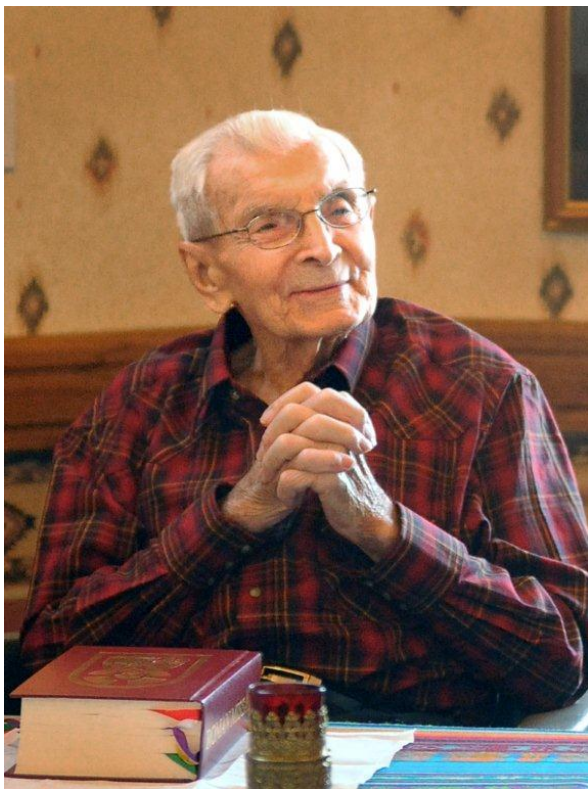


Saying Goodbye to a Legend

Father Emmett G. Hoffmann 1926 - 2013



Montana has lost a legendary missionary priest and a master fundraiser and the Northern Cheyenne have lost their greatest friend. On February 1st, 2013, Father Emmett G. Hoffmann passed on to the next camp to join his mentors, the old chiefs of the Northern Cheyenne Tribe. Father Emmett's humanitarian achievements on behalf of the Cheyenne stand unequalled in the history of the Catholic Church in the 20th Century American West.

Although he won numerous awards, it can be said of Father Emmett that he never forgot the farm. Born in 1926 near Marathon, Wisconsin, "Buddy" worked on the farm before entering the minor seminary at Mt. Calvary, Wisconsin. He then graduated to the Novitiate at St. Felix Friary in Huntington, Indiana and finally to the Mary Immaculate Friary in Garrison, New York. In 1950, he graduated with a degree

in Philosophy and returned to his home town of Marathon to the House of Theology at St. Anthony's Friary. On August 27, 1953, at the age of 27, Father was ordained a Capuchin priest at St. Mary's Church. His first parish assignment was to St. Labre Mission, a small, dilapidated mission school for the Northern Cheyenne in Montana. The school was on the verge of closing for lack of funds.

When he arrived in Montana in July, 1954, Father was shocked by the impoverished living conditions of the Cheyenne, the forgotten victims of neglect by the U. S. Government. They were drinking from contaminated wells and suffering from one of the highest TB rates in the nation. Malnourished families crowded into thin wall tents and old log cabins in temperatures of 40 degrees below zero.

Within a year, Father's supervisor became ill and Fr. Emmett, the inexperienced, naive priest took over as Executive Director of St. Labre Indian School and Superintendent of Schools. He knew nothing of business but he had the determination and a solid faith that God would show him the way. Soon, Father was organizing the first of his highly successful fundraising campaigns. Bursting with energy, his great enthusiasm and charismatic personality foretold an encouraging future for St. Labre.

In the coming years, Father's superiors tried to transfer him to other parish posts, as was the custom, but the Cheyenne gathered numerous signed petitions to block his placement elsewhere. In an effort to show how serious the Cheyenne were to keep Father Emmett with them, they made him an Honorary Chief of the Northern Cheyenne Council of 44, one of only two white men in history to attain that honor.

Over the years, Fr. Emmett became a pioneering giant among fundraisers. With advice from friends and donors, Leo Dohn, Conrad Sump and Paul Morigi, he perfected direct mail donor campaigns that funded many educational programs, not the least of which was the complete rebuilding of St. Labre Indian School. In the coming years, many generous and compassionate people responded to Father's appeal letters from, "Your beggar friend."

With help from donors, Father built a 5,000 square foot factory, founded 3 industries, rebuilt a sawmill and facilitated the construction of dozens of homes, 3 churches, 3 schools, 5 homes for neglected and abused children and beginning funds for what later became Dull Knife Memorial College. In all, Father helped educate thousands of Indian children and built an endowment to provide full college scholarships for many deserving high school graduates.

Father Emmett's success can be compared to that of Fr. Edward Flanagan, the famous founder of Boy's Town in Nebraska. Like Fr. Flanagan, Father Emmett succeeded in monumental goals that others thought impossible. Under Father Emmett's direction, St. Labre Indian School went from a few condemned buildings with less than 100 students to one of the finest modern Indian schools in the nation with an enrollment of 700 students in three schools.

After a Sabbatical in 1981, Father Emmett helped to construct St. Bernard's Church in Billings. Then he returned to St. Labre to build the Soaring Eagle Center, a 52,000 square foot facility containing an auditorium with 419 seats, full basketball court, 2 practice courts, indoor track, racketball courts, weight room, sauna and Olympic-sized swimming pool.

Father's 20 hour days finally took a toll on his health. In 1994, Father Emmett retired from St. Labre Indian School, but retirement didn't suit him. In 1997, he came out of retirement to found Soaring Eagle, a Public Charity, a Foundation that would build and maintain a 40-bed, assisted living home for Native elders called the Heritage Living Center. The Center opened in 2002, on a hill above Ashland, MT with scenic views of the Tongue River Valley. A biography of Father Emmett's life, *Renegade Priest of the Northern Cheyenne*, by author Renee Sansom Flood, was published in 2003.

We honor Father Emmett as a fundraising pioneer and a true advocate for the Northern Cheyenne. The whole course of his life was devoted to humanitarian justice and the grace of giving. As we say goodbye to a legend, we have traced his memory in our hearts.