

## **Our Journey to God through the People of Rosebud, South Dakota**

At the end of last July on a bright and sunny Saturday morning, 30 of us loaded up four small and tightly packed suburbans to make the long and hot trip to Rosebud, South Dakota. We made our way through Wisconsin and Minnesota, and as we crossed each state border the temperature seemed to increase more and more. Getting out of the car in Chamberlain, SD was the first of many hot days in the state that we would experience. The next day we went sightseeing in historic Wall Drug, and then finished the eventful day with an extremely long and dreadfully hot (110° to be exact) hike through the Badlands. We then made the final trip to Rosebud where we arrived to the place we would call home for the next week.

Over the next four days, we had different tasks that needed to be done. For two days, we painted houses or community centers around the area. We met many new people, ranging from Michael J. who gave us fresh water on a hot day, to the nice guy at the Gus Stop who gave us all free soda. A small group of us got to meet Nancy, the fast paced lady from New York who came to live in the Dakotas to fix computers for people who couldn't afford them. All of them affected each of us in a huge way, just by being themselves.

For the other two days we all got to experience kids club, where the kids came and got a chance to grow closer to God and have fun together. Many of us were deeply touched by the children and their simple ways. Almost instantly when they arrived they were next to one of us asking for a piggyback ride. On Thursday, we got to have a water fight with them behind the Boys and Girls Club, and the happiness that was written across their faces was one of the most rewarding things we had experienced on the whole trip.

Each night, we all had an activity together that helped to grow closer together. On Monday night, we went to the SunDance festival where we met Don Moccasin and learned about

the Indian culture and how to build a Tipi. Tuesday night was the poverty talk, and we all learned what it would be like to budget with only a small amount of money. Wednesday night we went to a charismatic mass where we prayed and worshipped in a completely different way than we ever had before. On our last night in Mission, we went on a beautiful hike in Niobrara, Nebraska. Although the hike wasn't as much fun as the hike through the badlands, we all still put on a smile and loved it at the same time.

Along with the hike in Nebraska, we also had a session with our group from Newman. We prayed together as a group, and then individually with one of the chaperones. While praying individually, one of the chaperones washed our feet. Many tears were shed that night as we prepared to head back to our normal and luxurious lives. We realized for the first time that we had made a difference to some people, and that difference could never be forgotten. Many of us stayed up late that night with the people we had met from other groups, because we knew that we probably wouldn't be seeing them again. The week had gone by so fast, and when it had ended we were all touched by what we had done and what we had experienced. We thanked God for granting us the great experience, and through the trip some of us were even able to find God.

In the end and looking back on it, I wouldn't trade my experiences in South Dakota for anything, because they made me a better person. The people there were so faithful and full of God that they helped me to realize what the important things in life were. They were no longer what clothes I wore or what car I drove, it was who I was as a person. I can never forget that lesson, and I thank the people of Rosebud for helping me to see that.

Pamela Buntin