

# “A life-changing experience”



Kay Ressel, an ELCA pastor and director of Lutheran Lakota Shared Ministries, stresses that a pillar of her work in Jesus' name is to challenge people's beliefs about Native Americans and to "hold people accountable for how they engage in ministry."

"My job is to push you out of your comfort zone so you come to a different way of knowing the Lakota people," said Ressel, who is not Native American.

*Headquartered on the Pine Ridge Indian Reservation and funded in part by Mission Support from the South Dakota Synod and the churchwide organization, Lutheran Lakota Shared Ministries serves a geographic area that, at 3,500 square miles, is larger than Rhode Island and Delaware combined.*

In 2000, Lutheran Lakota Shared Ministries opened a retreat center to house visiting teens who came to do missionary projects on the reservation.

"It was very appropriate in that time, but we knew we could do better," Ressel said. "Our focus now is on learning and listening to people's stories, getting to know one another, sharing time together, sharing meals. ... After we develop relationships, we find ways to work together."

The ministry still offers what Ressel refers to as "threshold ministries," with household items — diapers, sandwiches, hygiene kits, blankets — passed out the door to those in need.

In addition, there's the Lutheran/Lakota Job Corps, which employs about a dozen community members

in numerous roles. Staffers work with visitors who have come to the reservation to lend a hand and, more importantly, to gain a new perspective. This cultural-immersion ministry receives a variety of groups annually.

Tammy Jacobi did a 10-day immersion in January 2018 as part of her studies at Wartburg Theological Seminary. The experience brought her face-to-face with her own privilege, which she found humbling.

"Given what we take for granted as daughters, mothers, wives living in western Christianity, the immersion was eye-opening," Jacobi said. "[It] was a life-changing experience. Everyone had a lesson to teach, a story to tell."

*To find a video story about Lutheran Lakota Shared Ministries, visit [ELCA.org/SOFIA](http://ELCA.org/SOFIA).*



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