



DIRECTOR'S DESK- SOMETHING WORTH FIGHTING FOR

Dear Friend of St. Bonaventure,

"Whisky is for drinking. Water is for fighting."

The father of American literature, Mark Twain, was renowned for his wit and clever observations on society, politics, and human nature. He also had a gift for distilling complex truths into memorable quips that resonate still today.

Indeed, the "water wars" of the American Southwest continue to unfold against a backdrop of fierce debate over public spending, resource allocation, and the government's responsibility to Indigenous communities. And while cities and industries secure their water through decades-old agreements, thousands of Navajo families are being left behind.

In this issue of Mission Messenger, I invite you to a deeper look at the ongoing fight for Navajo water rights. Until a just solution for all can be found, our efforts at St. Bonaventure Indian Mission and School remain as critical as ever.

As we work to deliver clean water to Navajo families in urgent need, we also celebrate the power of water in a different way—the gift of Baptism. This issue highlights local families who have recently received this Sacrament of Initiation, marking a new beginning in their faith journey. It is a reminder that while water sustains life physically, it also nourishes the soul.

You'll also read about how our heating assistance program continues to be a lifeline for many Navajo families. Thanks to your generosity, we can provide warmth to those in need, ensuring no one endures freezing winter temperatures without help.

Finally, we look back at the joy of the Christmas season, with images that capture the love and community that make this time of year so meaningful, especially for the more than one hundred K-8 students at St. Bonaventure Indian School.

Thank you once again for standing with St. Bonaventure and the Diné (Navajo people) we serve. The fight for water—for justice, dignity, and survival—is far from over. But with your continued support, we can ensure no family, child, or elder on the Eastern Navajo Reservation is left without the blessings of clean water, warmth, and faith.

With gratitude & resolve,

Chris Halter



NAVAJO WATER RIGHTS: THE LEGAL BATTLE EXPLAINED

The St. Bonaventure water delivery program was recently featured in a televised MSNBC segment highlighting the ongoing legal struggle of the Navajo people for access to clean water. To watch a replay of the full video, please visit our website at StBonaventureIndianMission.org/MSNBC In this article, we continue this important conversation by taking a closer look at key historical rulings that have shaped the fight for Navajo water rights.

The legal battle to secure water rights for the Diné (Navajo people) dates back to the 19th century and their forced relocation onto reservation lands in remote desert areas across the American Southwest. Over time, policies, broken treaties, and legal battles have made securing water rights an uphill fight.

In 1908, a landmark Supreme Court ruling (Winters v. United States) established that Native American reservations had a legal right to

sufficient water sources to sustain their communities. However, enforcement of those rights was often met with legal roadblocks and competing claims from states and private water interests.



The struggle for water rights intensified in the 1960s when the U.S. government began allocating water from the Colorado River to various states in the West. Despite being the largest Native American reservation in the country, the Navajo Nation was left without a finalized water settlement.

In 2003, Navajo tribal leaders filed a lawsuit against the federal government for failing to protect their water rights. This case, Navajo Nation v. U.S. Department of the Interior, argued





that the government had a duty to ensure the reservation had adequate water supplies.

Two decades later, in a 5-4 decision, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled against the Navajo Nation, stating the federal government was not obligated to take direct action to secure additional water for the reservation. This decision was a significant setback, leaving thousands of Navajo families without clear legal pathways to claim the water they desperately need. This means long drives to haul water for drinking, cooking, bathing and children growing up without the simple dignity of turning on a faucet.



Thanks to your generosity, St. Bonaventure Indian Mission's water delivery program is a lifeline for these families. Each day, our water trucks travel miles of rough desert roads to bring fresh, clean water to those who need it most. Your support ensures the elders, children, and struggling families of the Eastern Navajo Reservation have access to the water they need to live.

Thank you for standing with the Navajo people in this ongoing fight. Your kindness brings not just water but hope.





CHRISTMAS AROUND THE WORLD

The spirit of Christmas shone brightly for the children at St. Bonaventure Indian School this year!

This special season of joy and anticipation was made even more magical because of your kindness. In a community where many families struggle to provide daily necessities like food, clean water, and warmth, Christmas gifts are often an unattainable luxury.

But because of your generous support, every child at St. Bonaventure Indian School received something to call their own. Thank you for bringing warmth to the hearts of these children and hope to their families facing difficult circumstances.



Our students also shared the joy of the season in another beautiful way—through song! This year's Christmas concert, *Christmas Around the World*, was a heartwarming performance featuring Christmas songs from countries such as Mexico, Japan and the Philippines.

Each class, from kindergarten through eighth grade, took the stage to perform a traditional song, filling the school with the sounds of celebration, faith, and unity. Dressed in colorful costumes and singing in different languages, the students embraced the beauty of global traditions, reminding us all that Christmas is a season of togetherness and goodwill that knows no borders.





As you look at these pictures, you will see the joy on their faces as they performed, the laughter shared between classmates, and the gratitude expressed in their smiles. These moments were all made possible because of you.



Thank you for sharing the love and joy of the season with children who needed it most. Because of you, the spirit of Christmas shone brightly at St. Bonaventure Indian School and across the Reservation.



EVERYDAY *Essentials*

For most of us, staying warm in the winter is as simple as turning up the thermostat. But for many Navajo families, firewood is their only source of heat—and their only chance of survival.

This winter brought extreme and dangerous conditions, from a historic blizzard that buried homes in snow to bitter cold nights that make staying warm a daily struggle for Navajo families.

To make matters worse, nearly one-third of homes on the reservation have no electricity. Even among those with power, only a small percentage can use it for heating.

Thankfully, through our Outreach Assistance Program and your ongoing generosity, families on the Eastern Navajo Reservation can turn to us for



urgently needed heating supplies like warm clothing, blankets, firewood, and propane. We also help with past-due electric bills so families can keep the lights on during the darkest months of winter.

Many Navajo families still live in traditional wooden hogans with dirt floors and broken or missing windows. Through your support, our Outreach team braves the bitter cold to patch leaking roofs and repair broken windows. These simple fixes can mean the difference between comfort and unbearable suffering.

Your generosity saves lives. Without proper heating supplies, many families face dangerous exposure to freezing temperatures, hypothermia—or worse. Thank you for bringing warmth, safety, and hope to Navajo families struggling to survive the freezing cold.

DARLENE DOESN'T JUST DELIVER WATER—SHE PLAYS A VITAL ROLE DELIVERING WOOD TO KEEP OUR FAMILIES WARM AND SAFE.

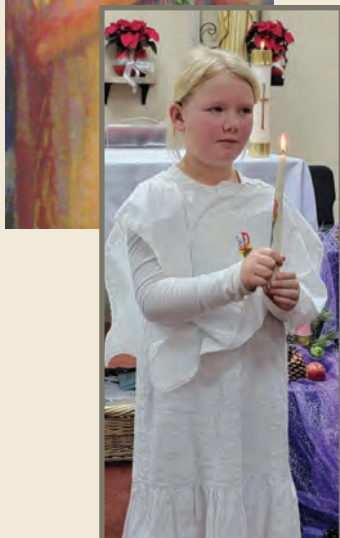


BAPTISM:

A NEW LIFE IN CHRIST



This fall, families from Thoreau, NM, and the surrounding communities—many with children attending St. Bonaventure Indian School—gathered in faith to celebrate the Sacrament of Baptism. It was a joyous occasion, filled with love, prayer, and the presence of the Holy Spirit.



The celebration was led by Fr. John Paul Madanu, the newly assigned pastor of St. Paul Parish. Through the cleansing waters of Baptism, Fr. John welcomed the newly baptized into the Church with prayer and anointing. The congregation, made up of family, friends, and fellow parishioners, rejoiced as these precious little ones took their first steps in their journey of faith.

The seeds of our Catholic faith planted in the American Southwest more than four centuries ago continue to flourish, thanks



to the dedication of the Church and the unwavering support of benefactors like you. Your generosity allows us to provide not only essential services and education but also the sacraments that bring our community closer to God.

As we celebrate these new members of our faith family, we give thanks for the blessings of Baptism and for the faith journeys of these families, who have chosen to deepen their relationship with Christ.

Please keep these families in your prayers. May God bless our newly baptized brothers and sisters, and may their faith continue to shine brightly for generations to come!

SEVERAL OF OUR STUDENTS WERE BAPTIZED AT THE MISSION CHAPEL





Jesus calls us all to be good shepherds

JOIN OUR MONTHLY GIVING PROGRAM



For many Navajo families, poverty is more than a challenge—it's a daily fight for survival. Together, we can change that.

Thanks to your generous partnership with St. Bonaventure Indian Mission, countless Navajo families have found renewed hope. But there is still so much more to do.

By joining our monthly giving program, you can provide consistent, lifesaving support for vulnerable Navajo elders, children, and families who have been overlooked for far too long.

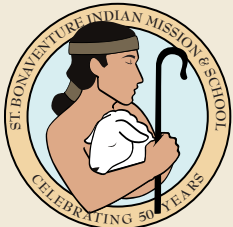
As a monthly donor, you will help provide:

- Emergency essentials like food, clean water, and firewood for warmth
- Urgent home repairs to keep families safe from the elements
- Two daily meals and tuition-free Catholic education for Navajo children

St. Bonaventure Indian Mission is dedicated to making your generosity truly impactful. No matter the season or emergency, your monthly gift provides the critical resources needed to support one of the most impoverished Native American communities in the United States. Your ongoing commitment brings lasting relief and renewed hope throughout the year.

Please join our monthly giving program today. Your regular support is a lifeline that provides food, water, warmth, and education for Navajo families who need it most. Together, let's break this cycle of poverty and bring lasting hope and dignity to people of the Eastern Navajo Reservation. Thank you!

IT'S EASY, JUST FILL OUT THE FORM BELOW!



Please accept my MONTHLY gift of \$ _____ in support of St. Bonaventure Mission & School.

I would like to charge my monthly gift to:

- Visa MasterCard American Express Discover

Name _____

Address _____ Phone _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

Card # _____ Security code _____