

FIVE MINUTES FOR MISSIONS

MARCH: RUSSELL BEGAYE

Do you know who the Navajo Code Talkers were? These Navajo men were Marines; they developed and used a special Code that was never broken by the Japanese during World War II. Major Howard Connor of the 5th Marine Division declared, “Were it not for the Navajos, the Marines would never have taken Iwo Jima.” The Code Talkers showed the world that the Navajo Indians were a remarkably intelligent and talented group of people. Our missionary of the month, Russell Begaye, is a Navajo Indian. Reverend Begaye was never a Code Talker in the Marines, but his life proves the truth shown by the Code Talkers. What has Russell Begaye done with the life that God has given him?

Russell Begaye was born and raised on the Navajo reservation located in New Mexico and Arizona. The family farm and ranch was large and had both winter camps and summer camps for their sheep. His father died when he was sixteen, but his mother is still living, as are eight brothers and sisters. All of them are believers in Jesus Christ. Russell’s family became Christians at a Southern Baptist church on the Navajo Reservation, and he accepted Christ as his Savior when he was twelve years old. Russell’s parents felt convicted by God to be a part of the Southern Baptist denomination.

Russell said that he felt a call to ministry from the time he first became a believer. He and his family were first-generation Christians, and they felt a **strong** compulsion from the Lord to lead others to Christ, and that conviction has never changed. One influential person in the formation of Reverend Begaye’s spiritual life was an eighty-year-old Navajo deacon. A second influential person was an Anglo missionary who continues to mentor Mr. Begaye even today. This missionary helped him preach his first sermon, start his first church at the age of sixteen, and helped him select a seminary.

Russell received a BS degree from UCLA and a Master of Divinity Degree from Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary. His area of expertise is the planting of Native American and ethnic churches. Even while he was in Seminary, he started five new congregations! Please understand that less than 5% of Native American Indians are Christians. Most Navajos observe a native faith that involves the worship of Mother Earth, week-long tribal rituals, and ceremonies that sometimes use the drug, peyote. Leaving the tribal religion to become a Christian involves a major change in lifestyle and, many times, a break in relationships with one's family.

After Seminary, the Home Mission Board called Mr. Begaye to direct the Office of Native American Ministries which worked with all tribal groups in the U.S. and Canada. He worked in this position for fifteen years and was able to start 320 new churches during that time. Next, he was called by the Home Mission Board to direct Language Church Extension and worked with 217 different ethnic groups. In this position he was able to lead in starting over 600 ethnic churches a year. Also, an office was established at the United Nations and work was done in Washington, D.C. in conjunction with embassies and work with refugees.

At the present time, Reverend Begaye chairs the Ethnic America Network that is composed of over eighty different denominations and ministry groups. This Network is hosted by the Billy Graham Center and conducts annual training courses for churches that want to reach these groups in our country. A Woman's Missionary Union Circle at Columbia helped to support Russell Begaye and his family for over thirty years. They are pleased to have had a small part in this man's ministry.

Let us pray. *Lord, We praise You for all those who minister to Native Americans and other ethnic groups in our society. We pray that Native Americans will understand the difference between "the Great Spirit" and God Almighty Who has saved them with the blood of Jesus. Call men and women of integrity to leadership positions in all ethnic groups.*

Raise up workers to teach the Ethnic Summit training conferences. Give Reverend Begaye wisdom and vision as he leads the Network. In Christ's Name; Amen.

Length: Exactly 700 words without Titles