

# Indian Mission and School Seeks Christmas Help Priest Says Prayers, Donations Urgently Needed

Special to The Catholic Courier

THOREAU, NM —This year, Very Rev. Douglas A. McNeill celebrates his 20th anniversary as a priest as director of a struggling Indian Mission far removed from the Borough of Brooklyn where he was raised by Irish immigrant parents.

"Fr. Doug," as he is affectionately known to the contingent of nearly 40 religious and lay missionaries serving with him, is director and spiritual leader of St. Bonaventure Indian Mission and School on the doorstep of the Eastern Navajo Reservation in Thoreau, NM.

After 20 years of hearing confessions, Fr. Doug is ready to admit that he, too, has a confession to make.

"Never, on the day I made my vows," says the priest whose dedication is rivaled only by his compassion, "did I dream my service to God would turn me into what I've become..."

...A BEGGARMAN!"

Explaining how he has come to find himself in this unexpected role, Fr. Doug acknowledges, "If I had the heart to turn my back on despair bred by near-Third-World poverty, I wouldn't be a beggarman.

"If I had the heart to turn my back on starvation and malnutrition here in America, I wouldn't be a beggarman.

"If I had the heart to turn my back on a new generation of American Indian boys and girls I see being condemned to the same lives of hopelessness as their parents, I wouldn't be a beggarman."

"But," the red-haired priest, confesses, "I AM a beggarman!"

As though it were yesterday, Fr. Doug recalls the day two years ago when he visited "Ella," a Navajo Indian, and her family in the 16x16-foot "box" that was their home.

"The ceiling was plastic trash bags held in place with carpet tape," Fr. Doug vividly remembers. "The walls were of scrap plywood. Sections of the outside had been tarpapered which gave a patchwork look to the makeshift dwelling Ella had constructed to try to protect her family from winter's life-threatening cold."

As he stepped inside the crude shelter with its "floor" of bare earth, hardpacked and swept clean, Fr. Doug said he realized that "Ella and her children didn't 'live' in this box; they simply tried to survive."



Two years ago, Fr. Doug McNeill, director of St. Bonaventure Indian Mission and School, "begged" for a new home for this child and her family. Today, this family is safe from winter's threatening cold in the first real home they have ever known, "thanks," the priest says, "to help from wonderful friends who care, as I do."

His heart pierced with sorrow when he later learned that an infant had died within those flimsy walls, Fr. Doug determined he would do whatever was necessary to help Ella and her family.

He turned to begging.

Today, "thanks to wonderful friends who care," Fr. Doug exults, Ella and her family are safe from winter's cold in the first real home they've known."

**Starvation and malnutrition.** These are more than words to Fr. Doug! Starvation and malnutrition among the aging Navajo Indians living in pockets of poverty on the Eastern Navajo Reservation have stirred the priest to action.

Financed by his "begging," the Mission operates what is possibly the only meals' delivery program of its kind in the continental United States. Bouncing along deeply-rutted paths over terrain that requires a four-wheel drive vehicle to traverse, lay missionaries travel thousands of miles yearly to bring hot, nutritious meals to aging Navajos. And, daily, the Mission hall is filled with grateful diners because Fr. Doug and his missionaries take seriously Christ's commandment to "feed the hungry."

Fr. Doug also takes seriously these statistics:

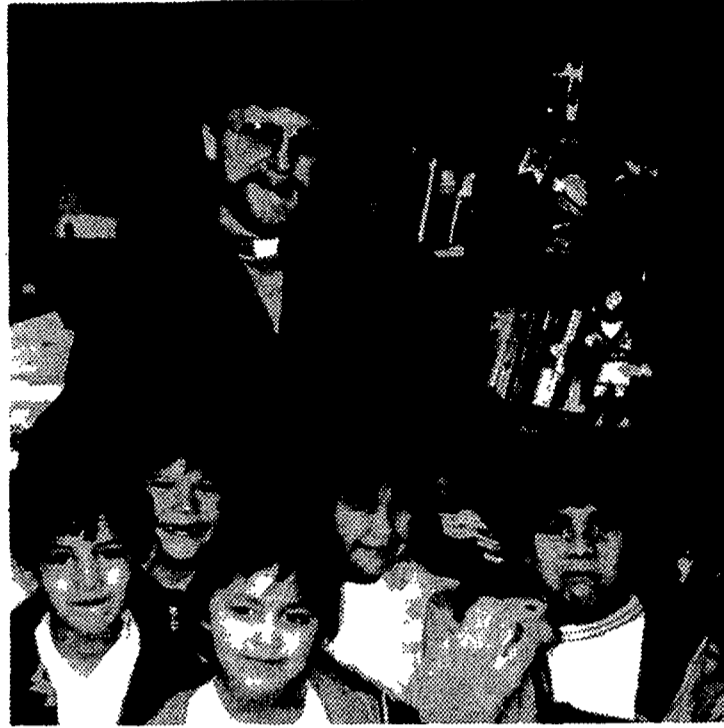
\*55% of the Navajo population cannot read or write

\*the suicide rate among Navajo teenagers is ten times higher than for their age group in the U.S. population at large.

Out of this need was founded the Mission school, Blessed Kateri Tekakwitha Academy, now in its tenth year.

To keep the school's doors open, Fr. Doug goes begging.

Gifts to St. Bonaventure Indian Mission and Blessed Kateri Tekakwitha Academy are fully tax-deductible. The school also qualifies for "Matching Gifts."



Brooklyn-born Fr. Doug McNeill with a group of students

Dear Catholic Courier Reader,  
I'm turning to you for your urgent help. I'm begging you to join me this Christmas in a partnership of prayer, love and concern.  
My urgent and serious problem is the plight of destitute families and aging First Americans on the Eastern Navajo Reservation ...and the future of our Mission school boys and girls.  
I cannot turn my back on the despair bred my near-Third-World poverty, so I'm begging for your prayers...and your help. I cannot turn my back on starvation and malnutrition, so I am begging for your prayers...and your help. I cannot turn my back on a new generation of American Indian boys and girls I see as condemned to lives of hopelessness without an education, so I am begging for your prayers...and your help.  
Christmas blessings,  
*Father Doug*  
Father Doug McNeill  
P.S. I pray for your needs, too.

Clip and Mail Today

Dear Father Doug, here's my emergency Christmas 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 1991 member of our Good Shepherd Club for whom Mass is offered on the 15th of each month.

( ) Please check here if you would like to receive a sterling silver pendant with a genuine turquoise stone and cornflower design symbolizing good fortune, made by our local Indians, as a token of appreciation for your gift of \$35.00 or more. It is a unique piece of jewelry you will wear -- or give -- with pride.

Send to: **Father Doug McNeill**  
% Christmas Help from Catholic Courier Readers  
St. Bonaventure Indian Mission and School  
Eastern Navajo Reservation -- P.O. Box 610  
Thoreau, New Mexico 87323 - 0610



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