

TRINITY BIBLE COLLEGE & GRADUATE SCHOOL

STRATEGIES FOR EFFECTIVE NATIVE AMERICAN MINISTRIES:
A Qualitative Study and Historical Research of the Church's
Successes and Failures on the Rosebud Reservation

BY
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A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment for the degree
Master of Arts Degree of Practical Theology in Rural Ministry

To the faculty of
Trinity Bible College and Graduate School

MAY 2020

*Dedicated to Mercy, Josiah, Grace, Titus, and Praise.
May you carry God's presence and love wherever you go!*

Acknowledgments

I would like to express my deep appreciation to the Holy Spirit who burdened my heart for the Native American people. I have said all along that this was Your paper, *Abba Father*, as long as I stayed in sync with You, it gets written. I would also like to thank my husband who has encouraged me (sometimes pushed me) even while he wrote his own thesis. Paul, thank you for doing this together and not letting me quit. Next, I could never thank my children, Mercy, Josiah, Grace, Titus, and Praise enough. We started this journey with a solar eclipse (that we had planned to watch together) and ended it with an unprecedented pandemic (with seven people under one roof online doing elementary, junior high, high school, undergraduate, and graduate-level schooling). You have each sacrificed time together and having your parents at special events. Thank you for all your encouragement, support, extra help (both around the house and computer expertise), and for taking care of each other. I love you to the moon and back!

I would like to thank my classmates in this first year of rural ministry masters at Trinity. Your encouragement, discussions, coaching, and humor enriched this learning experience. Thank you to all the teachers, host churches, pastors, and many more that made the unique experience of classes in different ministry settings possible. Thank you to Dwight and Nadine Sandoz who have always set the goal high and believed I could attain it. I would not have entertained the thought of a master's degree without you. Thank you to Trinity, Dr. Paul and Dr. Carol Alexander, Dr. Scott Townsend, and the rest of the graduate school team for believing in rural ministry enough to offer a master's degree. Thank you to our Crossroads Assembly of God family and our extended family that supported us through prayer, encouragement, childcare, and financial gifts. You are each appreciated! Finally, thank you to each person who consented to an interview. You are truly heroes of faith and I have learned from each one of you!

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Abstract

This study addresses the obstacles and problems in making Christ known among the Native American people and attempts to identify key principles for successful, long-lasting ministry on the reservation. Part one of the paper includes a brief history of the Rosebud Reservation along with an analysis of main issues affecting Native American ministry, followed by a theological review, and concluding with a definition of successful ministry among the Native Americans. Part two examines qualitative research through interviews from Rosebud Reservation ministry leaders followed by additional interviews of ministers of Native American ministries on various reservations. The study concludes with possible principles and suggestions for successful ministry on the Rosebud Reservation as defined in the first part of the thesis.

Thesis Statement

Using qualitative research and interviews, this thesis endeavors to answer the question of what successful ministry looks like on the Native American reservations and suggest strategies that may be procured as a model of ministry to reach the communities on the Rosebud Reservation.

STRATEGIES FOR EFFECTIVE NATIVE AMERICAN MINISTRIES

An Introduction to Ministry Challenges on the Rosebud Reservation

The Rosebud Reservation, home to the Sicangu (Brule) tribe of the Lakota Sioux, established its location along the southern border of South Dakota, east to the Pine Ridge Reservation in 1878.¹ The Native Partnership website states, “The Rosebud Reservation is economically depressed and ranks second (after the Pine Ridge Reservation) in per capita income on Plains Reservations. Unemployment sometimes reaches over 80%.”² Extended families often live together in houses of disrepair. Many Natives struggle with drugs and alcohol, furthering the disintegration of family units. Children often experienced shuffling from one house to another, growing up in confusion and uncertainty.³ A resurgence of culture and traditional religion over the past fifty years created a dichotomy of the past and present and a division between those who follow the *old ways*, Native religion and culture, and those who do not embrace this resurgence.

¹ Donovan Arleigh Sprague, *Rosebud Sioux: Images of America* (Charleston, SC: Arcadia Publishing, 2005), 8. “The Lakota reservations of today are about one half their original size from the Act of 1889. Rosebud Reservation was established in 1878 for the Sicangu and its headquarters was located at the town of Rosebud... The original eastern boundary of Rosebud Reservation was the east bank of the Missouri River... On the south end of Rosebud Reservation were Fort Niobrara, Spars, and Valentine, all in Nebraska. Fort Niobrara was established in 1880 to protect Nebraska settlers from the Sicangu and other bands. It was just northeast of Valentine, Nebraska.”

²“South Dakota: Rosebud Reservation: PWNA Resources,” South Dakota: Rosebud Reservation PWNA Resources - Partnership with Native Americans, accessed March 25, 2020, http://www.nativepartnership.org/site/PageNavigator/PWNA_Native_Reservations_Rosebud.

³Firsthand observation by the author while substitute teaching on the reservation - the school would often have to search for kids to find out which house they were to be picked up from.

Traditionalist Natives, those that adhere to the traditional religion and ways of the tribe, tend to distrust anyone they consider *white*, those of European descent or part of the dominant society.

Mistrust and assumptions formed around the sending culture hinders ministry efforts of people from *white* cultures. The Sioux culture appears complex and proud. Although they accept goods and food, they may discredit the donor's intent if they think the motivation came from pity or if the giver showed no intent of personally investing themselves. Short term ministry teams that come for a few days out of the summer leave feelings of abandonment, causing Natives to scorn their message. A common occurrence, community members may have a pile of items given by various ministries but remain internally unaffected by the gospel. Ministries that approach Natives with tangible gifts in hopes of drawing them into the church often leave exhausted and depleted physically as well as emotionally with few committed followers to show for their efforts.⁴

As Spirit-filled followers of Christ, miracles demonstrate the truth of beliefs. Jesus said, "These miraculous signs will accompany those who believe..."⁵ The incorporation of miracles in a worship service may demonstrate the truth of Christianity, but without a clear theological basis for understanding the identity of Jesus, the Sioux observer may account the miracle to a great *medicine man*, or holy man set apart as favored by the spirits to heal and see visions. Interviewee, Minister One, missionary to

⁴Observances from experiences and conversations with other ministers. For discussion on trust between Natives and White Christians please see Chapter Four of Craig Stephen Smith, *Whiteman's Gospel* (Winnipeg, Manitoba: Indian Life Books, 2006).

⁵ Mark 16:17-18, ESV.

the Rosebud Reservation, warns that although Natives and missionaries need the signs and wonders, ministers should provide practical teachings to prevent the misunderstanding that Jesus existed as merely a great medicine man.⁶ Teaching the needed theological foundations proves difficult when few if any community members attended Bible studies. Pentecostal signs and wonders provide affirmation of God's favor when paired with an understanding of Jesus as God incarnate through contextualized discipleship furnish a complete gospel message.

This research purposes through studying the past and present ministry on the Rosebud Reservation, to bring clarity of understanding and key methods that may motivate those who desire to minister on the reservation but don't know what to do as well as encourage those in current ministry. I ministered in an Alaskan Native village while in Bible College and youth pastored on the Nez Perce Reservation in Idaho with my husband as a newly married couple but found the Rosebud Reservation more difficult to build relationships and understand the culture. Our church located a few miles from the reservation and about 35 minutes from the town of Mission, South Dakota, has worked to develop relationships with an Assemblies of God Church for the Lakota Sioux. Many of the Lakota come from Mission to shop in Valentine and some Natives live in Valentine, Nebraska. Attracting and retaining Native Americans to the local congregation remains difficult in our experience.

God has increased my desire to reach the local population of all races in Valentine for Jesus. I desire to partner with the ministers on the reservation, but they do not seem to need more physical assistance in outreaches as current ministries already provide food

⁶Minister One interview with April Maunu, January 28, 2020.

and essential items. Disagreement over syncretism makes it difficult to partner with some ministries. This research considered methods to partner with ministers on the reservation. Occasional local Natives visit the Valentine Assembly of God, but not many stayed connected. The research included cultural reflection concerning how white churches and ministries may connect culturally to become more inviting. The perplexity and desire to partner with Native American ministries and reach Natives in my community spurred the writing of this thesis.

A resurgence of basic gospel sharing principles surfaced through literature reviews and interviews with ministers who work with Native Americans. The unique multiculturalism of the Rosebud Sioux requires the building of trust through meaningful relationships as a foundation for ministry. Interviewees indicated the need for spiritual healing of the intergenerational trauma that has prevented many Natives from finding their identity in Christ. Contextualized discipleship may provide the theology and tools Natives need to walk as committed followers of Christ. Discipleship should produce disciples that produce disciples. An increase of indigenous ministry on the reservations may facilitate an influx of Native souls transformed for Jesus. Part One of this thesis gives some foundational understanding of the issues affecting ministry on the Rosebud Reservation and the Theological basis for Native American ministries. Part Two reports on the interviews with various Native American ministers and the dialogue produced through their answers. The conclusion will procure some possible principles ministers on the reservations may implement to maximize effectiveness.

Research Methods

Research used a mix-method of literature and qualitative interviews. Uwe Flick wrote in *Introducing Research Methodology: A Beginner's Guide to Doing a Research Project*, "Today, there is a consensus amongst qualitative, as well as quantitative, researchers that you should be familiar with the ground on which you move and wish to make progress; finding new insights needs to be based on knowing what is known already."⁷ History books on Native Americans spirituality and Lakota Sioux culture provided insights into tribal ways and an understanding of the barriers to the gospel. Academic literature relevant to this research proved difficult to find, limiting the scope of this thesis. Twelve interviews with people ministering to Native Americans expanded the research. Seven of these interviews included ministers presently on the Rosebud and nearby Pineridge Reservation. They come from a mixture of backgrounds and denominations and provided an understanding of the challenges as well as the victories surrounding Native ministry in the present time. The research interviews included five ministers from other reservations because they have growing Native American congregations that provided important voices to ministry on the Rosebud Reservation. One of the ministry couples, although not currently serving on the Rosebud Reservation, ministered there for many years and planted the Assembly of God church in Mission. Another pastor came from Ireland, bringing a different perspective to cultural ministry. The other three interviewees, Native Americans themselves, ministered in transformational ministry on multiple reservations.

⁷Uwe Flick, *Introducing Research Methodology: A Beginner's Guide to Doing a Research Project* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications Inc. 2011), 32.

The primary and secondary sources limited the scope of the thesis research; the research that included the larger Native demographic provided a greater illumination to Native Cultural responses to the gospel. The literature perused gave a basic understanding of the tribe, and each interviewee brought a different perspective valuable to the thesis. Principles emerged from the research that may assist ministry on the Rosebud Reservation. These principles will receive discussion with the assistance of books used in rural ministry classes and notes from the Master of Arts in Rural Ministry, MARM.

Part 1: Literature Review and Theological Reflections

Part one explores literature on the history of the Sioux and the main issues affecting ministry among them. The research used information, when possible, pertaining to the Lakota Sioux (also called Brule by the French or Sicangu) that inhabit the Rosebud Reservation, but at times included the Sioux Nation (of which the Lakota are a subset) or the Native Americans as a whole. The author chose to use the capitalized word *Native* when referring to Native Americans in general or anything about Native Americans. Theological reflections on ministry to the Lakota Sioux will follow.

Chapter 1: A Brief History of the Rosebud Lakota Sioux

The Lakota Sioux division belong to the “Seven Council Fires”⁸ of the Sioux nation. Within the Lakota (a dialect division) were many family tribes. The Rosebud Reservation is home to the Sicangu, also called Brule. At the time of their move onto Rosebud agency in 1878 (Congress reset boundaries in 1889 making it the Rosebud Reservation) *Sinta Gleska*, Spotted Tail, led the tribe.⁹ Formidable opponents, Sioux braves showed their worth through fighting. By the time Spotted Tail settled his people at Rosebud, he had resigned himself to peace between the United States and the Sioux even if he did not trust the government to uphold their side of treaties. Spotted Tail told the military, “When people come to trouble, it is better for both parties to come together without arms and talk it over and find some peaceful way to settle it.”¹⁰ Spotted Tail tried to negotiate between the United States and other tribal chiefs including Red Cloud. His death in 1881 at the hands of one of his own tribal members caused controversy. Some said it was over a woman, Red Cloud believed the government was behind it.¹¹ Others said Crow Dog, his murderer, wanted his position as chief.¹² With Spotted Chief gone, Rosebud Reservation struggled to replace their strong leader.

⁸Understanding the Great Sioux Nation - Akta Lakota Museum & Cultural Center, accessed May 18, 2020, <http://aktalakota.stjo.org/site/News2?page=newsArticle&id=9017>.

⁹Sprague, *Rosebud Sioux*, 8.

¹⁰Dee Brown, *Bury My Heart at Wounded Knee: An Indian History of the American West* (New York, NY: Open Road Media, 2012), 122. Kindle Edition.

¹¹Brown, *Bury My Heart at Wounded Knee*, 420.

¹²George E. Hyde, *Sioux Chronicle* (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 1956), 65.

Spotted Tail desired an education for his children and the tribe's children, becoming a proponent for governmental schools including the Carlisle boarding school. He withdrew his children and grandchildren, however, when he realized the main intention was not reading and writing but assimilation into the white culture.¹³ He requested the *black robes*, Jesuit priests, start a school, believing the Catholics would provide an opportunity for learning close to home where children could still learn Lakota ways. St Francis School, a mission run boarding school that transitioned to a day school, came under tribal management in 1972.¹⁴

The tribe manages the schools and government of Rosebud and endeavor to teach an almost forgotten Lakota language and customs to a new generation. Catholicism, still prevalent, synchronizes with the Sioux legends and beliefs in a confusing blend. Since the Lakota passed down an oral tradition and history, conflicts arise surrounding authentic Sioux culture. Authentic or not, Lakota defend their culture and identity, their strong loyalty becomes justifiable considering the attempts made to strip these away from them.

¹³Hyde, *Sioux Chronicle*, 160. "Spotted Tail was never forgiven by the officials and the leaders of the Indian welfare groups for this deed. He had struck a savage blow at... education, which they believed was going to transform the Indian race."

¹⁴"ST. FRANCIS MISSION RECORDS Historical Notes," ST. FRANCIS MISSION RECORDS Historical Notes // Archives // Raynor Memorial Libraries // Marquette University, accessed May 15, 2020, <https://www.marquette.edu/library/archives/Mss/SFM/SFM-history.php>.

Chapter 2: An Analysis of Issues Affecting Native American Ministry

This research anticipated finding principles that could assist Native American ministry on the Rosebud Reservation; therefore, the literature review addressed specific situations that could affect bringing the gospel to the Lakota people rather than an ambiguous history. The following five themes reoccurred in the research, warranting attention: Colonization (or assimilation), boarding schools, Wounded Knee and the American Indian Movement (AIM), Indian religion and syncretism, and present social concerns (including drugs, alcohol, murders, suicides and broken families). Chapter 2 presents a summary of each.

Colonization/Assimilation

The United States government attempted to resolve clashes between early settlers expanding towards the west and Native Americans who lived in these areas through colonization. Lexico defines colonization as, “The action or process of settling among and establishing control over the indigenous people of an area.”¹⁵ Europeans came to America with varying opinions of the Natives, but most colonists believed their culture remained superior. Francis Paul Prucha wrote in *The Great Father: The United States Government and the American Indians*,

There was little doubt in the minds of the Europeans... that savagism was an inferior mode of existence and must give way to civility (civilization). The Indians were “younger brethren,” dependents whom persons in superior positions

¹⁵“Colonization: Definition of Colonization by Lexico,” Lexico Dictionaries English (Lexico Dictionaries), accessed March 23, 2020, <https://www.lexico.com/en/definition/colonization>.

claimed the right and obligation to shape into a new and civilized mold by persuasion if possible and ultimately by force.¹⁶

Christians, caught up in the western expansion of the faith, vied for position among the tribes. The government saw an opportunity to solve the “Indian problems” and keep denominations from fighting with each other by partnering with churches to colonize the Native Americans. The government thought colonizing the Natives would eradicate the massacres and violence between the races, and the missionaries that partnered with the government believed colonizing the Natives would bring them closer to salvation.¹⁷

Early missionary attempts to bring the gospel to the Native Americans often became marred by the misconception that the “Indian” needed to receive instruction to become civilized before they could be capable of receiving salvation.¹⁸ Attempts at *civilizing the Native*, training them in the European immigrants’ ways and culture, resulted in confused identities and a generational bitterness over their lost culture directed at the government, the church, and the white people in general.

Boarding Schools

Military and pioneer sentiment against the Native Americans in reaction to the violent clashes between the cultures escalated to the point of a calling for Native annihilation.¹⁹ Debate abounds over the intentions of Col. Pratt, the founder of the first

¹⁶Francis Paul Prucha, *The Great Father: The United States Government and the American Indians* (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1984), 5.

¹⁷Craig Stephen Smith, *Whiteman’s Gospel* (Winnipeg, Manitoba: Indian Life Books, 2006), 46.

¹⁸Prucha, *The Great Father*, 5.

¹⁹David Treuer, *The Heartbeat of Wounded Knee: Native America from 1890 to the Present* (New York: Riverhead Books, 2019), 133. Kindle Edition. “A great general has said that the only good Indian is

government boarding school. He is credited with the saying, “Kill the Indian, save the man.”²⁰ When his efforts to assimilate a group of Native men into the white culture failed, he turned to children. Promising education and provision to Lakota parents and sometimes resorting to forcing parents to release their children into his care, Carlisle boarding school soon grew to more schools over the country including one in Genoa, Nebraska where children of rival tribes were taught.²¹ Assimilation used military-style techniques and cruel punishments for infractions such as speaking Lakota.²² Homesickness drove many children to run away, those that stayed went home later to find that they no longer fit into the culture.²³ Tragically, some children even died.²⁴

Government-commissioned mission schools often did not treat the children much better. In *Native Americans, Christianity, and the Reshaping of the American Religious Landscape*, Steven W. Hackel and Hilary E. Wyss wrote about a boarding school erected and run by missionary Eleazar Wheelock in 1753 that set standards for educating Native

a dead one, and that high sanction of his destruction has been an enormous factor in promoting Indian massacres.”

²⁰Joel W. Martin and Mark A. Nicholas, eds. *Native Americans, Christianity, and the Reshaping of the American Religious Landscape* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2010), 293.

²¹“Flashback Friday: “The Tragedies and Successes of the Genoa Indian School,” History Nebraska (Nebraska State Museum), accessed May 19, 2020, <https://history.nebraska.gov/blog/flashback-friday-tragedies-and-successes-genoa-indian-school>.

²²Admin, “The Genoa Indian School,” Native American Netroots, February 15, 2013, <http://nativeamericannetroots.net/diary/1448>.

²³ Becky Little, “How Boarding Schools Tried to ‘Kill the Indian’ Through Assimilation,” History.com (A&E Television Networks, August 16, 2017), <https://www.history.com/news/how-boarding-schools-tried-to-kill-the-indian-through-assimilation>.

²⁴Treuer, *The Heartbeat of Wounded Knee*, 139. “They also went there to die. Perhaps no other aspect of Indian education during the sixty years of the boarding school era is more tragic than the fact that the school grounds at Carlisle and Haskell and all the other schools included graveyards... At Carlisle, hundreds of students were buried.”

Americans in the eighteenth century with the reported purpose of training up indigenous missionaries.²⁵ Government and mission run boarding schools alike forced students to adopt English culture and forsake their Native culture. Hackel and Wyss wrote, “Wheelock was convinced that it was only by replacing ‘the pernicious Influence of *Indian Examples*’ with English models of behavior that boarding schools like his could succeed in producing qualified Native American missionaries.”²⁶ Julian Rice, author of *Before the Great Spirit: The Many Faces of Sioux Spirituality*, wrote “When the products of these schools returned to their reservations, they had not become white, and many had learned only to hate themselves.”²⁷ The bitterness and loss of identity in many of the children who attended these boarding schools, continuing until the 1960s, remains evident in the older generations that went to the boarding schools, passing the anger toward the white man down through the generations.

Wounded Knee and the American Indian Movement

Two Wounded Knee events occurred—the first a massacre by the military that resulted in an estimated 150-300 Lakota deaths, and the second a standoff between members of the AIM and the military. The Second, 83 years after the first, protested the unfair treatment from the US government including the first Wounded Knee incident.²⁸ Although they took place on the Pine Ridge Reservation, Rosebud borders them, and the

²⁵Martin and Nicholas, *Native Americans, Christianity, and the Reshaping of the American Religious Landscape*, 215.

²⁶Martin and Nicholas, *Native Americans, Christianity, and the Reshaping of the American Religious Landscape*, 214.

²⁷Julian Rice, *Before the Great Spirit: The Many Faces of Sioux Spirituality* (Albuquerque, NM: University of New Mexico, 1998), 3.

²⁸Ian Frazier, *On the Rez* (New York, NY: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2000), 58.

two related Lakota tribes that inhabit them move freely between the two reservations. Although they ceased at the command of the government, The Rosebud tribe participated in the ghost dance that preceded the first Wounded Knee. The ghost dance, introduced by a self-appointed messiah, presented a mixture of Christianity and Indian religion that promised protection from the military bullets and the ultimate destruction of all white people, restoring the land to pre-immigration glory.²⁹ Donovan Arleigh Sprague wrote in *Rosebud Sioux: Images of America*, “All of the Lakota were greatly affected by the Wounded Knee Massacre, which marked the end of an era and of America’s Indian ‘war.’³⁰ Both Wounded Knees symbolize the struggle of the Native Americans to keep their identity.

The AIM website lists as their purpose, “to turn the attention of Indian people toward a renewal of spirituality, which would impart the strength of resolve needed to reverse the ruinous policies of the United States, Canada, and other colonialist governments of Central and South America.”³¹ According to Ian Frazier in *The Rez*, traditional Natives tended to side with AIM, while the progressive Natives and

²⁹Joe Jackson, *Black Elk: The Life of an American Visionary* (New York, NY: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2016), Chapter 19. “Dances with Ghosts” for more information about the spirituality of the Ghost Dance. (306), Short Bull told his followers that because the wasichu were interfering so much, he would shorten the time for the end of the world. Instead of next spring, everything foretold would happen after one more moon. He took upon himself the role of Messiah. All must dance together for a month at Pass Creek, a place “where the tree is sprouting” between Rosebud and Pine Ridge. If soldiers came, they would die; if the dancers wore their ghost shirts, they would live. In one more month, Indians would inherit the earth. As for whites, “there will be only five thousand of them left living on the earth,” he said.

³⁰Sprague, *Rosebud Sioux*, 51.

³¹Laura Watterman Wittstock and Elaine J. Salinas, “A Brief History of AIM” (accessed April 20, 2020), <http://www.aimovement.org/ggc/history.html>.

government officials stood against them.³² Whether for or against AIM's actions, their efforts brought attention to the plight of Native Americans causing a resurgence of Natives gaining back their traditions, culture, and Indian pride. Ministers need to be aware that Natives influenced by AIM, view Christianity as conflicting with their own religion.

Native Sioux Religion and Syncretism

The Lakota Sioux religion weaves through their culture. Reminiscent of the Old Testament traditions that wove through Hebrew life, the Lakota remain in tune with the spiritual and assign no division between their everyday way of life and their religion.³³

Craig Stephen Smith wrote in *Whiteman's Gospel*, "To a traditional Native American, everything about his or her life and existence is spiritual."³⁴ In the opinion of William K. Powers in *Native Religions and Cultures of North America: Anthropology of the Sacred*,

Not only have Lakota ceremonies been retained over a long period of time albeit changed to meet the needs of their worshipers, the Lakota have the ability to incorporate religious ideas from other tribes and even non-Indians, thus preventing Lakotas from becoming totally Christianized even though some live quite comfortably between more than one (sometimes more than two) religious systems.³⁵

³²Frazier, *On the Rez*, 61. "The main issue at Wounded Knee II came down to a conflict between progressives and traditionalists on the Pine Ridge Reservation...Traditionalists on the reservation generally sided with AIM."

³³Craig Stephen Smith, *Whiteman's Gospel* (Winnipeg, Manitoba: Indian Life Books, 2006). See *Whiteman's Gospel* for more information on the similarities of Native and Hebrew ways of life.

³⁴Smith, *Whiteman's Gospel*, 111.

³⁵William K. Powers, "Wiping the Tears: Lakota Religion in the Twenty-first Century," in *Native Religions and Cultures of North America: Anthropology of the Sacred*, ed. Lawrence E. Sullivan (New York, NY: The Continuum International Publishing Group Inc., 2000), 105.

Despite adjustments allowed in their spirituality, the Lakota protect their religion as a sacred part of their culture. Powers went on to say, “Recognizing that their beliefs and rituals have been constantly challenged by Christianity, Lakotas see themselves continuously fighting the influences of non-Lakota religion and culture.”³⁶ Presenting Christianity to a culture that is tied to their religion becomes a challenge. Lakota’s can be quick to incorporate certain Christian symbolism and ritual into their religion and even draw parallels between the religions while they stay faithful to their traditional beliefs. The dilemma, then, for Christian ministers is whether any Lakota symbolism and rituals can become incorporated into Christian practices or worship services while remaining devoted to biblical beliefs.

When Sioux people commit their lives to follow only Christ, rejecting their sinful past, identifying with their people becomes difficult to navigate. Dean Flemming, the author of *Contextualization in the New Testament: Patterns for Theology and Missions*, wrote, “Syncretism - the mixing of incompatible religious ideas and practices - is a constant challenge to the gospel, particularly when converts have recently come out of a pagan religious background.” Flo Ellers, a Native Alaskan evangelist and a believer in a future revival on the reservations,³⁷ writes in *Chief Walking Tall*, “For me, syncretism is another form of bondage in the guise of deception.”³⁸ Some of the church insisted on a total withdrawal from Native ways, concerned over possible pluralism of faiths. This

³⁶ Powers, *Native Religions and Cultures of North America*, 105.

³⁷ Warning TV – Dr. Jonathon Hansen. Dr. Flo Ellers' book "Chief Walkin' Tall" *YouTube* video 28:34. (Updated June 16, 2014), <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mpYDCgx4K50>.

³⁸ Flo Ellers, *Chief Walkin' Tall: A New Day is Dawning for Native Americans* (Cleveland, TN: Deeper Revelation Books, 2014), 125.

resulted in more lasting results without sifting through specific traditions, but the new converts suffered from an identity crisis and a strict forbiddance of Native traditions reinforced the suspicion in the Native mind that the white culture desires to obliterate the Native culture. By divorcing the Euro-European white culture from the biblical culture and requiring only what the Bible requires of believers some of this confusion could be avoided.

A Native minister that the author observed living both as a committed follower of Christ and identifying as an Alaskan Tlingit-Haida, Johanna Hotch, shared with the author her revelation of revival among her people. Hotch disclosed how she asked the Holy Spirit why He did not move in the Native congregations like the white ones and if the barrier was the Native religion. She felt like the answer was “Yes, It’s the totem poles.”³⁹ She has maintained a strict avoidance of any witchcraft ties to Native ways and has seen the move of God in Alaskan villages. Cheryl Bear-Barnetson from Nadleh Whut’en First Nation, author of *Introduction to First Nations Ministry*, a study done for the Four-Square Denomination, Takes a different view on Totem Poles and other Native symbols. She wrote, “Another source claimed that Totem Poles are a conduit for evil spirits. This person obviously never asked a Native person a question about the Totems. These claims have no bearing in truth.”⁴⁰ Bear-Barnetson states that Native Christians can “continue to practice their Native traditions, symbolizing the work of Jesus Christ on

³⁹ Johanna Hotch interview with April Maunu, June 18, 2019.

⁴⁰ Cheryl Bear-Barnetson, *Introduction to First Nations Ministry* (Cleveland, TN: Cherohala Press, 2013), 116.

the Cross.”⁴¹ The divide between even Native believers over the issue of syncretism illustrates the complexity of Native expression in Christian worship.

The Catholic missions observed the two extremes, early Catholicism forbade even speaking Lakota language. Through the example of visionary Natives such as Black Elk who incorporated his Sioux religion with Catholic beliefs,⁴² Priests began to allow some Native Symbols into mass.⁴³ One priest even used the pipe in prayer.⁴⁴ Flemming wrote, “Where do we draw the line of demarcation between genuine contextualization and inappropriate syncretism that compromises the ‘truth of the gospel’?”⁴⁵ Ministers on the reservations continually faced the dilemma of presenting a relevant yet pure theology to their churches.

⁴¹ Cheryl Bear-Barnetson, *Introduction to First Nations Ministry*, 119.

⁴²John G. Neilhardt, *Black Elk Speaks* (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1961), 248. A series of interviews with Black Elk in the later years of his life, *Black Elk Speaks* gives insights into Native Life and the intermixing of Catholicism with the Sioux religion.

⁴³Luther Standing Bear, *My People the Sioux* (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1975), 124. There are arguments over whether Native Religion already possessed some “Christian” elements before missionaries had arrived or if Biblical elements were included later. For an example of parallels between the two beliefs, Luther Standing Bear writes about the Sun Dance ceremony, “Many things were done during this dance which were similar to what I have read about Christ. We had one lining sacrifice, and he fasted three or four days instead of forty... We trusted one another, and our word was as good as the white man’s gold of to-day. We were then true Christians.”

⁴⁴Joe Jackson, *Black Elk: The Life of an American Visionary* (New York, NY: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 2016), 471. “In the 1950’s, after Black Elk’s death, Jesuit priests seemed divided about the holy man’s legacy. While older priests such as Zimmerman said he was forgotten, his books inconsequential, younger Jesuits tried to construct a form of Christianity more relevant to Oglalas. Membership had declined in local chapels, and these priests redesigned ritual in ways that seemed taken almost entirely from the Sacred Pipe. The reverend Paul Steinmetz, the parish priest at Sacred Hart Mission in the Pine Ridge Village, was one of these. To the consternation of his superiors, he participated in Native ceremonies and designed a new church that merged Catholic symbolism with Oglala. Most important, he used the Sacred Pipe in Mass. ‘The pipe is a type of Christ,’ he wrote. Praying with the pipe was as valid as praying with the rosary.”

⁴⁵Dean Flemming, *Contextualization in the New Testament: Patterns for Theology and Mission* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2005), Loc 3870. Kindle Edition.

Substance Abuse, Murders, Suicides and Broken Families

Alcohol became an issue for native Americans early. It has gotten worse on the reservations with the lack of hope and little incentive to make life better. Rice related the prevalent alcoholism and suicides to inward-directed rage resulting from the forced assimilation into white society.⁴⁶ Teen Challenge website explained what happens when people turn to alcohol or drugs to stimulate feelings of happiness; “When substance abusers come down from their high, these feelings of anxiety, self-hate, or depression often return even stronger than before. This can cause a vicious cycle where the user believes he or she can only feel “normal” when under the influence of drugs.”⁴⁷ Alcohol and drug use on the reservation results from inner turmoil that needs a transformational encounter with the gospel.

A local funeral director who performs burials for both Rosebud and Pine Ridge and has gained Native acceptance through unconditional love over the years shared the hopelessness evidenced by a suicide pact, gang activity, alcohol use, and illegal sales of methamphetamine. She has seen children raised by their great grandparents because of their parents’ inability to care for them as a result of life-controlling addictions. She heard parents wanting their children to graduate, leave the reservation, and have a better life.⁴⁸ A speech therapist on Rosebud agreed, noting she sees grandparents raising children, neglect of children, and suicides. She is also aware of a sex trafficking

⁴⁶Rice, *Before the Great Spirit*, 4.

⁴⁷“What Is Substance Abuse? • Adult & Teen Challenge,” Adult & Teen Challenge, accessed April 21, 2020, <https://teenchallengeusa.org/substance-abuse>.

⁴⁸Funeral Director interview with April Maunu, March 11, 2020.

problem. She observed a hopeful change of parents taking responsibility a few years back, but the younger parents are not following them.⁴⁹ The physical, emotional, and social needs of the Lakota confirm that opportunities abound for ministers on the Rosebud Reservation to bring the healing, transformational gospel of Jesus to a hurting people.

⁴⁹Speech therapist interview with April Maunu, April 20, 2020.

Chapter 3: Orthodoxy of Native American Ministry

Theological reflection concerning various facets of rural cross-cultural ministry on Native Americans reservations and their unique situations necessitates contemplation of the Word of God. Contextualizing the gospel message through relevant discipleship needs the guidance of proper theology. Additionally, a Biblical response needs to address an orphan spirit and victim mentality among Native Americans that manifest in a loss of identity and hope. Bringing inner healing to the intergenerational trauma of this people group and connecting their hearts to Jesus, could bring transformation on the reservation one person at a time. Ministry should remain led by the Holy Spirit and examined through the Scriptures; this section will explore the theology of ministry on the reservations including cultural and emotional themes followed by a profile of successful Native American ministry.

Contextualized Discipling

Multi-cultural may define the communities on the Native Reservations because they sit in unique positions as historically native, rural, and cross-cultural societies. Jesus spent most of His ministry on earth in rural locations, demonstrating His love for them.⁵⁰ Jesus, born and raised in small villages, brought value to rural areas through choosing to

⁵⁰Donnie Griggs, *Small Town Jesus: Taking the Gospel Mission Seriously in Seemingly Unimportant Places* (Damascus, MD: EverTruth, 2016), Loc. 326. Kindle Edition. “Jesus lived most of his life in a small town and, once his ministry began, wanted to continually go to small towns even after his fame began to spread everywhere.” The gospels record the majority of Jesus’ ministry took place in small villages and wilderness areas. For example, Luke 4:16; Luke 9:52, 56; Luke 10:38; Luke 17:12; John 6:1-14; John 10:40, ESV.

continue His ministry among them.⁵¹ Jesus related to people through his parables and teachings rich with rural references and contextualized to the minority culture dominated by Rome. Stuart Simpson, Founder of Empower Coaching and co-founder of Catalyst Ministries, wrote in *Revisiting Native American Ministry: Keys to Partner More Effectively*, “The Son of God took on humanity, ‘moved into the neighborhood,’ and shared the good news of the Kingdom using parables that the people of His day could relate to.”⁵² Donnie Griggs, in *Small Town Jesus: Taking the Gospel Mission Seriously in Seemingly Unimportant Places*, wrote, “We must not neglect Jesus’s approach to ministry, which clearly included prioritizing small towns.”⁵³ The research embraces the direction and heart of God in the rural and Native ministry He called us to reach.

The rural designation may initially occur concerning the number of people, but rural also occurs as a culture. Roth wrote, “rural identity is more of a worldview, more like a culture - a distinct way of framing and knowing the world.”⁵⁴ Rural towns often value similar ideals of loyalty, respect, and kindness as well as family, community, and their schools. The agricultural locale of the Rosebud has traditions that carry their values and language with idioms of cowboy culture including “pulling yourself up by your own

⁵¹John 7:42, ESV. “Has not the Scripture said that the Christ comes from the offspring of David, and comes from Bethlehem, the village where David was.”

⁵²Stuart Simpson, *Revisiting Native American Ministry: Keys to Partner More Effectively* (West Whales, UK: Catalyst Ministries, 2017), 408. Kindle Edition.

⁵³Griggs, *Small Town Jesus*, 336.

⁵⁴Brad Roth, *God’s Country: Faith Hope and the Future of the Rural Church* (Harrisonburg, VA: Herald Press, 2017), 27. Kindle Edition.

bootstraps.”⁵⁵ Independence, not just viewed as freedom for our country, conveys not remaining dependent on others, important in the area pioneer spirit. Rural residents took great pride in helping each other during the great flooding in the spring of 2019 rather than depending on governmental help. Communities printed tee shirts with rallying slogans embodying, “We take care of our own.” Natives have their own slogans such as “Native Pride” emblazoned on clothing, their own version of rural and Native culture.

Jesus, as part of a Jewish culture under Roman law, knew what it was like to be a minority governed by a dominant society. Smith wrote, “He knows what Native people have gone through, what suffering minority people face at the hands of dominant societies, and views life not only from a heavenly perspective, but through the eyes of an oppressed people! That’s the Jesus of the Bible!”⁵⁶ Jesus as a minority Messiah may convey the gospel that Natives can understand and transform their lives.

Native cultural manners can appear both “American”⁵⁷ and Indian in nature. A drive through the Midwest shows an abundance of many rural agricultural communities including those on the reservation. An apparent difference, difficult to explain, occurs when crossing over the reservation boundary. The buildings have native symbols and signs displaying an awareness of having stepped into another culture. Even if you miss

⁵⁵“Pulling yourself up by your bootstraps” can imply not whining, trying again, and not relying on others – all important values to the culture.

⁵⁶Smith, *Whiteman’s Gospel*, 15.

⁵⁷“American” culture is generally considered the white European originating culture mixed with a capitalistic spirit (for example: “Living the American dream” means acquiring a certain amount of wealth and independence).

the reservation sign, simple observance of the cultural differences will announce it to visitors. American reservation communities each contain culturally unique elements.

Cross-cultural ministry became one of Jesus' directives to his followers.⁵⁸ The first missionaries, Paul and Silas, went to other cultures to preach the gospel. Paul became a champion of the gentiles, a cross-cultural group living among the Jews, and proponent of cross-cultural churches.⁵⁹ He also trained Gentile leaders to minister in churches.⁶⁰ Flemming wrote, "Through the Spirit and the ministry of the church, Christ must be enfleshed in every contemporary human culture and context. To be true to the nature of the gospel itself, we must enable it 'to enter the bloodstream of the people'."⁶¹ At the center of contextualization lays the incarnation of Christ, which embodies the message of the gospel. Sherwood Lingenfelter and Marvin Mayers in *Ministering Cross-Culturally: A Model for Effective Personal Relationships* wrote, "Jesus, the incarnate Son of God, has set the example for us and commands us, 'Follow me.' Numerous Scripture passages demonstrate that Jesus' ministry among the Jews reflected and harmonized with their culture, and He commands us to follow His example."⁶² The early church, when encountering the Gentile Christians who had no understanding or background in the Jewish culture, decided not to "burden" these new converts with Jewish customs,

⁵⁸Matthew 28:19, ESV.

⁵⁹Romans 15:14-16, ESV.

⁶⁰Galatians 2:1-3, ESV; Titus 1:4-5, ESV.

⁶¹Flemming, *Contextualization in the New Testament*, 149.

⁶²Marvin K. Mayers and Sherwood G. Lingenfelter, *Ministering Cross-Culturally: A Model for Effective Personal Relationships* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2016), 114.

requiring the bare minimum of observances to have fellowship with Jewish believers.⁶³

Contrast this biblical example with the approaches amongst native converts that required them to assimilate into the dominant culture's method of worship. Jesus comes to each person in their context and culture. Contextualizing the gospel on the reservations should communicate Jesus to the native culture without compromising the gospel.

Jesus' instruction given to His followers to make disciples, applies in different ways.⁶⁴ Often believers delegated discipleship training to group Bible study time. What would developing disciples look like in a rural Native American setting? Should Biblical teachings become adapted to a specific culture? Smith wrote,

If the gospel is to be embraced by any culture, the culture of the people being reached needs to be respected, for it is much easier for God to convict than it is for man to try and do the work of the Holy Spirit. The power of the gospel is complete in and of itself to penetrate a culture, and redeem that which is redeemable, and convict and deal with that which is animistic and abominable in nature.⁶⁵

God called believers to love each person in their own culture and present the gospel to them. As leaders expand their understanding of the culture where they preach, they may find inroads into that culture through their values. Roth advocated, "ecclesioculture,"⁶⁶ for "incarnating the gospel in your zip code."⁶⁷ The New Testament apostles and authors set examples of adapting the gospel message to their audiences, "Being all things to all

⁶³Acts 15:28, ESV. "For it has seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us not to burden you with anything beyond these essential requirements..."

⁶⁴Matthew 28:19-20, ESV.

⁶⁵Smith, *Whiteman's Gospel*, 113.

⁶⁶Roth, *God's Country*, 17.

⁶⁷Roth, *God's Country*, 9.

people in order to win some.”⁶⁸ Flemming wrote, “The multitextured gospel story must be told and lived out in flexible forms as it engages new contexts. Otherwise, it will never truly be understood or embodied.”⁶⁹ Engaging Native Americans with the message of Jesus in their own culture instead of insisting they conform to a European-American Christianity could transform lives on the Rosebud Reservation.

Disciples making disciples in a cross-cultural ministry context employs indigenous ministry. Indigenous churches directed by indigenous people and not controlled by the dominant culture found freedom and acceptance. A foundation of trust and respect on the part of the sending culture for the Native people opened doors. The sending church can continue relationship and involvement, but recipients at some point should become leaders and senders themselves. Smith believes a path for success in Native American ministry could include evaluating the way it governs the tribal churches. Smith wrote, “then turn true responsibility, with accountability, to a fully empowered Native leader who is not there in a token position but can lead his people with the full endorsement and blessing of the denomination behind him.”⁷⁰ Raising up leaders and pastors from within the Native American community may release the reservation churches to multiply, even touching the world beyond their community.

⁶⁸I Corinthians 9:22, ESV.

⁶⁹Flemming, *Contextualization in the New Testament*, 3805.

⁷⁰Smith, *Whiteman's Gospel*, 77.

Emotional Healing

God designed humans to carry within themselves certain emotional needs that can only find fulfillment with Him. Tony Stoltzfus, author, coach, and director of the Leadership MetaFormation Institute explained the “Desire Wheel”⁷¹ in *The Invitation: Transforming the Heart Through Desire Fulfilled*, “Desires are the energy and motivation that power our actions. We live out of our desires.”⁷² The need for justice on the Desire Wheel indicated feeling undefended and could lead to crippling emotional wounds. The Lakota Sioux continue to struggle with a deep sense that they have not received justice. The Psalmist wrote, “God is a righteous judge”⁷³ and “The Lord is my strength and my defense; he has become my salvation.”⁷⁴ Although the desired justice may not become realized on the earth, the opportunity to draw near to our Just Judge expands the relationship with Jesus. Stoltzfus wrote, “Unmet desire is an immovable object that thwarts all attempts at changing your actions—but desire fulfilled is an irresistible force that thrusts you into living in Christ... when you experience desire fulfilled, you are no longer in bondage to need.”⁷⁵ Ministry that conveys Jesus as the fulfillment of unmet needs launches transformation in lives.

⁷¹Tony Stoltzfus, *The Invitation: Transforming the Heart Through Desire Fulfilled* (Redding, CA: Coach22 Bookstore LLC, 2015), 9.

⁷²Stoltzfus, *The Invitation* 9.

⁷³Psalm 7:11, ESV.

⁷⁴Psalm 118:14, NIV.

⁷⁵Stoltzfus, *The Invitation*, 10.

Unfortunately, some of the ills done to the Sioux came from the hands of “Christians,”⁷⁶ causing a stumbling block between Natives and Jesus. Rosebud Reservation inhabitants may carry a *victim mentality*, an expression of continual feelings by word or body language of victimization and the inability to obtain emotional healing, resulting in helplessness and hopelessness. Miroslav Volf in *Exclusion and Embrace: a Theological Exploration of Identity, Otherness, and Reconciliation* wrote, “The principle cannot be denied: the fiercer the struggle against the injustice you suffer, the blinder you will be to the injustice you inflict.”⁷⁷ Perhaps more than the need for justice; forgiveness, both given and received, remains needed in every person’s life. Volf wrote, “There is a profound ‘injustice’ about the God of the biblical traditions. It is called *grace*.”⁷⁸ Grace in the form of forgiveness is the merciful gift from our Lord whether we inflict pain or endure pain. Lack of forgiveness creates a perpetual feeling of being owed something, negating one’s own need to receive forgiveness. Sam Farina, a life coach trainer, said, “Forgiving requires a miracle—Jesus has provided the resource of forgiveness out of His bank. It’s not out of us, it is out of Him.”⁷⁹ Without the ability to forgive, bitterness and anger set in, turning to loss of hope. Ministry that models forgiveness and extends Christ’s gift of forgiveness to the heart connected to Him may see transformation on the reservation.

⁷⁶“Christians” has become part of the American white culture and does not necessarily mean “little Christs” as it defined the firsts Christians in Athens, nor does it mean one follows Christ.

⁷⁷Miroslav Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace: A Theological Exploration of Identity, Otherness, and Reconciliation* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1996), 217.

⁷⁸Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace*, 221.

⁷⁹Sam Farina, “Coaching Through Conflict” (lecture, Paradigms in Partnership for the Rural Church, First Assembly of God, North Little Rock, AR, March 18, 2019).

The lack of parental involvement can create an *orphan spirit*, a spiritual and emotional hindrance caused by feelings of abandonment and lack of guidance. The Lord shows Himself as a “Father to the fatherless.”⁸⁰ Following Christ can present the native with a crisis of identity. Even during chaos, abandonment, and damaging choices, there remains a community and family loyalty that remains strong. Becoming a Christian often results in rejection by their family, the very ones the new Christian identified with all their life. Jesus challenges people to choose Him over their family,⁸¹ offering a new identity in Him. The ministry that understands the Native Americans’ family dynamics can surround a new convert with the family of God, explaining their new identity in Christ, and invest in the long-term commitment to follow Christ.

Scriptures perhaps addressed intergenerational trauma in generational curses.⁸² Deep emotional wounds and individuals’ reactions can disseminate through the generations. Another biblical explanation could include familiar spirits.⁸³ The younger generation, having never experienced battles, massacres or the boarding school assimilation atrocities often continue to carry the offended, wounded spirit of their ancestors. Jesus can restore the soul and free it from emotional wounds, even those vicariously experienced. George O. Wood, former superintendent for the Assemblies of God, wrote in *Core Values: Serving Christ’s Cause with Effectiveness and Excellence*,

⁸⁰Psalm 68:5, ESV. “Father of the fatherless and protector of widows is God in his holy habitation.”

⁸¹Luke 14:26, ESV.

⁸²Exodus 20:5, Exodus 35:7, Numbers 14:18, Deuteronomy 5:9, ESV.

⁸³I Samuel 28:8, Acts 16:16, Isaiah 8:19, ESV.

“We must passionately proclaim Jesus as Healer. He not only heals our bodies; He also heals our emotions and our relationships. Malachi talks about the healing of generations from the hearts of the fathers toward the children and the hearts of the children toward the fathers.”⁸⁴ Many times, however, these hidden and explainable family patterns became accepted. Peter Scazzero, the author of *Emotionally Healthy Spirituality*, believes Christ followers can become free from emotional burdens from individual or family choices; “True spirituality frees us to live joyfully in the present. It requires, however, going back in order to go forward.”⁸⁵ For Native Americans this may mean a realistic study of their tribe’s history and their own choices. Scazzero wrote, “The gravitational pull back to the sinful, destructive patterns of our family of origin and culture is enormous. A few of us live as if we were simply paying for the mistakes of our past. For this reason, God has called us to make this journey with companions in the faith.”⁸⁶ Ministry that cares for the whole individual in community and commits to experience transformation as followers of Christ may receive the privilege of walking with them through healing.

Jesus instructed His disciples to “go into all the world and make disciples.”⁸⁷ A successful ministry includes contextualized disciple making that reaches the community. Jesus also said healing and miracles manifest through His sent ones⁸⁸ and they waited to

⁸⁴George O. Wood, *Core Values: Serving Christ’s Cause with Effectiveness and Excellence* (Springfield, MO: Gospel Publishing House, 2007), 22.

⁸⁵Peter Scazzero, *Emotionally Healthy Spirituality* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2006), 93.

⁸⁶Scazzero, *Emotionally Healthy Spirituality*, 114.

⁸⁷Matthew 28:1-20, ESV.

⁸⁸Mark 16:17-20, ESV.

begin ministry until they were filled with the Spirit.⁸⁹ On the Native American reservations, healing needs to include Spirit directed emotional healing. For the purpose of this research, the definition of successful ministry on the Rosebud Reservation embodies these elements as follows: Spirit infused, contextualized disciple making that results in transformed lives through salvation, and emotional healing in Christ. Components of successful ministry became defined in the following interviewees' ministries.

⁸⁹Acts 2:1-4, ESV.

Part 2: Qualitative Research

Qualitative research included interviews with ministers that have served many years on the Rosebud Reservation as well as interviews with ministers who experienced fruitful ministry among natives on other reservations. Employing a series of questions, ministers shared experiences, advice, and views pertaining to ministry among the Native Americans. Interviews used open-ended questions to ensure the freedom to respond with their personal experience or answers. A few interviews took place in person, but most were done over the phone. The context of the research acknowledges that choosing a select few ministers may create a bias of information and views; however, including ministers of differing denominational backgrounds may give comparative viewpoints. All ministers interviewed served in Evangelical churches; however, not all served in Pentecostal churches. Research interviews included some natives and other ethnic origins. A variety of backgrounds and denominations may enrich the conversation of ministry among Native Americans. This research cites interviewees as “Minister one, Minister two” and so forth to keep anonymity. When the interview included a couple, responses followed the same designation. Assigned abbreviations provided brevity.

Chapter 4: Interviews with Ministers on the Rosebud Reservation

Research launched interviews with present ministers of the Rosebud and Pineridge Reservations to gain an understanding of the challenges and views of those who work with this Native group as well as their ministry experiences. Interviews included a series of open-ended questions ending with an invitation to share anything they felt added significance, importance, or insight. Responses produced expected and surprising answers, common viewpoints among them as well as some unique responses. Questions included are listed in the Appendix.

Minister One

Minister One (M1), ministered among the Native Americans on the Rosebud Reservation for about ten years.⁹⁰ They became appointed missionaries in 2018, obligating them to set some of the established ministries on hold while they raised their support. The guidance gained from their leadership in US Missions has encouraged them for future ministry. They will implement the indigenous missionary method and vision of US Missions to reach, teach, and send natives into ministry.⁹¹ Their past ministry focused on youth and children and they plan to develop those relationships to impact families for Christ. M1 observed the native people on Rosebud consumed with poverty, drugs, alcohol, sexual abuse, suicide, and unemployment. M1 viewed the most heartbreaking problem as watching lost people without hope and no incentive to live.

⁹⁰Minister One, interview with April Maunu, January 28, 2020.

⁹¹“Assemblies of God World Missions,” Assemblies Of God World Missions, accessed May 29, 2020, <https://www.agwm.org/purpose/>. The Assembly of God World Missions Website, in part, lists their purpose to “Reach the lost... train believers...[and] plant churches.”

Although they have the antidote in Jesus, they faced some resistance to the gospel, fueled by the desire of natives to hold onto their religion. M1 blamed the barrier between Christianity and natives on the confusion about the history of the American government and the history of Christianity. The schools became an enforcer of this barrier, they believe, by emphasizing the native religions as part of their culture. M1 agreed that the history of Catholic and protestant church's involvement in the boarding schools that attempted to colonize young natives by forbidding their culture and religion has become a bitter memory that keeps some of the older generations away from Christianity. A pluralistic view that equalized all religious paths impacted the beliefs of the younger generation, the synchronistic issue mixed Christianity with native religion.

M1 estimated many churches on the reservation struggle with the problem of syncretism and observed great harvest increased when not mixing the gospel with old native ceremonies and symbols. M1 contested the possibility of redeeming parts of the native culture and religion since Jesus alone redeems but said that some parallels could be used to explain Christianity. Drawing parallels necessitated the application of care and understanding to not confuse Christian natives that have left their old life. Some of the symbols that may seem cultural can have religious meaning. M1 explained from their own pre-Christ life that when believers find identity in Christ, He calls all to leave their sinful life. When individuals desired to incorporate rituals into the worship service, it facilitated understanding to ask them what the motive exists behind their actions.

M1 noted a spirit of anger as a surprising area of spiritual need. He believed the spirit of anger backs native hopelessness. Bitterness and feelings of victimization can turn into anger, which produces a culture of anger and hopelessness. These tie into the

gang activity on the reservations and can even creep into the church in the form of prejudice.

When asked for any other issue on the reservation that deserves attention, M1 observed the over-emphasis on signs and wonders without proper discipleship and training can produce an attitude that Christ resembles a great medicine man.

Missionaries who eliminated confusion used an explanation of the person of Jesus Christ and His relevance in their lives.

Minister Two

Minister Two (M2) and his family felt called to the Rosebud Reservation after a construction mission trip there.⁹² They moved to the area in 2007 and started a Saturday evening church about ten years ago. M2 said despite watching many of the natives struggle with their old life, seeing ongoing physical healings, infillings of the Holy Spirit, and transformed lives encourage him in ministry.

M2 believes that the native religion created the biggest barrier between Native Americans and Christianity, either the pull to stay in it or the temptation to make Christianity and the native religion the same. The shunning of a family member who has fully committed to following Christ became a deterrent for some that may become interested in Jesus. The accusation that Christian natives desired assimilation into white culture created painful relational division. The older generation carried bitterness towards Christianity originating from historic circumstances when Native Americans

⁹²Minister Two, interview with April Maunu, February 18, 2020.

gave up their language and culture under force in the mission run boarding schools and they passed their offense to the younger generation.

M2 professed Native Americans as a very spiritual people, many profess seeing demons including the dreaded spider. Natives dedicated items to their gods, including drums. In anticipation of controversy surrounding symbols and colors and musical instruments, M2 preferred not making allowances for any native expression in his worship services. He defended his logic with the thought if you don't start then you don't have to draw a line, "If you know something isn't right, you wouldn't bring it in. Why bring the world into the church so they will come in?"⁹³ The reasoning behind attracting the world to the gospel by trying to look worldly translated to attempting to attract Native Americans to the gospel by appearing native.

M2 witnessed significant breakthroughs in the people that come to their ministry while going through a deliverance study. In agreement with the M1, M2 observed a lack of teaching and understanding of the Bible on the reservation. He referred to a move of God on the Rosebud reservation in 1984 that trailed off in the void of solid teaching from the word of God. Attempts at Bible studies ended in frustration over the lack of commitment and attendance.

The M2 family has ministered on the Rosebud reservation long enough to see the struggles of first nation people embracing Christ as their own and to become faithful followers of the gospel, forsaking their religions. The power of the Holy Spirit breaks the chains of these people and clear teaching of the gospel created a structure needed to disciple them. Their unique background and experiences equipped them to relate with a

⁹³Minister Two, interview with April Maunu, February 18, 2020.

minority group of strong identity who may face rejection by their community if they become devoted to Christ alone. As they have gained trust and continue to share their journey, they feel it has helped those to whom they minister. M2 shared that he never intended to become a preacher, but, as he supported another ministry group on the reservation, leaders of the church asked him to preach a message. Through the Spirit, he sensed the hostile atmosphere and felt led to ask forgiveness on behalf of the white people. The hostility melted and he found himself teaching the word of God. Many years later, he still ministers the gospel and expresses hope for the Native Americans on Rosebud.

Minister Three

Minister Three (M3) and his wife ministered on the Rosebud reservation for ten years before moving to the bordering Pine Ridge reservation where they have served for about twelve years.⁹⁴ M3 has a variety of programs centered around discipleship including equine therapy, bull riding, roping, and life skills programs. Life skills programs like welding teach useful skills with the over-reaching goal of instilling a successful mindset in a people group that has been told over and over that they will never amount to much.

M3, as a tribal member, provides a counterbalance to the lie that becoming a Christian means giving up being an “Indian.”⁹⁵ He witnessed the effect of boarding

⁹⁴Minister Three, interview with April Maunu, February 29, 2020.

⁹⁵The word "Indian" is used by the Native Americans as not just a reference to ethnicity but as their identity consisting of their values and traditions and those cultural things that would identify them as “Indians” to each other and other people groups. These things can be changed but would make them

schools on his mother and the older generation that embittered them towards Christianity. The message from the parochial boarding schools of having to become a white man and leaving their Indian identity behind has transferred in their minds to all of Christianity and even the younger generation carries this general mindset. Natives that commit to Christ became ostracized by their own family for having left the native way.

M3 chose a positive attitude in ministry even though trying to change a long-standing mindset has its ups and downs. He strived to plant seeds of hope through relationships and discipleship and wanted Native Americans to believe they can live successful lives in the white man's world. Observing the futile work of the church on the reservation, M3 believed the implementation of the Great Commission in discipleship and follow-up provided the missing structure in Native American ministry. Discipleship through relationships needed patience and perseverance. M3 explained, "Doing ministry on the reservation is like growing flowers in a rock pile. Once in a while, you see one bloom."⁹⁶ Churches, he observed, all desired revival but some waver in their faithfulness. Persistence in coming alongside individuals and discipling one-on-one may produce mature Christianity.

M3 believes syncretism does not have a place in a Christian Church. Combining Native religion with Christianity compares to attempting to "get oil and water to mix."⁹⁷ Understanding what objects and symbols mean in the Native mind assists when deciding

unrecognizable as a Native American to others. A Native that is raised in white culture is not recognized or accepted as a Native American unless he or she changes their cultural habits.

⁹⁶Minister Three, interview with April Maunu, February 29, 2020.

⁹⁷Minister Three, interview with April Maunu, February 29, 2020.

what needs excluding. He illustrated this point with the Native drum. To the general American culture, a drum means nothing other than an instrument and no harm occurs from using instruments that someone used for secular enjoyment before salvation in a worship service. The Native drum, however, symbolizes different ties to the earth and the spirit world. The materials used—the skin and wood—represent different spirits and the drumbeat itself expresses the heartbeat of Mother Earth (from whom the Lakota believe they originated). M3 explained the symbolism of the medicine wheel as a symbol of power, the dream catcher as a window into the spirit world, and the prayer wheel as the four spirit worlds that you face as you pray. M3 does not use Indian symbols or instruments in their worship services and believes that cultural understanding provided insights into the connections these symbols maintain with evil spirits.

M3's ministry builds on discipling Natives to follow Christ and learn new skills. Their discipleship process changed harmful Native mindsets and focused on the individual instead of a large group. Instead of giving material things or food that do not lead to inner change, they give a clear presentation of the gospel, a personal relationship with themselves, and discipleship activities that strengthen Native people in the daily battles they face.

Minister Four

The Minister Four (M4) family began a ministry to the Rosebud Reservation in 2013 and serve in a variety of outreaches including a children's church, men's Bible study, and jail ministry.⁹⁸ M4 brought unique connectedness to incarcerated Native

⁹⁸Minister Four, interview with April Maunu, February 27, 2020.

people from his background of gang involvement before his life-changing encounter with Christ, as well as his minority ethnicity. Self-described as nondenominational, M4's background was Independent Baptist. They do not own a church but have endeavored to stay close to the Apostle Paul's pattern of preaching the gospel before establishing a congregation. They overcame setbacks and challenges and have seen the progression of individuals on the reservation towards a transformed life.

M4 expounded on some of the histories of the Lakota Sioux and the churches the government set over different reservations. Rosebud, he explained, became home to Spotted Tail's people and the Episcopalian church provided governance. He believed lack of understanding on both the white settlers' side and the Native Americans' side led to some of the grievances including the broken treaties and the massacres. "Both sides were speaking and not listening."⁹⁹ Decades later, misunderstandings over cultural mindsets continued. "Natives [can] get insulated in the way of their thinking... [It is] a matter of them being dead spiritually and you are trying to explain to their minds."¹⁰⁰ Traditionally, the Lakota did not believe in hell or sin. Although some of these concepts became familiar to them because of the teachings of the church, presuming that Christian terms mean the same thing to both sides of the conversation could decimate understanding.

M4 believed that cultural identity created the predominant barrier to Native Americans embracing Christianity. Some Natives equated being Native American with the need to remain traditional. When Natives confronted him with their view of Jesus

⁹⁹Minister Four, interview with April Maunu, February 27, 2020.

¹⁰⁰Minister Four, interview with April Maunu, February 27, 2020.

being the white man's God, he described Jesus as a tribal God and attempted to demonstrate the Lord in a different light. M4 avoided speaking directly of Jesus being the only way, therefore rendering the traditions as wrong, and possibly offending the listener. He pointed them to Bible stories instead that teach this. When Natives try to say that Christianity is not the Indian way, He asks them, "What is God's way?"¹⁰¹ Focusing on God's culture could disarm the contention between human cultures.

When discussing syncretism, M4 emphasized that he does not mix religions and warned of its danger. M4 believed if missionaries persuaded Natives to leave their traditions and follow Christ, the use of traditional symbols or instruments may confuse them. Natives believed that traditional ways of living will ease an inferiority complex often experienced on the reservation. The new way of living Jesus taught through the Jewish culture neither validated Native Americans nor white Americans.

M4 believes keys to reaching the Native Americans include loving individuals, growing relationships, and building trust. M4 expressed himself to the people in the combination of respect and directness. "We just want them to see who we are and that we care."¹⁰² Ministry has produced the fruit of transformed lives evidenced by changed lives.

¹⁰¹Minister Four, interview with April Maunu, February 27, 2020.

¹⁰²Minister Four, interview with April Maunu, February 27, 2020.

Minister Five

Minister Five (M5) and his wife are South Dakota and Nebraska regional Missionaries for an evangelistic ministry organization.¹⁰³ He grew up in the area and was a teacher at St Francis Indian School before getting involved in ministry. Now they have a church on the Rosebud Reservation and hold a vacation Bible school in the summer as well as participate in outreaches on other reservations and missionary trips overseas.

M5's wealth of knowledge about the Lakota and his ease with their culture assists him in reaching the Rosebud Sioux. He asserted Native cultures have stayed the same for 200 years. He noticed that there has been a resurgence of interest in the traditional religion since the AIM obtained traction on the reservation and the schools started teaching Native traditions. Before the second Wounded Knee, Olsen observed that the reservation seemed to have mixed races. Since the "guerilla warfare"¹⁰⁴ that took place on Pineridge Reservation in the early 1970s, the population became predominately Native. The tribe took control of the schools and introduced the traditional Native religion to the younger generation, increasing interest, and familiarity. The push for identity as a people group along with bitterness towards the Christian/ Catholic faith as the perceived culprit for the real abuses inflicted on multitudes of Native children resulted in hardened hearts towards the gospel.

Inherent in the Native culture, spirituality weaves through Native life and traditions. According to M5, the Native people will turn to the supernatural whether

¹⁰³Minister Five, interview with April Maunu, March 4, 2020.

¹⁰⁴Minister Five's term for the confrontation between the government and the Native American Movement on Pine Ridge Reservation (that borders Rosebud).

through their traditional religion, Christianity, or another religion. Sensitivity to the spiritual realm does not have to be taught, Native people can feel it. Rosebud Reservation appears to have more of a mix of Christian theologies stemming from more than one denomination being given jurisdiction by the government. The government divided the reservations among denominations that were vying for new converts as part of their assimilation plan and to keep the denominations from fighting. The government gave the Catholic and Episcopal missions jurisdiction over Rosebud with St Francis overseen by the Catholics and Mission by the Episcopalians.

M5 does not believe the Indian religion should mix with Christian beliefs. He does, however, take a more relaxed view than some on what symbols or colors would be allowable for a Christian, setting the Apostle Paul as an example of listening to the Holy Spirit in such matters. M5, for instance, believes wearing some Native clothing may make no difference. He prefers to let the Holy Spirit speak to Native believers. “In my way of thinking, they need Christianity and then they will change from within.”¹⁰⁵ M5 disagreed with the thought that mixing religions would possibly confuse believers, but, instead, thought it would just cause Natives to reject the gospel message. He did agree, however, with others that discipleship serves as a key ministry method. He has brought people to the Keystone Project in South Dakota.¹⁰⁶ One of the visions of the Keystone Project that M5 adopted strives to raise indigenous pastors on the reservations that will reach their people for Christ. The Keystone Project website explains,

The time has come to embrace a strategy that is biblical, Spirit-led, self-sustaining, and which cannot be stopped. That strategy is the launching of

¹⁰⁵Minister Five, interview with April Maunu, March 4, 2020.

¹⁰⁶Minister Five, interview with April Maunu, March 4, 2020.

movements of multiplying disciples. It begins with a Spirit-prepared and chosen first-generation disciple, working to at least the fourth generation—intentionally making disciples who will make disciples.¹⁰⁷

Training up leaders from within native churches to understand kingdom theology may be a way to mature and multiply believers on the reservation.

Drug and alcohol usage on the reservation breaks families apart and devastates lives on the reservation. M5 observed broken windows and boarded up houses have increased with the availability of methamphetamine.¹⁰⁸ Treaties promised perpetual care for the Natives, translated to a Welfare system society with little incentive for work or betterment. Lowered benefits for married couples rendered to a lower percentage of marriages, hence weakening the family structure. Hopelessness manifested in many suicides, M5 has seen bright students with a promising future end their lives.

Circumstances have not discouraged M5 in his ministry on the reservation, however. His expectation of fruitfulness lies in the children on the reservation. His ministry held vacation Bible schools in which hundreds of children have responded to the gospel. He warned, “If the parents are into Native religion, children are cautious,” but added, “plant the seeds early.”¹⁰⁹ M5 pointed out the good in a Native culture that ministries can capitalize on and incorporate. For instance, children are esteemed in tribal

¹⁰⁷“Story,” The Keystone Project, accessed March 25, 2020, <https://keystoneproject.org/about/story/>.

¹⁰⁸The Broken Windows theory could indicate a breakdown of society when the community is not kept well. Encyclopedia Britannica describes the broken windows theory as an “academic theory proposed by James Q. Wilson and George Kelling in 1982 that used broken windows as a metaphor for disorder within neighborhoods. Their theory links disorder and incivility within a community to subsequent occurrences of serious crime.” Adam J. McKee, “Broken Windows Theory,” Encyclopedia Britannica (Encyclopedia Britannica, Inc., December 14, 2018), <https://www.britannica.com/topic/broken-windows-theory>.

¹⁰⁹Minister Five, interview with April Maunu, March 4, 2020.

life. Traditional forms of disciplining a child looked different than European culture; adults did not shame or punish a child, leaving that up to natural consequences or the gods. Instead, they celebrated good behavior. In M5's ministry, they integrated tribal values using rewards with the children.

Knowing the culture and relating to Native Americans on their level brings credibility and respect to M5's ministry. Getting them to laugh assists acceptance also. M5 relayed, "If you can strike humor with them you will have them for life. They never forget that if you joke."¹¹⁰ Discovering the methods used for communication in a certain tribe can facilitate the gospel. Although some tribes depend on radio, Olsen illustrated, the Rosebud tribe uses social media to communicate. Live streaming services could reach residents on a familiar platform. Cultural understanding facilitates communicating the gospel to the Rosebud Reservation.

Minister Six

Minister Six (M6), church planters who used relationships, trust-building, consistency, and forgiveness to launch churches,¹¹¹ described their ministry as "relationally living life with people."¹¹² When "messy" life occurs, M6 walks through it with congregants as a family.

The mistrust resulted from their past introduction to Christianity combined with traditional religion and conflict of identity that built barriers in the hearts and minds of

¹¹⁰Minister Five, interview with April Maunu, March 4, 2020.

¹¹¹Minister Six, interview with April Maunu, March 5, 2020.

¹¹²Minister Six, interview with April Maunu, March 5, 2020.

Lakota to the gospel message. M6 witnessed a lack of fear, humility, and surrender to God. They explained, “They want to make God practical, manageable.”¹¹³ M6 commented on the traditional Native religion of works reflecting into a practice of striving to earn salvation. Training in the theology of grace facilitated understanding and acceptance of God’s love and His sanctifying grace.

The pain Native Americans experienced in boarding schools and at the hands of the government transferred to the younger generation, surrounding them with hopelessness. M6 described the emotional state of the Lakota as “Layers and layers of trauma in large numbers.”¹¹⁴ Instead of becoming overwhelmed by the enormous pain the Lakota people carry, ministers need to find ways to deliver wholeness and healing.

M6 stated concern about the confusion and lack of discipleship on the reservation. They suggested the need for systematic theological teaching centered on Jesus. A successful ministry resembled the Great Commission fulfilled by discipling the individual. Both minister and congregant character focus brought about the growth of spiritual fruit.

M6 desired a pure gospel but applied contextualized Biblical standards proved difficult to discover. A Sioux raised in the white culture, M6 learned, sometimes through mistakes, what portions of Sioux culture may become redeemed. Sensitivity and leading of the Holy Spirit applied to issues of syncretism led to personal convictions emerging. “There is a kingdom, biblical culture that surpasses anyone’s culture,” explained M6.¹¹⁵

¹¹³Minister Six, interview with April Maunu, March 5, 2020.

¹¹⁴Minister Six, interview with April Maunu, March 5, 2020.

¹¹⁵Minister Six, interview with April Maunu, March 5, 2020.

Introspective focus, as well as Biblical foundation, guides the individual in navigating cultural and religious controversies.

Minister Seven

Minister Seven (M7) manages a relief agency through the Methodist denomination.¹¹⁶ Although not a pastor, she views her ministry as a discipleship program for Lakota volunteers that serve their community under her guidance. The agency distributed food through a soup kitchen and food pantry that provided clothing and other items in their stores and completed home improvements for veterans and tribal elders. Staff, M7 shared, not only gained employment through the welfare to work program but developed skills, resumes, and the confidence to know God has a good plan for them that motivated them to improve their lives through her training and individual discipleship.

M7 observed that Christians have demonstrated poor witness on and off the reservation. Native residents viewed Christian ministers as invaders, imputing onto them past abuses by missionaries and government. Connectedness among community members intensified reactions to and mindsets against the church. M7 explained that in the reservation community Native Americans, “know everyone and are part of their business.”¹¹⁷ Problems arose as people’s lives enmeshed with others and the pressure of co-dependence hindered self-betterment. Such dysfunction seemed normal and people become stuck in a victim mentality. M7’s responses to the bitterness and hopelessness flowed from her love and respect for everyone she ministers to. “[Native Americans]

¹¹⁶Minister Seven, interview with April Maunu, March 12, 2020.

¹¹⁷Minister Seven, interview with April Maunu, March 12, 2020.

can't pass up love.”¹¹⁸ They always accepted M7's offers of prayer as she gave them love but she warned that someone coming to minister in arrogance may find themselves rejected by the people they desire to serve.

M7 believed involvement in Native practices should arise from a matter of personal conviction. Her husband, a born again, Spirit-filled Christian, attended sweats and Sundances without hurting his conscience. She, on the other hand, has not felt freedom from the Holy Spirit to participate in any Native ceremonies. Her obedient separation from Native traditions has not hindered her ministry because she expressed respect for the Lakota.

Medicine men asked M7 to pray at community events with full knowledge that she only prays in the name of Jesus. M7 chose to not engage in cultural traditions through obedience to the Holy Spirit, not fear. Believers generally believed anything Native connects with demonic powers resulting in many Christians, although zealous for the gospel, to function in fear of cultural interactions. M7 answered, “We are not to fear,” but she added that ministers need to “know who you are [in Christ] or you have no business going anywhere.”¹¹⁹ M7 respectfully listened to traditional religious Natives and they responded with love. Walking in grace, power, acceptance, and love bridged fear and misunderstandings on both sides of the cultural divide.

Generational trauma created rejection issues that have extended into church relations. M7 explained the importance of longevity in healing emotions and building trust. When a minister who built trust with Natives moves, abandonment wounded their

¹¹⁸Minister Seven, interview with April Maunu, March 12, 2020.

¹¹⁹Minister Seven, interview with April Maunu, March 12, 2020.

fragile faith. M7 suggested successful ministry on the reservation developed generations of believers that pass the Christian faith to each succeeding generation.

Encouragement in ministry stemmed from God's provision of funds and miracles. M7 did not depend on grants or government funds and yet God always supplied through His people. "God wants to prove Himself."¹²⁰ M7 shared a time when staff witnessed a miracle of dresses, jewelry, shoes, and volunteers when they entertained the idea of blessing girls with dresses to go to prom. She spoke of receiving donations at crucial times. Staff witnessed daily miracles that show God's care.

¹²⁰Minister Seven, interview with April Maunu, March 12, 2020.

Chapter 5: Interviews with Key Native American Ministers

Discussions with a few key Native American ministers outside the Rosebud Reservation brought insights and clarity to the subject of ministering to the Natives residing in the Rosebud Reservation. Interviewees were selected by recommendation based on their experience in Native American ministry and the transformed lives their ministry has seen. Phone conversations included some of the questions asked of the Rosebud ministers when necessary, but a more fluid approach allowed for these ministers to share their story and passion for reaching Native Americans. The first interviewee worked on the Rosebud Reservation for many years before moving to a Montana reservation. The next three ministers served on multiple reservations and witnessed lasting responses among Natives. The last pastor came from Ireland, possessing a different cultural perspective, and has witnessed his church plant blossom, outgrowing their buildings twice. A summary of each conversation will provide dialogue points.

Minister Eight

Minister Eight (M8) and his wife ministered on a North Dakota reservation in the 1950s when they received the call to start a church on the Rosebud reservation.¹²¹ They started going door to door and doing street ministry with music and a bull horn on the main street in front of the community building and across from a bar owned by a man who had the reputation as the meanest man in town. Friendship, listening, and patience provided a door to reach him with the message of Jesus. A relative of his sold the plot of

¹²¹Minister Eight, interview with April Maunu, February 27, 2020.

land where the church now stands on in Mission, SD. M8 now ministers in Montana and has been ministering to Native Americans for over 50 years, fifteen with the Sioux.

M8 observed missionaries in the past who wanted to change the Native people into white people. “It can’t be done!” he exerted, “You can cut their hair, etc. but that’s not the way to present the gospel.”¹²² Instead, he emphasized waiting for the Holy Spirit to do His work and following the Lord’s leading, doing more listening and letting Natives speak. Building relationships and trust with individual Natives resulted in Christ transforming lives.

M8 suggested establishing relationships with Natives and conversing with them about Jesus for successful ministry. M8 exhorted, “To reach people, let them talk.”¹²³ Listening communicated respect and built trust. M8 also recommended connecting with Natives through mutuality and understanding. The staunch Native religion followers expressed willingness to have a conversation about their Creator, for instance. Arguing about theological differences may not benefit the discussion. Although M8 advocated clear boundaries between Christianity and the Native religion, he believed the Holy Spirit will do the work of helping them let go of traditional ways.

A former medicine man who had become a follower of Christ shared his salvations experience with M8, influencing their views on syncretism. This man found freedom from his past and attributed his ability to stay committed to Christ to his burning all his items used in traditional ceremonies. M8 explained, “You have to make a clean

¹²²Minister Eight, interview with April Maunu, February 27, 2020.

¹²³Minister Eight, interview with April Maunu, February 27, 2020.

break if you want to have success.”¹²⁴ Without purging the traditional religious items, slipping back into Native American religion became problematic for many Natives.

M8 believed it is harder to minister to Native Americans now since more customs such as the Sun Dance, which was forbidden for a time, returned into the communities. Knowledge of the Sioux traditions obtained by asking questions of medicine men and traditional religion followers assisted ministry decisions. Ministers needed to ask questions even about crafts before bought or taken into the house as some dedicated these to their gods and many have symbolism not understood by the non-Native Americans. The little dots done in a pattern in beadwork, for example, symbolize the peyote drum. “When [they] tie it to something wrong then [it is] wrong [for us to partake in],” said M8.¹²⁵ Understanding what even common things could mean to a Native helped a Christian determine what stands as permissible to possess.

M8 saw success in reaching the younger generations on the reservations. They assisted in the starting youth camps established in South Dakota for Native Americans. Youth camps introduce children to Christ at a critical age. Instead of building up to a Spiritual night on one of the last nights, the Native youth camps started with spiritual fervency. Native speakers became role models from the youths’ culture. Reaching the children with the gospel constructed a good foundation of spirituality that can be built on by ministers on the reservation.

¹²⁴Minister Eight, interview with April Maunu, February 27, 2020.

¹²⁵Minister Eight, interview with April Maunu, February 27, 2020.

Minister Nine

Minister Nine (M9) pastors in Arizona and serves as the Native American Fellowship's youth director.¹²⁶ His experiences on different reservations could bring a broader perspective to ministering to Native Americans. His church serves a variety of cultures including Navajo and Apache, but he has also ministered to Montana tribes and overseen ministries in Nebraska, Kansas, and the Dakotas. M9 observed Native tribes on each reservation as distinct from one another, however, maintaining ministry similarities. M9 witnessed, "Ministry is all about relationships. Be yourself [and] tell your story of redemption."¹²⁷ He believes a key component of ministry included youth, the biggest target for reaching the reservations. Reservations rank in the top ten people groups for depression and loneliness, M9 revealed. Young people needed equipping to carry the hope Jesus provided.

M9 viewed issues of syncretism as separate considerations depending on the tribe. In his experience, southwest tribal Christians tended to remain on the conservative side of the issue. Believers judged feathers used in worship as bringing in Native religion and not appropriate for Christianity. Midwest tribes, on the other hand, may consider traditional symbols and gatherings as a social issue, not religious, and tend to function with a more lenient judgment of mixing the traditional elements with Christianity. Employing questions and listening when relating to traditional Natives facilitated conversations. Traditional Native religions do not have an answer to sin, for instance.

¹²⁶Minister Nine, interview with April Maunu, March 12, 2020.

¹²⁷Minister Nine, interview with April Maunu, March 12, 2020.

M9 suggested asking medicine men, “what do you do with your sin?”¹²⁸ Natives live in a spiritual world, M9 explained, and do not divide their religion from the rest of their lives.

Minister Ten

Minister Ten (M10) pastors on the western edge of the Navajo reservation.¹²⁹ He has ministered for over 32 years and lived on three different reservations. *AG News* reported M10’s church had doubled by its second year, making it one of the biggest Native congregations in the country.¹³⁰ M10 believed in teaching congregants to reach out and send people from the church overseas; “we are not the mission field anymore.”¹³¹ He became weary of the reservations referred to as another social problem and desired to see leaders raised up from within the reservation churches, allowing independence from missionaries.

M10 visited the Rosebud Reservation and has familiarized himself with their history. He observed that the Lakota remained one of the last tribes to surrender to the government and they maintained a broken spirit from which they need freedom instead of trying to medicate the pain. Negative feedback stemmed from past trauma and their brokenness. M10 did not recommend paying people’s rent or utilities, “Enabling people

¹²⁸Minister Nine, interview with April Maunu, March 12, 2020.

¹²⁹Minister Ten, interview with April Maunu, March 11, 2020.

¹³⁰Deann Alford, “A Native Success Story,” *PENews* (General Council of the Assemblies of God, November 28, 2017) <https://news.ag.org/en/News/A-Native-Success-Story>. Accessed March 18, 2020.

¹³¹Minister Ten, interview with April Maunu, March 11, 2020.

is not healthy.”¹³² Instead, he suggested asking people questions and assisting them by talking them through issues.

M10 discussed the reservation pastor, a subject that had not been touched upon with other interviews. He suggested that many reservation pastors became unhealthy, adding to the brokenness of the church. Discouragement in reservation ministry resulted from little connection to other pastors; the care of other ministries influenced a struggling pastor. M10 recommends pastors off the reservation partner with the reservation pastor by investing in him through education, books, fellowship, and conferences. Reservation ministers could benefit from fellowship and teaching of leaders who think on a different level.

When considering how to redeem culture on the reservations, M10 cautioned it depends on where you minister; every tribe utilized different languages and cultures. Admitting he cannot embrace their religions, M10 explained culture expanded to issues much bigger than religion. Culture involved family interactions, values, language, and customs. M10 professed personal freedom in using Native symbols such as the feather or drum, but he limited his liberty for the sake of his congregants who may become confused because of prior teaching. Protecting congregants’ consciences meant agreeing to a more conservative view.

M10 carried hope for the reservations. He strove to build people in his church to live as better disciples when he leaves. He opposed personality-driven ministries that enable dependent people that never grow up, but desired, rather, for people to depend on God. Missionaries may have employed personality-driven ministry in a paternal mindset

¹³²Minister Ten, interview with April Maunu, March 11, 2020.

in the past, but M10 believed that it can change with time and the right team. He admonished that prayer and fasting will lose spiritual chains in a community and allow the Holy Spirit opportunity to give creative strategies. M10 believed ministries “are still married to our processes.”¹³³ Highly relational and hands-on learners, Native Americans may need ministries that approach them on their level.

Minister Eleven

Minister eleven (M11) developed a nonprofit ministry reaching all the reservations with the mission to reach every Native.¹³⁴ M11 transitioned to his present ministry after 40 years of preaching the gospel as an evangelist and pastor. His strategy brought hope to the reservations including creative ventures into the “seven mountains of culture”—arts, business, church, education, family, government, and media.¹³⁵ M11 had a burden for reaching the first nations people of America for Christ and developing disciples who train other disciples.

M11 observed the church in general does not utilize other avenues to minister besides through their buildings. He started praying, “God, show me what I have never done because I want to get what I’ve never had.”¹³⁶ M11 also became aware of the need to raise up leaders. He scrutinized discipleship programs in hopes of discovering one with a simple implementation that met the needs of an oral culture, and Natives can

¹³³Minister Ten, interview with April Maunu, March 11, 2020.

¹³⁴Minister Eleven, interview with April Maunu, March 12, 2020.

¹³⁵Minister Eleven, interview with April Maunu, March 12, 2020.

¹³⁶Minister Eleven, interview with April Maunu, March 12, 2020.

duplicate. M11 believed he has found a discipleship program that will adapt to the Native culture. He has already found creative ways to teach Biblical principles including partnering with a bow manufacturer and teaching archery in the schools. Incorporating life lessons into the archery lessons produced an understanding of the values and learning styles of most Native tribes. M11 aided in bringing Biblical truths through an avenue with which Natives can relate.

M11 explained the issues of syncretism came out of attempts to contextualize the gospel but became points of contention. Some ministries avoided the issue by not allowing Native expression in the church. If we will reach the Natives with the gospel, M11 argued, we must put ourselves in their world and obtain a solid understanding of their ways. M11 encouraged examining the early church's dealing with the laws and intercultural interaction in the church. The admonitions given to the Gentiles meant to facilitate fellowship between the cultures, not to confine one culture. "What are we doing," M11 asked, "to liberate Natives to greater understanding in God?"¹³⁷ Interviewing medicine men, he suggested, may assist in determining which things Christian worship could accept. M11 believes God called him to focus on reaching people instead of taking sides in the issue of syncretism. We need to reach Native Americans on their level and endeavor for understanding on both sides.

Minister Twelve

Minister twelve (M12) came to Nebraska over 12 years ago as a missionary from a foreign country to pioneer a ministry on the Omaha Reservation.¹³⁸ Now his ministry

¹³⁷Minister Eleven, interview with April Maunu, March 12, 2020.

¹³⁸Minister Twelve, interview with April Maunu, March 10, 2020.

holds church services in two locations. He ministered to a diverse cultural group and the original site keeps growing. The honor of serving the Lord and seeing lives changed encourages M12 in ministry.

M12 believed all cultures are reached for Jesus the same way—through relationships and a clear salvation message. His congregations, although on the reservation, consisted of a mix of races. His focus does not center on the traditions of a people group, but rather proclaims the life of Jesus. Although aware of the unique struggles of the Omaha tribe, M12 welcomes all people to follow Christ.

M12 expressed his desire to reach the Native people trapped in addiction. Natives that chose living free from drugs and alcohol go back to their homes filled with vices and pressure to give in to the addictions. A home with a discipleship program for people breaking free from addictions could become an answer. Providing Natives a path beyond freedom from the destructive influences around them seems paramount to lasting transformation.

Chapter 6: Analysis and Interpretation of Findings

The interviews brought out similar themes, rendering principles for effective ministry on the Rosebud Reservation. A summary of the interviewees' descriptions of successful ministry could define success as transformed lives through Christ without stipulation in numbers or time. Those familiar with the Sioux confirmed that ministry among them often took a longer time than other Native tribes and included difficulties. Comments on healing the past hurt between whites and Natives as well as discipleship designed for Native culture reoccurred. The need for relational discipleship resounded as the most important key in Native American ministry.

Chapter six will proceed with procuring and analyzing the key principles from the interviews in chapter five that may enhance ministry on the Rosebud Reservation. Applying these principles to Native American ministry may produce an avenue for transformation and discipleship.

Key Principles Gleaned from the Research and Interviews

The following four principles appeared when comparing the interviews and certain literature on Native American study: meaningful relationships, contextualized discipleship, indigenous ministry, and Holy Spirit empowered inner healing. Surveys indicated that applying these four principles enhances ministry on the Rosebud Reservation.

Meaningful Relationships

Meaningful relationships develop the primary components of rural ministry. Roth wrote, "This means that in our rural communities, we have to be ready and open to

forming relationships... The kingdom is lived into being one relationship at a time.”¹³⁹

The mistrust between cultures on the reservation necessitates authentic relationships to break down the misconception that sees Christianity as a white man’s religion. Aaron Morrow, author of *Small Town Mission: A Guide for Mission-Driven Communities*, wrote, “People tend to perceive who God is through the lens of their relationship with others. That’s why it’s generally ineffective to tell someone that God wants to have a personal relationship with them if you aren’t interested in having a personal relationship with them.”¹⁴⁰ Building relationships of trust with individual Natives communicates God’s love through human demonstration.

Contextualized Discipleship

Ministries that assume the methods used in predominantly white cultures grow and mature Christians will remain adequate on a reservation could result in distanced, immature Native Christians at best and disenfranchised, lost people at worst. David Bosch wrote in *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in the Theology of Mission*, “The Christian faith is intrinsically incarnational; therefore unless the church chooses to remain a foreign entity, it will always fully enter into the context in which it happens to find itself.”¹⁴¹ M11 warned the Bible study approach normally used with book and paper study may not work.¹⁴² Other ministers agreed with this assessment or told of how they

¹³⁹Roth, *God’s Country*, 131.

¹⁴⁰Morrow, *Small Town Mission*, 1029.

¹⁴¹David Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2011), 139.

¹⁴²Minister Eleven, interview with April Maunu, March 12, 2020.

had Bible studies dwindle after the initial meeting. M3 disciplined Natives as he taught them hands-on life skills.¹⁴³ M10 clarified that different tribes needed different approaches. He found on one reservation that hiking as a group and discussing the Bible worked well. The tribe he pastors now responds better to meeting in small groups. He cautioned not to get married to a process, but instead find what works in a community.¹⁴⁴ Ministers seeking to tailor their discipleship practices within the context of the community they serve may see connection and acceptance among Natives.

Indigenous Ministry

Discipleship should produce mature Christians that multiply. The natural course of ministry raises leaders from within the church. Outsiders often treated Native American churches as a perpetual mission where the congregation always functioned as the takers and the missionary (usually from the dominant society) took on a paternal role as the giver. Bear-Barnetson wrote, “More appropriate words for characterizing effective missionaries to indigenous people are serve, wait, support, encourage, relinquish control, yield to other cultural norms and ideas, mentor an indigenous person to take one’s place as missionary, and then transfer to a new assignment.”¹⁴⁵ Contextualized discipleship needs to include training for ministry, releasing church members to do the works of the ministry themselves. Smith wrote, “I would like to encourage a turnaround of mentality among our Native Christians... For centuries, we have been on the receiving end of

¹⁴³Minister Three, interview with April Maunu, February 29, 2020.

¹⁴⁴Minister Nine, interview with April Maunu, March 12, 2020.

¹⁴⁵Bear-Barnetson, *Introduction to First Nation Ministry*, 66.

missionary endeavors. The time has come for us to move from being the recipients of missions to that of participants in missions."¹⁴⁶ M10 told how he changes the mindset of takers to givers through taking his Native congregation on mission trips.¹⁴⁷

Spirit-Empowered Inner Healing

Emotional trauma, generational wounds, and addictions caused barriers to the gospel in hearts as well as *hooks*—weaknesses that can draw one away from Christ, the enemy can use to pull new converts back into their old life. Every interviewee spoke of the hopelessness that manifested in the inhabitants of the Rosebud Reservation through poverty, suicides, drug and alcohol use, and a general lack of desire to succeed. As social work and counseling have limitations, there persisted a great need for transformational healing through the Holy Spirit. A few of the ministers interviewed mentioned the Holy Spirit operating in their services and the healings they had seen. Even more than physical healings, great healing of their hearts precedes Native Americans' embracing their identity in Christ and enabling them to continue as followers of Christ. Bear-Barnetson wrote, "Many First Nations feel shame in their identity...Many indigenous people deeply resent those who attacked them physiologically and sociologically and have become firmer in their resolve to reject Christianity."¹⁴⁸ Spirit-filled ministers can extend emotional healing and removal of shame to hurting Native Americans.

¹⁴⁶Smith, *Whiteman's Gospel*, 59.

¹⁴⁷Minister Ten, interview with April Maunu, March 11, 2020.

¹⁴⁸Bear-Barnetson, *Introduction to First Nation Ministry*, 72.

Conclusion: Possibilities and Future Research

Multifaceted and expansive, Native American ministry proved a larger topic than would fit well in one thesis. The research deemed the issues presented in this thesis as important to Native American Ministry on the Rosebud Reservation. A discussion encompassing all Native American issues goes beyond the scope of this thesis research. Many of these issues could expand the focus or develop another thesis topic. Syncretism, for example, remains a subject that divides churches and ministries. Continued research about syncretism may clarify theology and praxis on the reservation. Some secular journals wrote on generational trauma; however, Christian (especially with Pentecostal emphasized) academic level writings seemed difficult to procure. Expanding the research and writing about emotional healing through the Spirit could assist ministers as they reach Native Americans, giving hope for life transformation. Continuing research of expansive books and articles about these fascinating people and other tribes can open new understanding to build a community of faith.

The research goals in both the literature review and qualitative interviews included understanding the issues barricading the Lakota Sioux from receiving the gospel and following Christ as committed disciples. Having grown up in an area with a different history of the engagements between Native Americans and the government as well as the spiritual atmosphere, this thesis research expanded my understanding of the Sioux Nation and their history with government and missions. This study enabled comprehension of the continued obstacles to the gospel among the Plains Indians. The descriptions of the atrocities carried out in boarding schools gave empathy to the generational trauma carried in Natives from many of the tribes. Dismissing the boarding schools as a contemporary

issue needing attention before this study, I did not realize how recent the boarding schools continued to exist or the pain that passed through generations. Many of these boarding schools were mission schools, influencing the face of Christianity to the Native people who attended there. Although ministers cannot take responsibility for wounds they did not inflict, they can address these hurts honestly, repenting for Christians and missionaries of the past, and extend Holy Spirit healing.

The military and Native clashes occurred with complications, sometimes one side assumed more of the fault, sometimes the other, and sometimes clear responsibility for conflicts became indistinguishable. The literature study indicated ministry should not combine with government on the reservations. Ministry benefits from distancing itself from government programs or appearing to have a white man's agenda for the Native people. The late Richard Twiss, a proponent of contextualized Christianity, wrote about Christian missionaries accepting government assignments on the reservations in *Rescuing the Gospel from the Cowboys: A Native American Expression of the Jesus Way*, "...contributing to the cultural oppression brought with the gospel was the Native People were, many times, first introduced to Jesus as part of American territorialism, treaty enforcement, educational programs, economic hegemony and social disintegration through assimilation."¹⁴⁹ Ministers do not function as government agents, but additional care should separate the gospel from social programs and politics.

Although syncretism created problems and divisions, the research produced surprising results indicating the theological agreement among those interviewed on the

¹⁴⁹Richard Twiss, *Rescuing the Gospel from the Cowboys: A Native American Expression of the Jesus Way* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2015), 324.

subject; yet the praxis of that theology demonstrated varied applications. The unity over resisting syncretism involved different ways ministers addressed compromise, which created disagreement about ministry procedures. Nine interviewees did not allow any Native expression in worship, preferring to avoid the potential conflicts and theological debates (see chart on page 71). Others remained content to let the Holy Spirit lead and, if necessary, convict the individual. I expected evidence of giving up all ties to Native traditions and spirituality producing successful Native ministry. Instead, the research indicated an authentic relationship takes precedence over cultural expression of worship. Nine out of the twelve interviewees spoke of relationships with individuals (see chart on page 71). M12 had the least to say about syncretism; coming from neither the Native culture nor Euro-America, he chose to focus solely on a personal relationship with Jesus. His congregation, although on the reservation, encompasses more than one culture.¹⁵⁰ Seven of the ministers interviewed mentioned that they chose not to incorporate Native traditions into their worship services in deference to the older generation's conscience. Generations ago missionaries taught that Christian Natives must give up all Native ways and they still adhere to their teachings. Sensitivity to each congregation with a concentrated effort to live together in an authentic community could make room for each congregation to find freedom in Christ.

Ministries may express different opinions on the practice of syncretism, but the need to contextualize the gospel by changing the structure of discipleship became a growing realization among many. Nine interviewees, the same number that spoke of relationships, expressed the need for contextualized discipleship on the reservations (see

¹⁵⁰Minister Twelve, interview with April Maunu, March 10, 2020.

the chart on page 71). Some of the ministers interviewed have practiced their own modified discipleship and others sought a culturally acceptable form or program. Over and over the interviewees expressed the need for discipleship among Natives that would model Christ incarnate.

The need for indigenous ministry came from the literature study and MARM classes on the healthy rural church. Healthy Christians and churches multiply. Dwight Sandoz, professor for MARM, taught, “Mature churches must have a way to propagate... [we] need to train and release people.”¹⁵¹ He went on to explain that self-supporting develops healthy autonomy, identity, and multiplication. Always staying on the receiving end of ministry means to stay immature. The natural cycle of contextualized discipleship should expect Christians to grow up in the faith to do the works of ministry. This will naturally look indigenous on the reservations, building the trust level of the community and perpetuating the gospel on the reservations.

The goal of this research continues to advance the gospel among the Native Americans on the Rosebud reservation. From studying the research, pursuing meaningful relationships, contextualized discipleship, indigenous ministry, and Holy Spirit empowered inner healing on the reservations may enhance Native American ministry and bring about Christ-following transformation in Native lives.

¹⁵¹Dwight Sandoz, “Mature Church” (lecture, Paradigms in Partnership for the Rural Church, First Assembly of God, North Little Rock, AR, March 20, 2019).

Appendix

1. Describe your ministry to the native Americans
2. What do you think is the biggest barrier to Native Americans embracing Christianity?
3. What are some of the problems you have faced in Native American ministries?
4. Are you encouraged or discouraged in ministry? Why?
5. What do you think are the biggest social problems on the reservation?
6. What do you see as the greatest needs in the reservations?
7. What are some of the successes you have had on the reservation?
8. Why do you think ministry to Natives is different than other cultural groups?
9. What is your view of syncretism?
10. Do you think some of the customs of the natives can be redeemed and used in worship? How would you discern between what is acceptable and not?
11. Is it possible to partner with ministries that view syncretism differently?
12. How important do you believe the issue of syncretism is to successful ministry on the reservation?
13. Are there any other issues that you believe are important to successful ministry?
14. What would successful ministry on the reservation look like to you?

Charts and Illustrations

Comparison of Responses from Interviews

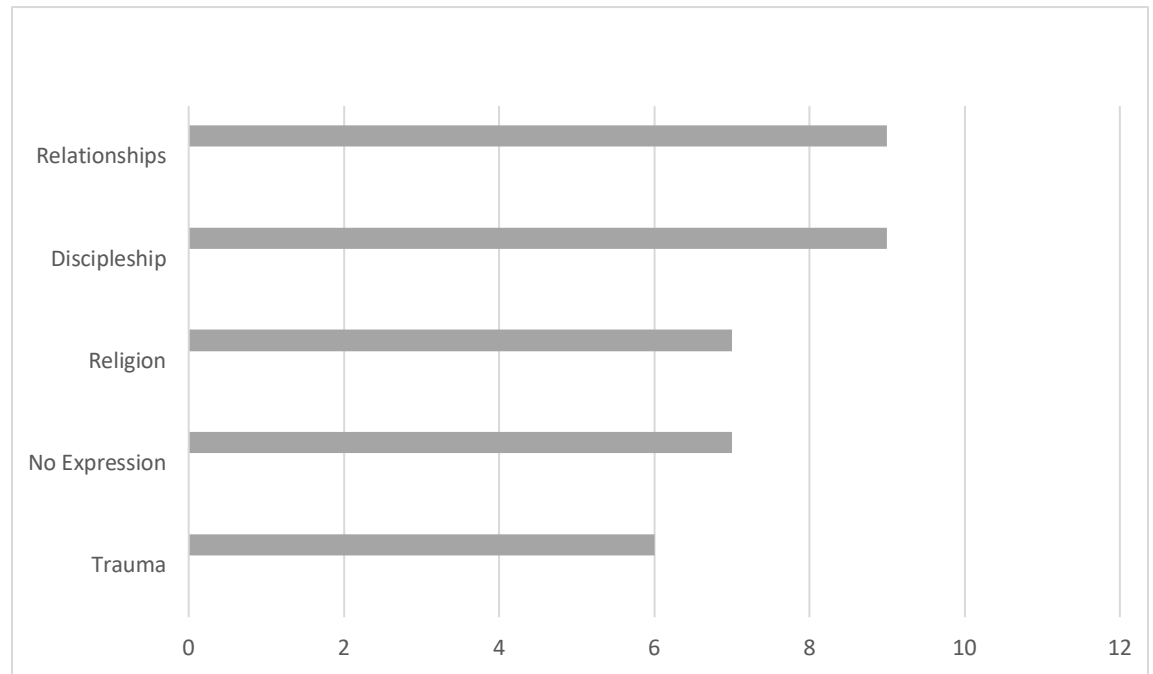


Chart shows the number of interviewees (out of 12) that specifically mentioned these five areas:

1. Relationships with individuals is important in reaching Native Americans for Jesus and establishing ministry.
2. Discipleship is a needed component among Natives (either they described what they were doing to disciple or described the lack of discipleship on the reservations). For some this included releasing into indigenous ministry.
3. Traditional Native religion is a major barrier to ministry on the reservations.
4. Emotional trauma or the need for emotional healing was mentioned.
5. Interviewees stated that they had no traditional Native expression (symbols or items) that are used in service. Others may not have Native expressions in their church services, but they did not state so.

*Disclaimer: This is a chart resulting from stated responses of interviewees from the questions in the appendix. Other interviewees may agree with these statements but did not expressively state them.

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Minister Seven interview with April Maunu, March 12, 2020.

Minister Eight interview with April Maunu, February 27, 2020.

Minister Nine interview with April Maunu, March 12, 2020.

Minister Ten interview with April Maunu, March 11, 2020.

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