

## **A Conduit for the Lord**

**By Sarah Dixon Young**

When the Lord works in the lives of His people, He includes His people in doing the work.

Pastor Steve Osage has served as a conduit of the Lord's blessings to ministries across the Dakotas for the past twenty years, exemplifying Philippians 2:13: "For it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for His good pleasure."

"God made it easy," he says. "I would just visit the churches to find out how they were doing and what their needs were. Then, I would call other churches who would give. It was really amazing to be able to connect them and watch the Lord work."

For Osage, serving others began with his salvation in 1981. A minister came to the hospital where Osage was recovering from a car accident and shared the Gospel. Osage continued a lifestyle of alcohol addiction for six more months, until one evening, walking to the bar, he remembered the Pastor's words and prayed to receive Christ.

"I just passed by the bar, went home, and told my wife, 'Let's go to church,'" he recalls. He was baptized, and three years later, he became licensed to minister. He began pastoring in Oklahoma. In 1993, he and another pastor took their families and traveled to Lower Brule, SD to share the Gospel with the Lakota people there. Thirteen people accepted Christ.

The next year, Dakota pastor Wilbert Robertson invited Osage to travel to the Lake Traverse Reservation in South Dakota to do a revival. While handing out fliers, Osage encountered the spiritual hardness of the people when one man took the flier, wadded it up, and tossed it to the ground. Later that night, Pastor Robertson shared about the immense need of the Dakota people and about the difficulty in reaching them with the Gospel.

Osage was intrigued. Later in the evening, he went to talk with Robertson again about the community's need for the Gospel.

Robertson told him, "Would you pray about serving here? I believe you could really help because you are a real people person. I am not, but I see that in you." Before the end of the week, Osage knew that the Lord was calling him to the Dakotas.

His wife, Rita, wasn't so sure; however, the Lord worked on her heart too, and by the next Spring, they were moving, along with their granddaughter, to pastor not one, but two congregations on the Lake Traverse Reservation: First Baptist Sisseton and Bethany Baptist.

In addition to sharing the Gospel, Osage also kept an eye out for young men he could mentor and train to be leaders in the church. Just as Robertson had mentored him, he came alongside others.

"One of the goals Wilbert had was to train indigenous pastors. Every church I pastored, I always picked somebody to mentor in that direction. I would build relationships with them and get to know their strengths," Osage says.

Over the years, he has mentored many of the native pastors of the Dakotas. One of them is Chris Little. Osage met him in his native Oklahoma and mentored him, later suggesting that he come to Lower Brule to pastor Hilltop Baptist Church. Little has served there seven years.

“Pastor Steve has been my pastor, my mentor, my friend- and is like a dad,” Pastor Little says. “He has led by example, showing me how to walk in faith and be a servant with a cheerful, giving heart. He always pointed to Christ in his work, never taking the credit for himself.”

During his time in Sisseton, Osage received a call from believers in Minot inviting him to come and begin a native work there. Osage and his wife began to drive the 400-mile, seven-hour journey every Thursday in order to hold worship services on Thursday evenings. They would drive back to Sisseton the next day. Eventually, Osage connected the group in Minot with a pastor from Oklahoma.

About this time, the Dakota Baptist Convention heard of all that Osage was doing in native work and invited him to join the staff as a Language Mission Director. Osage accepted and moved to Bismarck in 1998.

He heard that the small church in Lower Brule was closing, so he began his work with the DBC by leading a small congregation as believers in Lower Brule met in the Golden Buffalo motel to worship. That group eventually became Hilltop Baptist Church.

When the group was ready for a building of their own, Osage connected them with mission teams from Oklahoma and Florida who were willing to supply both the materials and the labor to help build the new sanctuary. The Lord used Osage to be a conduit of His blessing to many more churches after this, as Osage lined up mission teams to help build buildings, conduct revivals and Bible schools, and do evangelistic outreach on reservations across the Dakotas.

A woman named Rosie Whiteowl called from Mandaree, ND and asked if Osage would be willing to come and start an evangelistic work in her community. It was 160 miles from Bismarck, but Osage made the trip and found that Whiteowl and a few others were meeting in an old building eighteen miles out of town. The building was in the middle of a field, and when Osage arrived, several teens with hammers climbed up to the bell and hit it until people began to come to the church.

For two years, Osage and his wife drove to Mandaree to worship with believers there. He arranged to meet with the tribal chairman to ask about leasing land for a new building. Once it was agreed on, Osage made a call to a mission team in Louisiana who built the new building in just two weeks. The people of the Lord in Mandaree then had a place that would be warm in the frigid winter months where they could worship together.

Osage used his experiences in the Dakotas to help connect similar needs to the Lord’s provision in Oklahoma and in Navajo country, resulting in 16 more churches being built across Oklahoma and 2 on Navajo reservations.

During his time with the DBC, Osage joined the work of First Nations Baptist Association, an affinity association of native churches under the umbrella of the DBC. Pastor Robertson and Pastor David Boyd, of Brockton, MT had begun First Nations in 1998 to equip and train native believers to be leaders in their churches and communities.

First Nations began with five churches, but grew to include fourteen churches. Together, the churches were able to host pastor’s conferences, youth camps, family camps, and area wide crusades. Osage has remained active with First Nations even after his time with the DBC ended. In 2019, First Nations hosted a crusade, several revivals, and a Pastor and Church Leadership Conference for native believers. Today, there are eleven churches in First Nations, and Osage has mentored four of their pastors.

Osage's wife, Rita, passed away in 2016. She had always traveled alongside her husband and ministered to the women in each community. Osage particularly remembered her gentleness and care with the abused women of Sisseton.

"She would go right into their houses and help them," he remembered, "and she would share the hope of the Gospel with them."

Osage later remarried, and his wife Luanna now serves alongside him as they travel and minister to believers and congregations in the Dakotas, Oklahoma, and elsewhere.

The love they have for the Lord and for the downtrodden shines through all the Osages do.

"All the churches I've pastored had one thing in common: their need. And I have seen God meet so many needs. As soon as I thought, 'This church is really starting to come along!' God would move me to a new, difficult location or church and teach me to love the people all over again. That's what it was all about: love," he says.

Osage and his wife have recently moved back to Oklahoma, but he knows one never retires from the service of the Lord.

"I just love being a Christian," he says. "I can say, 'See what God does? See His timing? I am just amazed at all that He has done.'"

*Sarah and her husband, Paul serve at the Dakota Baptist Church in Fort Totten, ND, on the Spirit Lake Nation.*