

Indian Mission Seeks Help Prayers, Donations Urgently Needed

Dear Friend in Christ,
I'm writing this letter for a compelling reason. Growing up in Brooklyn, I had no idea that God would call me one day to work among Navajo Indians in faraway New Mexico. And, when I began my ministry on the Eastern Navajo Reservation, I never, ever expected to find the kind

Ella is a Navajo Indian. Her crude shelter measures about 16x16, hardly the size of an average garage. It is furnished with a sagging double-bed, a crude kitchen table and chairs and a

homesite lease. She has no money. She has nothing." Roxie's words kept tumbling out. "I know the Mission doesn't have funds to build Ella a hogan (a traditional Navajo dwelling), so I haven't wanted to worry you about her. But, she's desperately in need and I'm desperately concerned for the family. You know how cold it's already getting at night. Will you come with me to see for yourself?"

Then I saw for myself what I just described to you. I'm Father Doug McNeill and for the past 15 years my work has been here on the Eastern Navajo Reservation among the poorest of our Nation's poor.

When Roxie arrived with me in tow, Ella looked hopeful. I reminded myself I had only come to look...but my heart would not let me leave without making a commitment to Ella that her family would have a safe shelter just as soon as possible.

I don't know who looked more joyous — Ella or Roxie. They hugged each other, laughing and crying at the same time. The little ones joined in and I stepped outside to see if any of the materials in the shanty could be salvaged for the building of a hogan. I wasn't much encouraged.

In the days that have passed since I visited Ella's shack with Roxie, I have prayed for a way to fulfill the promise I made to Ella. Too well, I know the truth of Roxie's statement that the Mission doesn't have funds

on hand to build Ella a new hogan.

We operate on a shoestring (and a lot of faith!) and, too often, when I check our bank balance, I find we are what my mother would call "Flat Broke!"

Yet, today, I still know I couldn't have walked away from Ella's plight and slept a wink without making a commitment to help. My heart made a commitment I believe your heart would also have made if you had been there with me. I'm writing this letter today appealing to you to help with this desperate need...to reach out with compassion for the plight of this American Indian family.

The day of our visit, when she finally got hold of herself, Ella began to quiz Roxie about what kind of a new hogan we would build for her family.

"Will it have a real roof?" she asked. Roxie looked at me. I nodded, Yes.

"Will it have a real floor?" Ella asked. Roxie looked at me and, again, I nodded, Yes.

Ella hugged herself. She took a deep breath before she dared to ask, "Will it have real windows?"

This time, Roxie didn't look at me. She nodded, Yes!

Turning away from Ella, Roxie spoke to me in hushed tones that only I could hear.

She almost begged, "Father, could we also get Ella a safe new stove to go in her new hogan?" What could I do, but nod, Yes!

A hogan for Ella's family to protect them from the life-threatening cold of winter!

As Roxie turned to me, I turn to you today. I plead for your prayers. And I also plead for your help for the building materials. For materials for a real roof...a real floor...real windows.

This is a need that is so real I couldn't turn my back on it.

Can you? I'm praying Ella's family will be able to count on you. Will you help today with this emergency need?

During Lent, our hearts are focused on Our Lord Jesus and His Resurrection.

It is in His name that our Mission reaches out with love to our Native American neighbors on the Eastern Navajo Reservation. It is in His name that I ask for your generous gift today to help us build a hogan for Ella and her family and to share in all the good works of St. Bonaventure Indian Missions and School.

When you write, send me your Special Intentions so I can pray for you, too.

In the Love of Jesus,

Father Doug
Father Doug McNeill

P.S. If I could take you in tow, as Roxie did me, I know you would want to do whatever you could to make sure Ella and her children have a new hogan this winter. I can't...so I ask you to see Ella and her ramshackle dwelling through my eyes. See the plastic at the windows. See the plastic trash bags taped together to form the ceiling. Feel her grief for the infant who died last winter within those flimsy walls.

P.P.S. The sight of Ella's surviving baby still haunts me. See her for yourself in this picture and let your heart go out to her as Roxie's has...and as mine has.



of poverty I once thought existed only in "Third World" countries.

Lay missionaries who come to serve with us almost always ask me, "Father, is this America?"

I'm sure you would, too, if you would have been with me the day I visited Ella and her family. I was appalled at what I found, even though I knew in my heart what to expect.

The ceiling is plastic trash bags held in place with carpet tape.

The walls are of scrap plywood. Outside, sections of the wall have been tarpapered which gives a kind of patchwork look to the makeshift dwelling. Step inside and you're standing on bare earth, hard-packed and swept clean.

Right away you notice the "windows" are simply strips of opaque plastic which offer little protection against the howling winter wind.

Last winter, an infant died within these walls.

Ella and her children don't "live" here. They try to survive here.

And they wipe the tears from their eyes when they speak of the baby who didn't

dilapidated over-stuffed chair that serves as a bed for one child. In the center of the single "room" is a rusting wood stove.

Roxie's heart has gone out to Ella and her three surviving children. Roxie is our Volunteer Outreach Director. Several weeks ago, I had begun noticing that Roxie, whose personality usually bubbles, was withdrawn into herself. I hoped there was nothing wrong with any of her family back home. So, I finally decided to ask her what was troubling her and see if there was anything I could do to help.

"It's Ella," Roxie blurted out, almost before I had finished my question to her. I must have looked puzzled because she hurried on, "Father, you should see her place for yourself. I've been trying for months to help her get in touch with agencies I hoped would be able to respond to her need for decent housing. She's been to Window Rock (the capital of the Navajo Nation about 60 miles from here). She was shifted from office to office, left waiting for hours. But all we've gotten for her efforts is

Clip and Mail Today

Dear Father McNeill, here's my Easter gift of \$_____.

Pray for my Intention: _____

Name _____

Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

() Please check here if you would like to receive a specially-designed, gold-plated Good Shepherd Pin as a token of appreciation for your gift of \$100.00 or more. You will also be enrolled as a 1989 member of our Good Shepherd Club for whom Mass is offered on the 15th of each month.

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Send to: **Father Doug McNeill**
% Project Easter Help
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