

# ENCOUNTERS WITH BEAUTY PAVE WAY FOR HEALTHY CHOICES

*Dominican Sister uplifts children from broken families on Chippewa-Cree reservation*

Every other Tuesday during the summer, **Dominican Sister Margaret Mary O'Doherty** drives a busload of children from the Rocky Boy Indian Reservation in Box Elder, Montana, up to the nearby Bear's Paw Mountains. The children range from fourth-graders to 10th-graders.

"We go up in the mountains and spend the day hiking and swimming," said Sister Margaret Mary. "We'll come down to have a picnic."

After leading trips for 20 years, she said the number of children varies but her purpose does not: She wants the children to encounter beauty.

"It's so beautiful here in the mountains, right in their backyard, but some of the children have never been here," she said.





Sister **Margaret Mary** gathers children for simple moments of prayer.

Focusing on the good parts of life is pivotal to Sister Margaret Mary's work at Rocky Boy, where she has been a pastoral assistant at St. Mary Parish for 32 years. Originally from Elmhurst, New York, Sister Margaret Mary entered the Dominican Sisters of Sparkill in 1957. She earned her master's degree in religious education and taught in St. Louis, the Bronx, and Middletown, New York, before coming to Rocky Boy, a reservation of 5,000 people. In September she will be 80 years old.

Although she is not a Native American, Sister Margaret Mary loves learning Chippewa-Cree traditions, which have been incorporated into the church.

"The spirituality on this reservation is beautiful, and it gives

me life to see people continuing it," she said. "For me, that's the most vital thing we need to do here: to help them keep connected to the creator and all the gifts we have here."

As part of her ministry, Sister Margaret Mary builds relationships with families all over the reservation. She leads a food pantry twice a week at St. Mary's and teaches religious education at St. Anthony Parish in Box Elder.

"Most of the people on the reservation are baptized, but they are not that involved [in the church]," Sister Margaret Mary said. "So it's a matter of working with all the people on the reservation, all the people who are here, no matter what they believe."

Drug abuse, alcoholism and unemployment are common. As a

licensed drug and alcohol addiction counselor, Sister Margaret Mary teaches drug prevention classes at the public school. She focuses on "positive action" to keep children "on the straight and narrow."

"I try to spend more time on showing them what they can do rather than what they shouldn't do," she said. "I don't want to be blowing up the problems. I want to show them they can make healthy choices and that they can walk in a different way."

Many of the children Sister Margaret Mary works with come from broken homes. Her goal is simply to be supportive of them.

"It's hard for the kids ... to explain to them that it's not that they're loved less, it's just that there's a difference. I just try to talk to them about what's going on. The main thing all of us need to know is that we're loved by God."

Since 1979 Catholic Extension has extended more than \$350,000 to support the Rocky Boy Reservation. In addition to funding Sister Margaret Mary's work, funds have supported the building of St. Mary Church and the salary of Father Peter Guthneck, who has been at St.



**"The family is a school where prayer reminds us that ... we are one and we have a neighbor close at hand: He or she is living under the same roof, is a part of our life, and is in need."**

—HOMILY IN ECUADOR, JULY 6, 2015



**"Walking Buffalo" Father Guthneck** has gained the respect and love of the Chippewa.

Mary's since 1977 who serves two other parishes as well.

Father Guthneck was officially adopted into the Native American community—a gesture of respect—and was given the native name "Walking Buffalo." Like Sister Margaret Mary, he is loved by the families of Rocky Boy. 🐾