

The O'Learys

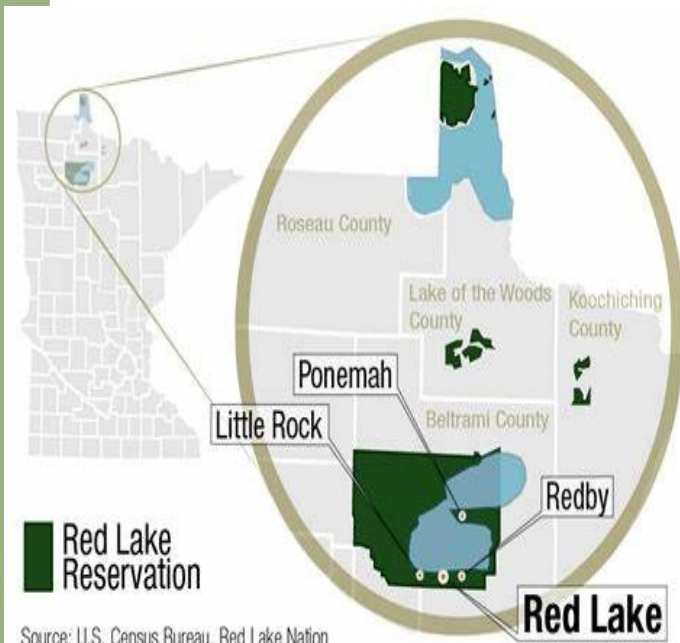
Serving Indigenous Peoples in North America

As we take time to reflect on the first quarter of 2024, we're thankful for the many opportunities the Lord has given to carry out His will during this first quarter. As Ryan was reflecting on first quarter ministry, he summarized his main work as consisting of the following areas: preaching God's word, teaching/training others related to Native people and ministry, leading Native American ministry, and networking with other Christians and Christian leaders for the purpose of potentially partnering in ministry. This newsletter will provide an overview of the ministry activity in each of these areas.

PREACHING

Ryan has had various opportunities to preach God's word in Sunday services during the first quarter of this year. For example, Ryan went with a group of people to the Red Lake Reservation recently and the Ponemah community on this rez to preach a message from Exodus chapter 23. The subject of this message was about the importance of getting spiritual guidance in life, and that we get this guidance from God's word. Many people are looking for some type of spiritual guidance and are looking for it from various sources. However, Ryan stressed how the Bible is fully trustworthy, and that people need to study it regularly to receive the guidance it offers us. Ryan provided some specific spiritual guidance from this OT book of Exodus in the message.

(The picture below is a map of the Red Lake Reservation and where the Ponemah community is located in it).



TEACHING

Part of the focus of our ministry involves investing in the next generation of Native Christian leaders. Having such leaders is extremely important for there to be fruitful Christian ministry among tribal people as there is a lack of these leaders currently. As a result, Ryan traveled to Flagstaff, Arizona the beginning of January and taught a week long course at Indian Bible College. The title of this course was, "Introduction to Native Ministry", and all the students in this course were members of various tribes in the United States.

Ryan covered a number of topics in this class, including reviewing two books written by Native Christian leaders. Students and even some staff who sat in on the course periodically commented on how much they enjoyed and were blessed by taking the course. For example, the President of the Bible college sent Ryan a note after he was done teaching the course about how it was a joy to have Ryan teach for the week and how much the staff at the school who sat in on the class some enjoyed the course. Ryan was encouraged in that this school has a vision to grow and make more of an impact among Native people. (the picture below is of Indian Bible College staff and students).



While Ryan was in Flagstaff, he was able to connect with a pastor friend of his who is Navajo. This friend serves as pastor of an evangelical congregation in Flagstaff that is largely comprised of Navajo people. This pastor asked Ryan to speak in his church on Wednesday evening. While it was a stretch for Ryan in that he was teaching all day, everyday, throughout the week and adding a sermon into his ministry work was tough, the Lord gave Ryan a message to share and Ryan did the best he could with the strength God provided to share this message.

This congregation also has a large number of people who attend services online. For example, Ryan's pastor friend shared that there were over a 1000 people who watched the service online the Sunday before Ryan came. When Ryan was done preaching, the pastor gave people attending online around the Navajo nation and in person an opportunity to ask Ryan questions. A number of people physically present as well as online asked Ryan a variety of questions. It was a tremendously rich time of ministry!

TRAINING

For three weeks in February and March, Ryan provided Native ministry training for people from various congregations interested in or even engaged currently in Native ministry. We see in the life of Christ that Jesus Himself invested/trained others to carry out His work and will on Earth, and He is always the best model to follow! There simply too much ministry to do by ourselves, and we need a team of other people to join us on this Native ministry journey. We're thankful for the team that God is raising up. But, this team needs training as well to effectively engage in Native ministry.

As result, during the first night of training, Ryan discussed issues in the past that have created trauma and many Indigenous people being hostile toward the gospel. During the second week of training, Ryan shared about the solution in this present time, which is to see churches and individual followers of Jesus live a biblically faithful life. Ryan touched on some aspects of what a Biblically faithful life looks like, and why living this kind of life is so important in Native ministry. In the third week of training, Ryan touched on the future and what is happening in the six centers of ministry that make up the First Peoples Initiative and addressed some other topics.

NETWORKING

Networking and working with other ministries and ministry leaders is important to do God's will on earth. This first quarter involved a significant amount of networking and beginning to build relationships with significant ministries and ministry leaders in the United States. For example, Ryan flew to Los Angeles the first part of March to attend his first board of directors meeting for the National Association of Evangelicals on March 6th and 7th. The board activity began on March 6th as the board visited Disneyland to hear from Christian leaders about the power of storytelling, including the story of the gospel. After listening to these leaders, the board visited inner city Los Angeles and a ministry serving homeless people in the city. The name of this ministry is the Los Angeles Mission. We as board members listened to leaders from this mission share about their work, and we also ate dinner with some of the people who are staying at this mission. It was an amazing night.

The next day, Ryan attended his first NAE board of directors meeting at Biola University, and he had an opportunity to share briefly about himself, what he does, and about what tribe Ryan comes from. Some denominational leaders introduced themselves to Ryan afterwards and shared how they would like to help and partner in ministry.

LEADING

Much of Ryan's time involves leading the First Peoples Initiative as well as serving as the President of the National Association of Native Evangelicals. He has regular leadership meetings for both ministries. Also, a part of Ryan's work includes recruiting new leaders for both leadership teams. We are encouraged in that a number of new leaders have joined the First Peoples leadership team, and one new leader joined the board for the National Association of Native Evangelicals. For the First Peoples leadership team, a First Nations leader from Canada joined the leadership team. Gary is a very respected and experienced Christian leader in Canada, and we're blessed to have him on our team. He has an amazing story of God's transforming power in his life, and how he overcame significant poverty and trauma from his childhood through faith in Christ and growing strong spiritually. He shared his story during his first leadership meeting with us and we as a leadership team listened intently his story. Having a First Nations leader from Canada on the First Peoples leadership team is extremely important as the First Peoples Initiative involves developing a ministry to First Nations people in Canada as well.



Other networking/relationship building took place the first quarter of 2024. For example, Ryan met with the leadership team of SIL, which used to be a part of Wycliffe but is now a separate organization. We discussed the importance of language revitalization in Indigenous Christian ministry, and how we might be able to work together to accomplish this needed task. Many tribal people have a distorted view, based upon what took place in Indian residential schools, that to be a Christian includes abandoning one's Indigenous language. This simply is not true. A part of our focus going forward in ministry will include helping the church learn and incorporate Indigenous languages more in their ministry, including in their Sunday morning church services.



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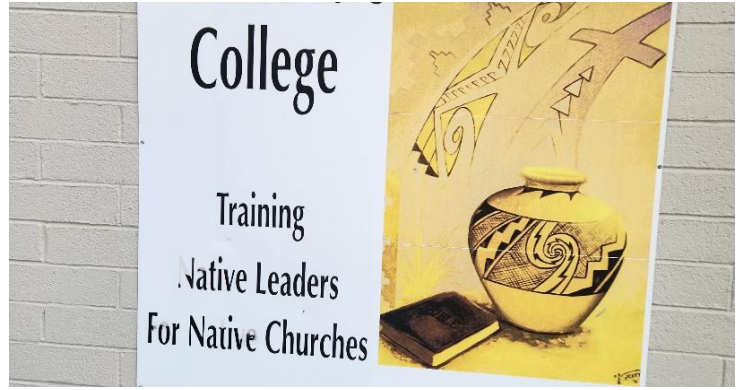
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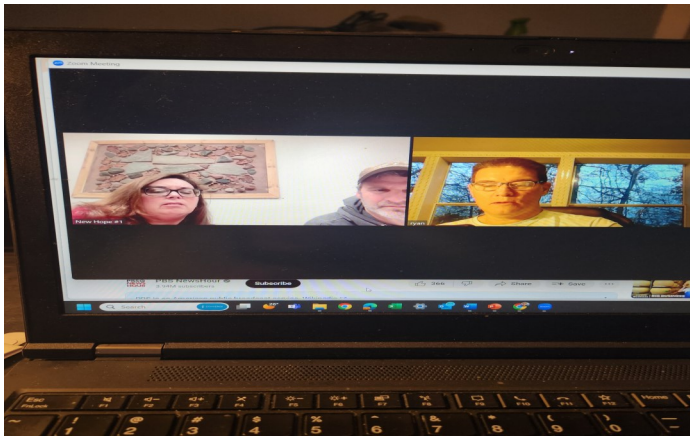
Here are some pictures related to our ministry travel and ministry during the first quarter of 2024. Even though we don't often include many pictures as it's hard to fit a lot of pictures on a two page newsletter, we thought that we would add an extra page to this newsletter and share some more ministry related pictures with you.



Ryan took this picture during the NAE board visit to inner city LA and walking on the streets. Tents of people needing permanent residency line the streets, and some of the people are members of federally recognized tribes.



This sign is posted on one of the main buildings at Indian Bible College in Flagstaff where Ryan taught, "Introduction to Native Ministry" during the first part of January. It shows the purpose of this school, which is deeply needed in Indigenous ministry in North America.



The picture above is Ryan working with two people from a partnering church to prepare for the online Native ministry training that Ryan provided in February and the first part of March.



Ryan took the picture above, which is of the massive Navajo nation, while he and his Navajo pastor friend were driving to attend a high school basketball game in Winslow, Arizona. This occurred when Ryan was teaching at Indian Bible College in Flagstaff. The Navajo Rez has about 15,000,000 acres and has over 300,000 tribal members. Ryan was able to meet several Native ministry leaders who he had never met before who were attendance at the game as well.



Ryan took this picture during an NAE board visit to inner city Los Angeles. During this visit, the board listened to a presentation about addressing the significant problem of homelessness in LA, and how this ministry is engaged in wholistic discipleship of the people living at this inner city mission.



The picture above is obviously of a sign for one community on the Red Lake Reservation, that being Ponemah. Ryan preached during a Sunday morning service at the only evangelical church in this community on Red Lake. You can see the sign behind it that says, "home of the Ojibwe language." We shared in this newsletter how Ryan is engaged some with Bible translation and language ministry, SIL, to facilitate Indigenous language use in Christian ministry more.