

# **The Black and Indian Mission Collection**

## **An interview with Father Wayne Paysse, executive director of the Black and Indian Mission Office**

***Special message:** For many dioceses, the annual collection for the Black and Indian Missions in the United States is taken up on the first Sunday of Lent. Please feel free to share the following Question and Answer interview. This Q&A can be distributed in newspapers, clergy bulletins, parish bulletins, posted on websites, or any way that you believe will have the greatest impact. Thank you for your assistance in helping to make this collection better known among our people.*

*– Father Paysse*

### **The Annual Black and Indian Mission Collection is officially set for the First Sunday of Lent. But some dioceses take up the collection on different Sundays throughout the year. Why is this collection important enough to be a “national” collection?**

This collection is for evangelization among the African Americans and Native Americans across the United States. It is the first and oldest collection in our country. Established by the U.S. Bishops at the Council of Baltimore in 1884, the collection is for the sole purpose of Native American and African American ministry.

St. Katharine Drexel was devoted to this evangelization effort and she used her inheritance to nurture the body and soul, to lift each person towards a dignity that all are created in the image of God. Through the national collection, the Church continues the legacy of St. Katharine Drexel in proclaiming Gospel values. The National Collection also provides opportunities for Christian formation in the Catholic faith, evangelization outreach on Indian reservations, parishes, schools, missions and in Black Catholic communities. The collection also supports missionaries ministering in these communities, to name a few ways the collection supports a wide range of ministry.

### **The collection supports evangelization efforts around the United States. In what ways is this concretely achieved?**

It is beautiful to witness the impact on the lives of individuals through the annual Black and Indian Mission Collection. I am happy to share with you two examples.

In the Diocese of San Bernardino at St. Jude’s Indian Mission School, I had the great privilege of administering, for the very first time, a celebration of First Holy Communion. I am pleased to note that school enrollment there continues to increase. Because of the mission school, many families are growing in greater appreciation of the Catholic faith. I

am grateful and privileged to witness this beautiful transformation in the field of evangelization.

Another example is in the Mississippi Delta where I had a pastoral visit to St. Francis of Assisi, which is an African American parish and school in the Diocese of Jackson. I was delighted to spend time with the children in the classroom and on the playground. Their beaming smiles and laughter spoke volumes to me about the importance of the annual Black and Indian Mission Collection. And I said to myself, “This is why the collection is so important ... to bring happiness and the Catholic faith to the children today, so they can continue to share and experience the joy of the Christian life tomorrow and tomorrow and tomorrow.

**With all of the changes in our church and society since 1874, why do you think the Black and Indian Mission Office has continued?**

This Office has continued because of the great need for God in the hearts of men, women and children. The U.S. bishops during the Council of Baltimore were great visionaries. They responded, by the grace of Christ, to a need in the Black and Indian communities. Through their evangelization efforts, and missionary hearts, they were able to provide ongoing support to the Black and Indian communities because of devoted women and men across the United States who believed in their own baptismal call. This national collection established by the bishops, for the bishops to support their ministry of evangelization in the Black and Indian communities has deep and lasting roots. We must tip our hats to the generations of the laity who have supported and continue to support this national collection. I say to them, “Thank you and God bless you ... please don’t stop making your sacrificial offerings each year for the Black and Indian Mission Collection. And don’t forget to visit our website at [www.blackandindianmission.org](http://www.blackandindianmission.org) to learn more about the ministry and legacy of the Black and Indian Mission Office!”

**You have been executive director of the national office for approximately three years. What portion of this ministry gives you the greatest satisfaction?**

I feel the greatest satisfaction comes when I meet people on Reservations, in the African American communities, parishes, missions and schools. I really enjoy meeting the people, especially the elders and hearing their stories of life and faith journeys. Being present to people helps me to reflect and pray in a more focused way. When I celebrate Mass, hear confessions, visit the sick and share special occasions with our Black and Indian communities, I feel connected to two thousand years of faith, love and joy in the Catholic faith. I know deep within that the global outreach is beyond today and tomorrow – for it is eternal right now! When I read the lives of my predecessors – all that they accomplished and how they served God – I want to do the same. It is a privilege to serve the African American and Native American communities across the United States.

**Is there one thing that you have learned about the Black and Indian Communities as executive director that has surprised you?**

Yes, prior to my appointment, I never realized or understood the great suffering of Native Americans in the United States and how they continue to be discriminated against even today. The same can be said of the African American community. It is essential that the Church continues to provide opportunities for society to recognize the gifts of our Black and Indian sisters and brothers. Both the Indian and Black communities have gifts of their own to share with society and the Universal Church. Their historical and ongoing burdens continue to be ours, too! God has created us to help each other and to bring comfort, healing and reconciliation to all hearts in a world wounded by sin. Each year with the annual collection, the Black and Indian Mission Office responds to Christ when he said, “Whatsoever you do the least of my brothers and sisters, you do unto me.” The words of Jesus should not surprise us in the least. Rather, each of us should be invigorated with a greater sense to serve and to make sacrifices for all peoples, beginning with our own families.

**What is the primary information that you want people to know as they prepare for the 2010 Black and Indian Mission Collection?**

The Church continues to be present to Native American and African American communities through the annual collection. As was mentioned earlier, the official date of the Collection is the First Sunday of Lent. But, some dioceses have chosen to take the collection at different times of the year – for which we are most grateful!

The first thing I would like to encourage is prayer. *Pray, pray and pray for the success of the Black and Indian Mission Collection.* This is the most important gift you offer!

I would like each family across the United States to contact your diocesan office to learn when the collection is taken in your particular diocese, and put a big circle around the date on the family calendar that hangs on the refrigerator. The Sunday prior to the collection in your diocese, you may want to remind members of your family, neighbors and parishioners to pray for the success of the Black and Indian Mission Collection and to make a generous monetary offering when they go to Mass. In fact, you may consider asking your pastor how you can assist the parish to prepare for the collection (know that materials are sent to the parishes requesting materials – including posters, envelopes, etc.) This is certainly a concrete way to assist our Black and Indian sisters and brothers by promoting the collection in your families, work places and parishes. *It is also a wonderful way to be a stay-at-home missionary!*

Remember in your prayers all the bishops of the United States for their pastoral service to the Local and Universal Church. Especially remember your particular diocesan bishop. Let him know how much you value the missionary outreach of the Church in the United States.

I wish to commend and thank all the religious women, men and laity who offer their lives in faithful service to Christ for the Black and Indian Missions in the United States. I ask all to pray and encourage vocations to the priesthood, religious life, diaconate and lay ministry across the globe, but particularly for the Black and Indian Missions.

Again, I want to remind everyone to visit our website at [www.blackandindianmission.org](http://www.blackandindianmission.org) and sign up for our free Native American newsletter, *The Sentinel*. You may also request to receive a free holy card of Blessed Kateri Tekakwitha with the Canonization Prayer. And don't forget we have holy cards of Venerable Pierre Toussaint. To receive our new E-Zine for the African American Community, or for further inquiry of the Black and Indian Mission Office, please contact us at [info@blackandindianmission.org](mailto:info@blackandindianmission.org). God bless you for your prayers and support!