous experiences worldwide, and the current Native community in Minneapolis. We were invited to ask questions, and I was particularly interested in the physical Native community that exists in the Twin Cities—there is an actual Native neighborhood—and why that does not exist as visibly in places like Chicago.

It was powerful to see what happens when communities build service agencies and community centers and stay near each other; the Native community in Minneapolis recently ceremonially dismantled a giant piece of art (*Scaffold*) that was based on the scaffold which the US government used to hang 38+2 Dakota men in

Makato, MN in 1862. This artwork triggered intergenerational trauma stemming from the violence of the state against Native people, and community members met with the gallery that was showing the piece to explain why it was so hurtful and initiate its deconstruction. Throughout our conversation, people involved with NACDI came through and said hi. We met someone who grew up in Chicago, an artist from Oklahoma who was working with the gallery, and a member of the White Earth Band of Ojibwe, who was working on changes to her tribe's constitution.

After meeting so many wonderfully welcoming people, we headed back to the MAIC, where we were welcomed again for a hoop dancing class. We learned that the hoop we were learning to master symbolizes the world. Around the hoop's edge, all of our relations, humans, animals, plants, the moon, the stars, are present in the circle, but when the hoop is rotated so that its perimeter is parallel to the ground, we see that we are all on the same plane and are therefore equally important. Our awesome instructor discussed physics, chemistry, and geometry while also emphasizing the inspiration for each shape, such as an eagle or butterfly, and the traditional beliefs about the benefits of hoop dancing. The other students in the class, who had much more experience than we did, welcomed us into the class even though we slowed it down, and at the end, we got to see them perform a demonstration. The other students were also generationally diverse, and it was so much fun to share space and dance with them. After breaking a sweat at dance class, we headed to the best Somali restaurant in town for dinner. I am so sorry that you cannot taste it for yourself.

After some really amazing spiced tea, we headed back to church and watched some clips from the congressional hearing this summer on reparations for American descendants of slaves. We discussed the arguments we heard against reparations and the potential of the system of liberation for one group to affect the liberation of another. By this point we were all very sleepy, as we had a very long and joyful day. We learned a great deal and were welcomed by so many people! We got to use our bodies in a way that is traditional in tribes across the United States, and we are all going to think about reparations differently next time we discuss them with others. We did so much, and it took me a long time to write about it, so I must away to bed. Thanks for checking up on us! How was your Tuesday?

**Day 4: Cultural Fusion & Queering the Narrative**  
**Wednesday, August 21, 2019**  
**James Pruitt**

Although today's post will be on queering the narrative, I think it will be helpful for me to stick to a narrative. (What's "queering the narrative," you ask? Well, it is a term used to describe breaking boundaries or thinking outside the box. Oftentimes, this complicates the way we think about solutions by breaking pre-conceived notions, while also bringing more depth to an issue.) Today, we began with a quick visit to Birchbark Books and Native Arts, a Native-centered bookstore in Minneapolis. Native author Louise Erdrich founded the store in 2000 as a community bookstore. I personally found the non-fiction section very interesting, and ended up picking up a copy of *An Indigenous Peoples' History of the United States*.

Afterwards, we went to the Midtown Global Market to pick up lunch, which we brought over to a predominantly Native Catholic Church, Church Of Gichitwaa Kateri, to eat with Claire and Larry, our hosts. We shared tamales with them in the midst of a yearly backpack drive run by the church. Then we went into the sanctuary and talked about everything from Anishinaabe treaty rights to cultural fusion in Catholicism—the reason we came to talk to Larry and Claire in the first place. To prepare for our conversation, Larry smudged the room with sage (a sacred medicine plant). He said this is a tradition that is done to prepare both the space and the people for a sacred ceremony. What we saw after the smoke cleared was a beautiful theological mosaic with tiles of all shapes and sizes. The center piece of this mosaic was a medicine lodge made out of red willow branches, with bags of medicine tied onto it. Inside this holy site was a bear skin used to keep the Eucharist materials and other important artifacts. The lodge itself is taken down and ceremonially rebuilt during Holy Week.

We proceeded to follow up this meeting with a visit to the Minneapolis Institute of Art, where we looked around for ways museums can work on decolonizing as institutions. For example, the museum had traditional medicine outside the door to its Americas exhibit. While wandering around the museum, I encountered an exhibit dedicated to the work of Mexican photographer Graciela Iturbide. The work was really aligned with the theme of the day: queering the narrative. The pictures she took were able to simultaneously highlight contradictions in Mexican (and by extension American) culture and also somehow take said contradictions and paint them into a clear portrait of a society, one institution at a time.

For dinner we wrapped up the day by learning about the Karen (pronounced "kah-REN") people of Myanmar by eating dinner at a local Karen restaurant. The fried rice there is excellent!

### **Day 5: Dakota 38+2**

**Thursday, August 22, 2019**

**Matthew Erlec and Ben Pruitt**

*Matthew:*

On Thursday, we kicked off our day with a trip back to the Native American Indian Community Development Initiative building to visit the connected café, called Powwow Grounds. Here, we got beverages such as hot chocolate, tea, and coffee, as well as some food. Outside was a community farmers' market centered on Native communities (Four Sisters Farmers Market), consisting of a variety of booths for local organizations. Some were food-related, but there were also booths for the Minnesota Public Schools and another organization we had learned about earlier in the week, called Dream of Wild Health. This is a group that teaches Native people about the importance of healthy food and how to grow this food effectively on your own. For lunch, we had "Indian tacos" with frybread from the market.

*Ben:*

We then went to a store called Northland Visions Beads & Supplies that sold Native American art and jewelry. After that, we went to the Minnesota State Fair, where we encountered a butter sculpture, foot-long corndogs, an all-you-can-drink milk bar, deep-fried Oreos, and fried cheese on a stick.

*Both:*

We then drove to spend our last night camping in Minneopa State Park, where 38 Sioux men were hanged in the largest mass hanging in U.S. history.

At the campsite, we listened to the *This American Life* episode "Little War on The Prairie" on Friday morning. As we listened, we reflected on the mass execution that happened nearby and the Dakota War as a whole, discussing it in the context of the Bible passage Matthew 7:1-6: "Don't judge, so that you won't be judged. You'll receive the same judgment you give. Whatever you deal out will be dealt out to you. Why do you see the splinter that's in your brother's or sister's eye, but don't notice the log in your own eye? How can you say to your brother or sister, 'Let me take the splinter out of your eye,' when there's a log in your eye? You deceive yourself! First take the log out of your eye, and then you'll see clearly to take the splinter out of your brother's or sister's eye."

From this, we learned that we need to truly reflect upon ourselves and how we are contributing (through our complicity) to the erasure of Indigenous narratives before we critique others. We must acknowledge that this land is stolen, and Native people continue to be harmed. Then, we must take action in creating a relationship with them and restoring their communities.

### **Day 6: Reflections on the Journey**

**Friday, August 23, 2019**

**Martha Pruitt**

We're home!

This week, we learned about Native cultures, the impact of colonialism, and the atrocities that Native people have survived. We learned about restorative justice and its impact and potential. We visited and supported Native-owned stores, such as Northland Visions Beads & Supplies and Birchbark Books and Native Arts ... and so much more. We topped off the week with a camping trip in a state park, close

to which is the site of the Dakota 38+2 hanging, and learned about its impact on people's lives. On a lighter note, we enjoyed s'mores around a fire (and had a heck of a time pitching tents), with some of us freezing at night.

I was the youngest member of the youth group on this trip and also the only first-timer, so in case you're wondering, here's my review of SPR youth mission trips: "10/10 would do again." Martha out!

## Recommended Resources

### Listen:

- [E Ola Ka 'Olelo Hawai'i](#)
- [This Land](#) (all episodes)
- [All My Relations](#) (all episodes)
- [Ideas from CBC Radio](#): Revisiting Thomas Massey's Lectures, Justicia Canadiana, Reconciliation Can't Happen Without Reclamation of Land
- [Frank Waln on Understanding the Native American Experience Through Hip Hop](#)
- [How Might Trump's Food Box Plan Affect Health? Native Americans Know All Too Well](#)
- [Little War on the Prairie](#)

### Read:

- *Indian Country Today*: [Do You Prefer "Native American" or "American Indian"?](#)
- *Geez Magazine*: [Decolonization Issue & Study Guide](#)
- *Episcopal News Service*: [Wyoming Ordains Its First Native American Female Priest](#)
- *Episcopal Church*: [Standing With Standing Rock Taught Episcopalians About Solidarity](#)

- *Indian Country Today*: [The Traumatic True History and Name List of the Dakota 38](#)

### Watch:

- [The Episcopal Church Exposes the Doctrine of Discovery](#)
- [First Speakers: Restoring the Ojibwe Language](#)
- [Dakota 38](#)
- [Miss Navajo](#)

### Thank you to our mission partners in the Twin Cities!

- St. John the Evangelist Episcopal Church
- Church Of Gichitwaa Kateri
- Restorative Justice Community Action
- Minneapolis American Indian Center
- Minnesota Indian Women's Resource Center
- Native American Community Development Institute