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It is the people we encounter who make our travels memorable

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In May, I traveled to Pisek to cover the 125th anniversary of St. John Nepomucene Church for New Earth. Even there, so far from home, I saw people I knew. Our daughter's high school choir director played the organ. Father Jared Kadlec, whose rectory at St. Benedict's is only a few miles from our house in Horace, celebrated Mass. Parishioners and visitors greeted each other so warmly it was like a family reunion.

So when the time came for me to travel to Bechyne to cover their church's 125th, I wanted my husband, Tony, and our 9-year-old, Chloe, to experience it, too. Then I got a phone call. St. Augustine's in Fessenden had a food building at the county fair and the caller wondered if I might write a story about it. The fair was the same weekend as the anniversary in Bechyne and the two communities were nowhere near each other on the map, but I started planning.

If we headed to Fessenden on Thursday, we could visit Mom and Dad in Minot for the weekend and Tony could see his customers there on Friday. Then early Sunday we could drive to Bechyne. Two New Earth stories in one weekend, plus a family visit, and a work trip for Tony. Our weekend together was planned!

Before it was time to leave, the flood hit Minot. My parents were safe, but I felt like we needed to be there. I remembered the stress of the constant news reports during flooding in eastern North Dakota, the images of water inundating homes and the frustrating inability to see for ourselves what was happening because travel wasn't possible or allowed. Even if I could do very little to help those afflicted in Minot, I knew our presence would help draw my parents away from the devastating news reports for awhile.

It was a weekend we will never forget, filled with the goodness of people and God's grace. On top of the nice visits and great food at the Catholic building at the fair, Chloe won a stuffed animal playing a game, and the carnival worker gave us another when we told her we were going to visit Grandpa.

In Minot, we met a man whose house was filled with flood water but who was at work helping a displaced family buy a camper. We met the family that rejoiced that they now had a home for the next few months. They had lost a great deal, but were grateful to have each other.

When Sunday morning came, we got up extra early because we knew several roads would be detoured. About an hour into our drive we came upon a roadway that was built up with rock. Water was lapping against both sides. A sign told drivers to "take turns" but the heavy fog didn't allow us to see if anyone was coming from the other direction. We inched forward, then saw the lights. A truck was headed our way. Both vehicles hugged the edges and we

were able to meet and pass. It was the longest unknown road I've ever traveled, but an adventure all the same.

Soon, we reached our final destination. Just like in Pisek and Fessenden and Minot, we were greeted like family members in Bechyne. The celebration was joyous and an experience we will remember and talk about often.

Our travels had not been elaborate or costly, but were filled with the warmth of people, the gift of faith, grateful hearts and time with family - experiences beyond value that create lasting memories.