

CHURCH FAMILY

"So we, being many, are one body in Christ, and individually members of one another."

~ Romans 12:5 ~

The last months have been very interesting for our family. Our son Jonathan was born in April, my dad Gary was diagnosed with pancreatic cancer in June, our daughter Matilda started kindergarten in August, and just last week, Oct 11th, Ela and I celebrated nine years of marriage. There have been many highs and some very low lows, but our Lord Jesus has been faithful through it all.

With all of this going on in my life, the concept of family has been on my mind a lot lately. What and who is family? Why family? What's the purpose or idea of an ideal family? Those questions are hard to answer because in my experience in life and ministry, family can mean/be a lot of things. It can be a blessing or a curse, a strength or a weakness, a source of love or a source of hate. To narrow it down and say family is like "this" or "that" would be too simplistic and naïve; there are way too many variables involved. But what I can say from my own experience and what I see in Scripture is that family, at its base level, is a place of belonging. **Family means I belong.**

Is this how we see the Church? A place of belonging? Family? I can say with confidence that this is how Jesus sees His Church—as His very own family. Remember the time when Jesus's earthly mother Mary and His brothers went to see Him? Jesus's response was, "My mother and My brothers are these who hear the word of God and do it" (Luke 8:21). Seems harsh towards Mary, right? Obviously, Jesus loved His mother, but He was making a point here. He came to establish a new family, an eternal family with God as the Good Father and with those who are born again through faith in Jesus as His sons and daughters. Jesus also references this new family when Peter asked him about all that they had left behind to follow Him. Jesus answered that, "everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or wife or children or lands, for My name's sake, shall receive a hundredfold in this life, and inherit eternal life" (Matthew 19:29).

What a promise! And we as His Church are its fulfillment; we are the hundredfold fruition of this new family in Christ. With God as our Father, we are family and a place of belonging, now in this life and for all eternity!



Yet even while Scripture is full of this familial language leaving us with no doubt that God our Father desires family and that His Church is the fulfillment of that desire, the question remains, **is this how we see the Church?** Do we see it as a place of belonging? Do we see it as family? I believe for the most part we are happy with God being our Father and we His sons and daughters. The problem is that we don't see each other as family, truly bonded and belonging to each other. However, Paul says that we are "*individually members of one another*" (Romans 12:5). Simply put, he is telling us that as members of the family of God, we belong to one another. So like it or not, just as we belong to God our Father through Jesus, we belong to each other. That's Church Family as Scripture teaches and demonstrates.

I do not have the time or space to go through all the Biblical examples and directives on this subject. But hear me when I say that if you are a born-again follower of Jesus Christ, then we are family, we belong to each other. In fact, our churches need to be a place of belonging. People, both in and out of the church, are starving, craving, and dying to belong to something. We all want family; we all want to belong to something, and sometimes our need to belong can lead us to dark and broken places. Yet all the while, God in His merciful kindness created a family, His family, a place of Belonging where light, life and love reign and through Jesus, the Firstborn, He welcomes all.

Here in Oglala, we are convinced that we need to be family, His Family. And although we have learned that this is not easy and it takes a lot of intentionality and humility, we are committed to the process and recognize that it's only by His Grace that we can do it. Our people need it, we need it. Being His Family means that we belong.

We love you all and appreciate you. Thank you all for praying and supporting us here in Oglala. I want to send a personal thank you for those praying for my Dad, Gary; please continue to do so. Our Father God is Faithful! Sincerely in Jesus,

Pastor Eric & Ela Sutton with Matilda & Jonathan



YOUTH MINISTRY

Since our last newsletter in spring, we have been able to consistently keep the Rec gym open for two afternoons a week. In some ways, it feels like we are starting ministry all over again. Many of the Oglala youth who have been coming to the Rec over the last 20+ years are now sending their own children. There are a lot of new names to learn. There are gym rules to be re-enforced. There is a HUGE need for leadership and guidance, for friendship and trust to be re-established. Sometimes when I look at these children, I feel the burden of a shepherd; there are so many lost sheep...

I am still out there playing basketball, but I am slowing down and getting sore a lot quicker. I compare myself to an old lawnmower; when the mower was new it started right up, but after a while, you need to pull the draw cord several times and have a few false starts before it gets going. So we are praying for new young gym leaders. Will you please pray with us and ask for help for God's ministry in Oglala?

It is good to see a new generation of kids in the gym. If there was ever a time or generation that needed hope, it is this generation as they enter a world so divided and hurting. Please pray for the youth today.

Leon & Mary Schwartz

OUTREACH

Over the recent months, a couple different groups of visitors were able to join me in our weekly outreach to the men at Pine Ridge jail. I feel like God really used these visits as a blessing.

The first visitor brought his guitar and led worship for the men's Bible study group. We were touched to see the Holy Spirit minister to the hearts of the inmates. Several had tears in their eyes. At the end and to our amazement, our friend received applause, which really was an honor to God and wonderful proof of the power of worship music. Praise Jesus for this wonderful gift.

The second team that came to the jail with me was part of a men's group from Denver. They have been wanting to partner with us on the reservation and felt led to come up here. During their visit, one Lakota man that had attended the jail Bible study before gave his life to the Lord. He had followed both the traditional Lakota way but had also professed to believe in Jesus. After a conversation with one of the visitors from Denver, he made up his mind to surrender and to just follow Jesus. Praise God for his salvation!

Elliot & Crystal Morales, Outreach

HEIDI'S NOTES

- * One day a few weeks ago, a five year old girl walked up to me and said, "When the gym closes and you guys go home, God plays in here all by himself!"
- * Every day during open gym at 4:30 pm, we hand out a snack to the kids. The whole way up until 4:30 I get asked when snack is, what's 4:30, how many minutes is that, etc. One day a young boy asked when snack was. I replied at 4:30 and he said oh at 3:30. I said no at 4:30, and he said, "Oooohhh, you mean 400 thirty," and then he was satisfied.
- * Two boys go to Oyate Christian School in Oglala. I asked one how school was going and he answered, "Great! We sing 'My God is so big!'" Then I asked the other one what he had learned that day and he said there was a man that had a big boat and he put lots of animals on it and then it rained forever!

Kids are so funny. I love their perceptions of life and how they take it all in with awe and wonder. But it doesn't seem to take long until the troubles of life weigh them down and they get tough and hardened, even at a very young age. A little girl that is usually very happy seemed quiet and sad. She came up to me and said, "I dropped my tablet and my aunt said I'm stupid, then a couple more times she said I'm stupid." I wonder why harsh words like these always seem to stick more than words of praise?

It is a challenge to work with children, especially when they have so many negative influences speaking into their lives. However, I am reminded every day that Jesus gives life and that He wants each of these little ones as well as the 'I'm too cool for that' older ones to be His children and know our Heavenly Father through the power of the Holy Spirit.

Please pray that the hearts of our youth will be protected from the enemy so they can freely receive the love God has for them. Pray also for more laborers to minister to this age group in Oglala. I don't think my shoulders can push the merry-go-round full of kids many more times without one of my arms just breaking off. (: Also pray with me for courage, patience, mercy, and compassion that only come from the Holy Spirit as we minister in this difficult spiritual climate. I am grateful that we do not battle alone. Thank you!

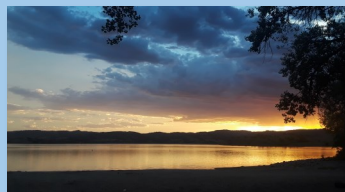
Heidi Martin



BULLETIN BOARD

CHURCH FAMILY NEWS

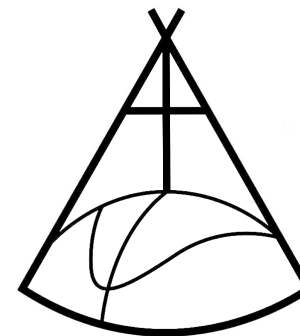
Being family, we enjoyed some new and special fellowship fun this year! Twice this summer, we got together at nearby Angostura Reservoir for a cook-out, beach time, volleyball and corn hole games. Too bad summer is (almost) over...



If you have checked our website lately, you may have noticed that we have not been posting updates as regularly as we used to. In fact, many of our old posts have been deleted, especially pictures. The tribal council asked that all ministries on Pine Ridge refrain from using pictures of Lakota youth, so we try to follow that directive.

PRAYER REQUESTS

- ♥ Thank you, God our Father, for making us Family, for choosing us to belong with You and with each other. What a privilege!
- ♥ Thank God for our Oglala Church Family and for the strength, joy, love, fellowship, and fun (and frustrations and corrections, too!) that we give to and receive from each other
- ♥ Thank God for the opportunity to have the Rec gym open again, and for His continued provision and protection for our ministry
- ♥ Please pray for our Church Family to grow ever deeper & bigger, and to love even more
- ♥ Pray for new, young(ish-er ☺) staff for our Rec team, especially for help with open gym
- ♥ Pray for our other daily ministry activities: Bible studies, jail outreach, discipleship, etc.
- ♥ Pray for the upcoming tribal elections that Jesus would lead, reign and give wisdom
- ♥ Pray for our upcoming Christmas Outreach for provision, good weather, and open hearts to receive the one true gift: Christ the Savior



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- TIPI WAKAN -

A Light In The Darkness



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