

St. Aidan's (Toronto) Youth Learning and Service Trip - Summer 2018

This summer a group of 8 youth and 4 accompanying adults from the church of St. Aidan's in Beach, Toronto, lived in the community of Old Crow for a service and learning project. This is their report

The Leaders:

Natalie: *"We are all people." Someone said this to us during our time in Old Crow and it really resonated with me. We learned that Gwich'in means people, and we know that we are all people, living together in this world. It was wonderful to talk with the community members and to hear about their plans for the future, to keep their community thriving, and to solidify the message that we are all people, who need to come together, to continue to make our world and our communities a better, more sustainable place.*



Lucy: *Celebrating a midnight eucharist on sacred Crow Mountain with the Rev. Bert Chestnut, community members and our group was a highlight for me. Midnight mass has always had connotations of darkness and candlelight at Christmas, but this was mid-summer with the sunlight that never leaves the sky - and it was too windy to light the candles outdoors! We sang, prayed and shared communion together as sisters and brothers in Christ, bridging the geographical and cultural differences between us.*



Amy: *I choose this photo for two reasons. I have several more spectacular sky pictures from this trip, but not only does this one have a rainbow in it (the second time we had seen rainbows in the space of a few days) but it was taken at about 1:30 AM! The natural beauty of the area, and the rainbow, are both important reminders of our connection to God through nature. Outdoors has always been one of the places I feel closest to God, and listening to the people of Old Crow talk about their spirituality and understanding of God not only reinforced the validity of this, but reminds me of the imperative to be good stewards of nature – something that is easy to overlook at home in a big city. I was so impressed with how easily the local people we talked to wove their spiritual life into every part of their everyday life, and acknowledged the need for all of us – people, animals, plants, water etc - to work together to live a good life in which the earth and all that is in it can thrive. Which brings me to the second reason for this picture, it includes the picnic table that was in front of our residence. As the week progressed we sat out there more and more, especially after one of the locals mowed the grass for us, and we had a campfire there our last night. When we made ourselves available, local people would stop by to join us, to talk with us so we could get to know each other, to share s'mores and spider hot dogs, to invite us to partake in other adventures. The trip gave us the opportunity to slow down and take time to just be in community with others, easy to do in a small community, easy to forget to do (or avoid) in the big city.*



Chris: *Flying out of Toronto, heading west, I was struck by the thought: perhaps the best way to celebrate Canada Day was to travel across like 3/4 of it. We live in a big country. The second biggest in the world, by area. To call it “vast” is an understatement. We travelled over the precambrian shield, the ancient boreal forest, the width of the prairies, the rocky mountains, and the lower part of the arctic tundra. And we found ourselves welcomed into a community completely different than the one we had left. One that is actually another Nation, within this big, messy, complicated land. But one where we were welcomed, fed, loved, and allowed a chance to connect and learn. For me, that was the biggest take-away. That we were blessed with a*

chance to go way way way up north, to get to listen. To listen to the community leaders passionately telling us plans for the future; to listen to southerners (and internationals) who had chosen to make the far north their home; to listen to the elders and storytellers, and hear of a unique, tough, creative, and independent people who have lived there for over 20k years; to listen to community members and understand how our experiences are similar, and how they are completely different; and to listen to the young people—who made themselves at least as comfortable as we did in our accommodations—and who told us about why they loved their community, and what excited them about their future, and the things that scared them. There were many times when I worried that we weren't "doing enough" in the community; then I was reminded that the act of connecting our two communities was a vital part of the calls to action from the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. All we needed were open ears and hearts, and a willingness to receive their words and add them to how we understand who we are as a big big community, in this really really big land.



Youth Participants:

Geneva: *Learning about Old Crow's values was very eye opening for me. What I found really interesting was how much a community that truly values sustainability can thrive. There is nothing more important than our natural resources and the land that we live on, and it is important to respect that.*



Val: *This unique sculpture was made by a resident of Old Crow. Throughout the community, homes and buildings are decorated by caribou antlers. This demonstrates the importance of the Porcupine Caribou Herd to the community. Vuntut Gwich'in use all parts of the caribou, signifying the respect they have for the animal that sacrificed its life in order to provide for them.*



Nic: *On the first day that we arrived in Old Crow we had the chance to take part in the games that had been set up in celebration of Canada Day. At first not many of us were all that confident about talking to and being around the people in Old Crow, however as we kept on getting*

involved in the games we were able to relax more and really have fun. I think that the moment in this picture captures a time where we became more comfortable around the new people we met and we started to feel really welcomed into the community. With everyone laughing at the situation I could feel the energy in the room shift from that of an awkward tone to one that allowed each member of our group to open up more. This happened with each game that we participated in and by the end I believe that it helped us to interact more with the community members. I'm very thankful to have the opportunity to have been able to visit such a wonderful place.



Issy: *While being in Old Crow there were so many things that made me fall in love with the small community. The most prominent part was definitely the youth in the community. From the first day we got there the kids were knocking at our door, curious and eager to find out who these visitors were that came to their town, and why. Some were shy, but the more time we spent together, the more comfortable they got with us, and we with them. Together we would play games, colour, make bracelets and even just talk, since we all had lots of questions for each other. The youth in Old Crow live a much different lifestyle than I do, but we are all still so similar. We enjoy the same sports and activities, like the same music and play the same games. In the picture below, myself and a young girl were playing in the snow we found on Crow Mountain. The girl was telling me how much she loved winter, and couldn't wait for it to snow again. Overall, I felt a great connection with the children and youth I met in Old Crow and that was definitely the highlight of the trip.*



Grace: *A group of youth and myself went to Old Crow, Yukon and Whitehorse, Yukon for 10 beautiful days and I couldn't have asked for a better experience. What really touched me was how well the community worked together and how open they were to invite an all Caucasian group of kids/adults into their indigenous community. As soon as we arrived in Old Crow they were nothing but inclusive and wanted nothing more than to join in with the Canada Day festivities! One part that really spoke to me was the religious point of view. Going into this service-learning trip I assumed that the people of this land would be very different in terms of religion, but it was such a great epiphany to realize that we are all looking for the same thing and that's love, acceptance and joy given through God and the people around us. I realized this during two separate points on this journey and that was when we first arrived in Whitehorse and Bishop Larry greeted us with a place to stay, a big smile and in-depth history of the land and the people who live on it. The second time was on Wednesday, Old Crow's minister Bert, had scheduled a midnight mass at the top of the mountain. We had heard that it only took 45 mins to walk up to the point of the mountain, so we left 1 hour before to give us time... we got half way and we knew that it was going to take much longer. Luckily the townspeople were driving up and were offering us rides, but we kindly declined thinking optimistically that we would make it, until that realization, so we hopped on the pick-up truck and we were off on a beautiful scenic ride to the top of the mountain from people we didn't even know and when we arrived, I sat through one of the most beautiful services ever. It was beautiful intertwined with both cultures and it was so nice to see people of different backgrounds come together in God's love, loving and respecting one another and that's when I knew how welcomed we were in this village and how Bert, Larry, the Anglican Church and God have touched the Gwitchin People of Old Crow and us.*



Olivia: *Walking up Crow Mountain for a midnight eucharist was definitely a highlight of our trip to Old Crow. We had a gorgeous view on both our hike up before the service and truck ride down afterwards. Looking out over the vast expanse of land was an incredibly humbling experience, and one that will stick with us for time to come.*



James:

Going to the Yukon in June was one of the best experiences of my life. I am a bit of a home body so at first I was a bit apprehensive about going to a place far away to meet a bunch of people I didn't know. As soon as our plane landed in Whitehorse I knew that the next week and a bit were going to be some of the best days of my life thus far. I couldn't have asked for a better group of people to share my experiences and for that I am extremely grateful. Highlights of my trip include talking to the people of Old Crow and learning about their own little autonomous community in the great white north, eucharist on Crow mountain in the midnight

sun, playing cards with the gang, and of course hanging out with Bishop Larry in Whitehorse!
My photo is from when we went to the Carcross desert, what a great and scenic place. I am very grateful to have had this experience.



Blythe:



During the unforgettable experience that Old Crow offered, the significance of their surroundings really captivated my attention. Having a specific herd of caribou named after the river through which it migrates, is not something you would hear or think about on a day to day basis. This showed me how connected the people truly are to their land and nature as a whole. The people there also showed major respect for every little thing surrounding them; from the ground beneath your feet to the animal being sacrificed to keep families alive. One thing I remember from this trip was being told that whenever an animal is killed the hunter will immediately start praying thanking the Creator for this animal that sacrificed its life to feed a family. The experience as a whole was truly as eye-opening and educational as it was fun.

