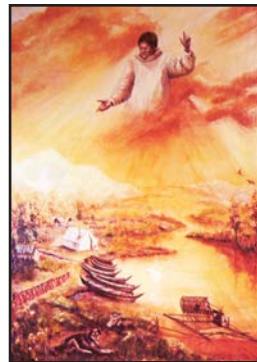




The Alaskan Shepherd



Volume 59 Number 2

Spring 2021

Some give by going to the Missions

Some go by giving to the Missions

Without both there are no Missions

The Universal Church at the Top of the World



Bishop Chad Zielinski and Fr. Thomas Sagili on the shore of Utqiagvik, Alaska.

St. Patrick's Catholic Church in Utqiagvik (formerly Barrow), Alaska is named for an Irish saint, is pastored by an Indian priest, and is the spiritual home to Inupiat Eskimo, Filipino, Tongan, Samoan, and Caucasian Catholics. Truly, this parish epitomizes what it means to be the "universal church."

Utqiagvik is like no other city in the United States. Perched at the tip-top of Alaska, the community of around 4,500 people is located 320 miles north of the Arctic Circle. The sun sets in mid-November, plunging the city into perpetual darkness until late January. Surrounded by the Arctic Ocean on three sides and hundreds of miles of tundra on the other, Utqiagvik is blasted with fierce winds and below zero temperatures that last well through April.

CATHOLIC BISHOP OF NORTHERN ALASKA
1312 PEGER ROAD FAIRBANKS, ALASKA 99709
Phone: 907-374-9532 www.dioceseoffairbanks.org

*Special Masses are offered throughout the year for
you and your intentions by our Missionary Priests.
Please pray that God may bless us and our work.*



Airshot of Utqiagvik: RealWindow Creative/Shutterstock
 Inset: St. Patrick's Catholic Church, Utqiagvik.

The rewards for surviving this “polar night” come in May, when the sun fixes itself firmly in the sky and blesses the people with perpetual sunlight for nearly three months. Even then, at the height of summer, temperatures average less than 50 degrees, with the hottest day on record occurring in 1993 when the thermometer topped out at just 79.

It almost seems more apt to call Utqiagvik (pronounced oot-kay-ahg-vik) an island, given its remoteness. There are no roads in or out of the city, so every single thing you need to live, including food, has to be flown-in or barged-in (once a year) at great expense. There are no paved roads, either, since the continuous thawing and freezing of the permafrost would wreck asphalt, even if you could afford to transport it that far north. The dirt and gravel roads are used not only by people, but by wildlife, including polar bears, which occasionally wander into the more populated areas of Utqiagvik during spring.

Despite its temporary look, Utqiagvik is actually one of the oldest permanent settlements in the United States, having been settled by Inupiat Eskimo people thousands of years ago and whose people still make up two-thirds of the population. This ancient, aboriginal culture is on full display each spring when the Inupiat hunt bowhead whale and distribute the blubber and skin (*maktak*) according to an established traditional formula.

In the midst of all this arctic exoticness is the northernmost
The Alaskan Shepherd Newsletter

parish in the world: St. Patrick's Catholic Church. Catholicism took root in Utqiagvik just about 75 years ago—in 1954—when the first St. Patrick's was cobbled together from abandoned World War II quonset huts from a nearby Army base. The makeshift church served the parish for nearly 40 years, despite being woefully lacking in basics such as running water, an indoor toilet, and an efficient heating system. The current church was completed in 1993 and included living facilities for a priest (and mercifully, indoor plumbing!).

Perhaps most incredibly, despite being located in an isolated community at the top of Alaska, St. Patrick's is undoubtedly the most ethnically and culturally diverse parish in Alaska. Parishioners include not just Caucasian and Inupiat Eskimo Catholics, but faithful men and women from numerous island nations in the south Pacific, including Samoa, Tonga, and the Philippines. While exact details about how Pacific islanders ended up in frosty northern Alaska has been lost to the annals of time, most agree it was jobs that drew cultural minorities to Utqiagvik in the 1970s, when oil companies started drilling in Prudhoe Bay and began constructing the Trans-Alaska Pipeline that ships crude oil to Valdez in the southern part of the state.

“The story goes that three little old Filipino ladies came to Utqiagvik from California in the 1970s, then convinced their families from the Philippines to join them here because there were good-paying jobs,” says Pilar Salamat, a St. Patrick



Fr. Thomas Sagili

parishioner and parish council member who moved from the Philippines to Utqiagvik 30 years ago. Now, nearly 7% of Utqiagvik residents are Filipino.

While Catholicism is the norm in Salamat's home country of the Philippines (86% of its 111 million residents are Catholic), there are just about 60 Catholics holding onto the faith in Utqiagvik. No wonder—the diocese's severe priest shortage in the past 50 years, combined with the city's remoteness, has meant these northernmost Catholics have only had intermittent pastoral care since the church's founding. Until recently, St. Patrick's was visited just a few times a year by a missionary priest, leaving the faithful mostly without the Mass, Confession, Anointing, and full funeral rites. Between priest visits, a small but dedicated group of lay Catholics did virtually everything else to care for each other spiritually and keep the faith alive in their community, including leading Communion services,

sacramental prep, religious ed classes, faith formation for adults, and funeral services.

After having worked so hard to maintain the faith on their own, St. Patrick's parishioners were understandably thrilled to learn they would get a permanent pastor in 2018, when Bishop Zielinski assigned Fr. Thomas Sagili, a missionary priest from India, to the parish.

The mission field in northern Alaska is radically different from the ancient, well-rooted faith Fr. Thomas left behind in his home diocese of Cuddapah in southern India. The apostle Thomas traveled to the country just 20 years after the Resurrection to plant the Gospel and St. Francis Xavier helped it bloom when he came to India in the 1500s to help Portuguese colonists hold onto their faith. Indian Catholics view their faith as a gift from missionaries, and with a surplus of priests and religious, they are generous in sending priests to serve in mission dioceses like Fairbanks that have a desperate need for clergy, says Fr. Kumar Pasala, another of the diocese's Indian priests, who also serves the diocese's northernmost parishes in Nome and Kotzebue.

Because the faith has such strong roots in India, enculturation—the harmonious marriage of faith and culture—tends to be farther along there than it is in rural Alaska, says Fr. Kumar. Most Indians are Hindu or Muslim and Christianity is culturally foreign. To help people more easily embrace the faith, Indian Catholics have retained many cultural traditions that are rooted in the dominant culture, says Fr. Kumar. Married Catholic women, for instance, still wear the red dot or “bindi” on their foreheads, a traditional Hindu practice that connotes marital status.



Polar Bear on the Beaufort Sea Coast: Jeff Stammer/Shutterstock

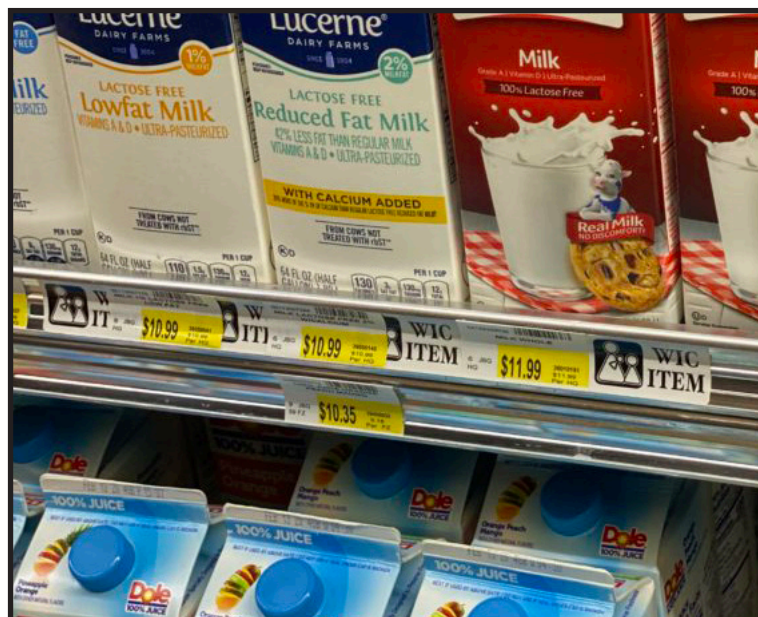
“We are baptized Catholics, but our country has a Hindu background and culture, so we practice our faith in a way that resonates with people,” explains Fr. Kumar.

Both Fr. Thomas and Fr. Kumar admit it has been quite an adjustment going from sultry, sunny India to the frozen mission field of northern Alaska. But for Fr. Thomas especially, who has spent the past two years pastoring St. Patrick’s, immersing himself in another culture in such a remote, arduous environment has generated immeasurable spiritual blessings.

“It’s a hard place to live, yes...it’s cold, and dark, and it can be depressing if you don’t immerse yourself in God,” he says. “But that aloneness with Him has surely been a great blessing and it’s why I feel so much joy when I’m serving the people here.”

No doubt, it also helps that St. Patrick’s has such vibrant, strong faith among its members. When the bishop temporarily shuttered parishes across the diocese last spring due to coronavirus, Fr. Thomas genuinely worried some of the church’s most dedicated parishioners might try to sneak into his private daily Masses.

“The people were devastated that we had to close the church,” he recalls. The faithful were so anxious to return



Utqiagvik Grocery
Photos courtesy
of Blog Site

Hey There From Here!
<https://heytherefromhere.com/category/alaska/>

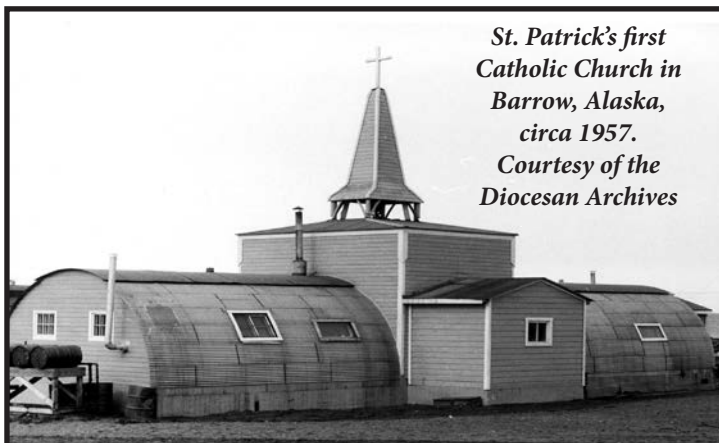
Item	Avg. Lower 48 Cost	Utqiagvik Cost
Loaf of Bread	\$1.99	\$6.29
Gallon of Milk	\$3.61	\$11.99
Apples (lb.)	\$1.30	\$5.49
Lemons (each)	\$.53	\$1.99
Iceberg lettuce (1 head)	\$1.99	\$5.49
Ground beef (73/27; per lb.)	\$3.49	\$8.99
Bacon (1 lb.)	\$6.49	\$14.99
Bag of AP Flour (5lb)	\$2.29	\$19.99
Cool Whip (tub)	\$1.89	\$7.99
Frozen pizza	\$3.99	\$10.99
Orange juice (52 oz)	\$3.99	\$12.99
Butter (lb.)	\$3.89	\$5.99
Diapers (66)	\$24.99	\$39.99
Bottled water (Case of 24)	\$3.99	\$29.99
Liquid laundry detergent (100 oz)	\$11.99	\$37.99

to worship that when Bishop Zielinski issued a decree in late April permitting parishes to cautiously reopen, parishioners asked Fr. Thomas to celebrate a public Mass that very day. As of March 2021, St. Patrick's remains the only Christian church in Utqiagvik that is open for worship, which has prompted even some Protestants to visit the church outside of Mass times to pray.

In many ways, living in such an extreme arctic environment has impressed upon Fr. Thomas and his parishioners an even greater awareness of their dependency on God to meet their needs. This past winter, for example, the parish's boiler broke down, plunging the church and priest quarters into below-freezing temperatures for nearly four days. Celebrating Mass bundled up in winter gear was challenging, as was trying to stay warm enough to get a good night's sleep, admits Fr. Thomas. But the priest and parishioners "just kept praying and gave it all to God." Finally, the parish administrator called with news she had found someone willing to perform an emergency boiler repair. Says Fr. Thomas, "God provides, surely. He always provides what we need."

For the Catholics who call St. Patrick's home, however, God's greatest provision has always been spiritual. He has sustained their faith the lean decades of rarely seeing a priest and now the Lord has given them Fr. Thomas as their priest in residence. Having a priest on-site has made all the difference, says Salamat, and enabled the people's faith to bloom even amidst the added privations from COVID-19.

"Now we have Mass, Confession, and Bible study," she says, adding that Fr. Thomas celebrates Mass most days of the week, and has added novenas, Adoration, the rosary, and many other traditional devotions to the parish's schedule. "Father enlightens us so much by his preaching and counsel, too. Of course, we're grateful to receive the Eucharist in a Communion service. But it's just so much richer to celebrate a full Mass all together, as one community."



*St. Patrick's first
Catholic Church in
Barrow, Alaska,
circa 1957.
Courtesy of the
Diocesan Archives*



On the beach outside of Utqiagvik—framing the Arctic Ocean—is the famous Whale Bone Arch. The arch symbolizes the people's relationship to the sea and to whaling and is flanked with the shells of traditional whaling boats and other bones scattered about. There is little information about the arch's history, though it is believed to have been constructed towards the end of the 19th century.





Hunter Wilbur Leavitt watches the open lead for passing whales from the edge of the shore ice off the coast of Utqiagvik (Barrow), Alaska. Photo by Billy Adams

The Bowhead Whale Hunt

Alaska's Inupiat Eskimo people have survived for millenia in one of the harshest places on earth because they are impressively resourceful when it comes to taking what they need (and just what they need) from the land and sea. Though Alaska Native people now have access to processed foods, most still hunt, fish, and gather edible roots and berries year-round. This not only helps them maintain their cultural identity despite a more modern way of life, but has the practical benefit of offsetting the high cost of store-bought food, which must be flown or barged into their remote villages at exorbitant cost.

One of the most important subsistence activities still practiced by Inupiat Eskimo people in Utqiagvik is the hunting of bowhead whales. To most people, hearing that some Americans still hunt whale sounds scandalous...aren't whales endangered?

The short answer is: no, not all whale species are endangered. And one that is not endangered is the bowhead whale.

Inupiat Eskimo people have hunted the bowhead whale for thousands of years, but their right to hunt the creature in modern times has not been without controversy. In 1977, the International Whaling Commission banned the harvest of bowheads because a report erroneously estimated the whale's numbers in the Bering Sea to be less than 2,000. Inupiat hunters quickly established the Alaska Eskimo Whaling Commission to fight the ban and ensure their people's needs and traditions would be considered in whaling laws. The Inupiat called for an annual quota for harvested bowhead whales, as well as more accurate studies of the species' population in the northern seas. Their lobbying got the ban overturned within a year. The ban was replaced with an initial quota of 12 landed bowheads.

For the past 40 years, the cooperation between the Alaska Eskimo Whaling Commission and various U.S. governmental agencies has resulted in an impressive body of scientific data about the bowhead whale. Now, the groups work together to conduct a periodic census of the bowhead whale population using a shore-based visual count combined with underwater acoustic monitoring. Scientists also have learned a great deal about the whales' anatomy, reproduction, and food habits from studying the whales harvested each spring by the Inupiat. Subsistence whalers in Utqiagvik and in other northern, coastal areas of Alaska are rightly proud that their people have contributed so much to the world's knowledge of the bowhead whale, which came about because they fought to preserve their people's traditional way of life.

Continued on page 9

Dear Bishop Zielinski,

F1 S2021 02

I want to help you and the missionaries ministering in Northern Alaska to bring the Mass, the Sacraments, religious education, and training to the people of Christ. Please accept this donation to your **General Fund** and use it where most needed.

AMOUNT OF GIFT:

\$15_____ \$25_____ \$50_____ \$100_____ \$250_____ Other \$_____

Name_____ Street No._____

P.O.Box_____ City_____ State_____ Zip_____

To receive announcements from Bishop Zielinski about ongoing campaigns or special needs for the diocese, please leave us your email:

EMAIL_____ PHONE_____

Donations by **CHECK** can be made payable to: Catholic Bishop of Northern Alaska or CBNA
1312 Peger Road, Fairbanks, Alaska, 99709

CREDIT CARD donations can be made online at http://bit.ly/CBNA_AK OR CALL us at 907-374-9532.

Dear Bishop Zielinski,

S2021 02

Enclosed is a special donation to **St. Catherine of Siena Church, Chefnak**—
a fund intended to build a new church for the people of Chefnak.

AMOUNT OF GIFT:

\$15_____ \$25_____ \$50_____ \$100_____ \$250_____ Other \$_____

Name_____ Street No._____

P.O.Box_____ City_____ State_____ Zip_____

To receive announcements from Bishop Zielinski about ongoing campaigns or special needs for the diocese, please leave us your email:

EMAIL_____ PHONE_____

Please remember these special intentions

St. Catherine of Siena, Chefnak

Total Projected Cost: \$4 Million

Funds Raised: \$2 Million+

Status: FULL SPEED AHEAD!



Editor's Note: FINALLY! Thanks to the donations of many generous benefactors, the Diocese of Fairbanks is looking forward to beginning in earnest the building of the long-awaited church, St. Catherine of Siena! We have had so many hurdles to overcome, the most complicated being the implementation and support of community mitigation measures for Covid-19—particularly in the villages of northern Alaska.

Coupled with the current economic downturn caused by the pandemic, this has led to increased expenses that make the project much costlier than previously calculated. Beyond those unexpected upsurges, the travel mandates made the sending in of construction groups or work crews impossible. These mandates are vital to protect our Native people from the possible infection of the virus, which would be devastating to a village with no sophisticated medical facilities. Alaska is doing well

administering the vaccine within the villages and to others in high risk groups. With these necessary precautions in place, we are finally able to continue toward the original project. This spring we will begin building the rectory and the foundation for St. Catherine's Catholic Church in Chefnak before the snow flies! We thank you for your prayers and your generosity. We will keep you updated as we continue our mission and ministry to the people of Chefnak and northern Alaska as we navigate these challenging times.

Chefnak—even in the absence of a building and amid a health crisis—continues to be an active and entirely Catholic community. The new church building is designed to seat 134 in the main worship area with space for an additional 24 in the lobby/social area. Design improvements include increased lighting, a beautiful worship space, room for social functions and religious education classes, storage and office, enhanced heating options to conserve fuel, as well as a ramp and stairs to provide access to all. There will also be room left for growth and added facilities in the future.

The Diocese of Fairbanks welcomes any donations toward the rebuilding of St. Catherine of Siena Catholic Church.



Thank you for your gifts and prayers
for the building of St. Catherine's
and for the people of Chefnak!

Continued from page 6

The annual spring whale hunt remains an important part of Inupiat Eskimo culture in Utqiagvik and Native children begin learning this important skill set early on. They learn how to build and maintain an *umiaq*, or traditional skin boat, as well as how to safely travel on sea ice to the whaling camps. Preparing the *umiaq* begins in summer when bearded seals and caribou are harvested. The seal skins are prepared and used to cover the boat's wooden frame, sewn together by thread made from dried caribou sinew.

Subsistence whaling is more than just a fun social event for the Inupiat Eskimo people. The practice reflects their most cherished values and traditions and is a deeply spiritual event that unites them in a shared respect for the natural world and God's provision for their people through it. In fact, it was this sacramental worldview, that saw all of creation as infused with the divine life of the Creator, that made Alaska Native people so receptive to Catholicism when early missionaries brought the faith to the region in the 1800s.

For our Inupiat Eskimo Catholics, subsistence is a way of life that reflects their own unique and beautiful culture. In this place of frigid temperatures and months without sunlight, gathering food from the land reminds the residents of Utqiagvik just how tenuous survival really is, and that ultimately, we all rely on God to sustain us, whether we harvest our own meat from a skin boat or buy it shrink wrapped at the grocery store.



Editor's Note: *I am especially indebted to Dean Swope for sharing these photos of Fr. Chuck Peterson, SJ. Dean writes, “I am very thankful that I was able to capture these photos as documentation of an extraordinary event; and that they have found a place where they can be utilized in a way that can truly honor a man of God, that I knew and loved, brings me peace and joy. Thank you for allowing me to be a part of celebrating this great man, I am so deeply moved I cannot keep the tears from my eyes as I try to write this. I can hear his voice as he would always exclaim to me, “Dean My Brother!!!”*

On October 1, 2017, at age 78, Father Chuck Peterson concelebrated his farewell Mass at Immaculate Conception Church in Bethel with Bishop Chad Zielinski and Louie Andrew and Chris Tulik—two deacons he had helped train for the permanent diaconate. Serving as a priest in Alaska since 1970, Father Chuck spent five decades building and encouraging indigenous leadership within the church through the implementation of an Alaska Native Deacon Program.

Suffering from a series of health issues in fall of 2017, including an incident of severe bleeding outside his brain, he was transferred to San Jose, California to recover. Upon departing he talked with Dean Swope at KYUK about his desire to return to Bethel, Alaska, and about his hopes for a Yup'ik priesthood.

“And when I do, (return to Alaska) I’m really wanting to see, dream of dreams, a Yup’ik priesthood,” said Father Chuck. And I realistically don’t feel it can be completed in my lifetime, but I want to promote it as much as I can: a Yup’ik priesthood in the Catholic Church. Heck, I’d like to see a Yup’ik bishop, too.”

At his final Mass in Alaska, he was surrounded by his beloved parishioners, Yup’ik elders and deacons and their wives, who sang a traditional Yup’ik blessing for safe travels on his journey. Then, unexpectedly, on December 1st, the diocese received word that Father Chuck had been hospitalized and placed in intensive care with a severe case of Covid-19-related pneumonia. A day later, his niece, Jo Anne Peterson, reported that her uncle was in good spirits, joking with nurses and staff and would remain there for two weeks or until his condition improved. The following weeks brought news of Father Chuck’s progress toward good health, but on December 15, he fell into a coma and it was reported that his organ functions were slowing. On December 24th, Christmas Eve, Father Chuck Peterson passed away at the age of 82. He will be greatly missed. His contribution to the Catholic Church and the people of northern Alaska was immense and will never be forgotten.

From Montana to Alaska

*Excerpted in part from **Alaskan Catholicism**, by Father Louis L. Renner, SJ*

Charles Jon “Chuck” Peterson was born the younger of two boys to Gustave and Margaret Leppert Peterson in Missoula, Montana, on November 26, 1938. He attended St. Francis Xavier Grade School and Loyola High School, graduating a salutatorian in 1956. Toward the end of his high school years, fascinated by airplanes and flying, he joined the Civil Air Patrol and earned a flight scholarship. A flying missionary priest was his goal and he ardently pursued his pilot license. However, shortly before flying solo he was denied medical clearance due to his poor eyesight. Still, his hopes to become an Alaskan priest (spurred by films about Fr. Bernard Hubbard, SJ, seen in his youth) never diminished. In August of that year he entered the Jesuit novitiate at Sheridan, Oregon, and made his simple vows as a Jesuit after two years of formation. He spent two more years in Sheridan studying the classics and humanities and performed so well he was asked to specialize in Latin and Greek.

In June 1960, Chuck went to West Baden, Indiana, for three years of philosophical studies. Upon completion, he was overjoyed to learn he would be going to Copper Valley School in Glennallen, Alaska to teach Latin, English, and Religion for two years and to serve as prefect for the younger boys and moderator of the Civil Air Patrol Cadet Corps. Recalling this time period years later, he remembered as highlights the March 27, 1964, earthquake, his tour around Alaska in early summer 1964, and the ordination of Fr. George T. Boileau, SJ, to the rank of bishop on July 31 that same year.

During summer 1965, Chuck earned his Master’s Degree in the Classics at University of San Francisco. He went on to teach Latin and Greek at Gonzaga Preparatory in Spokane, Washington for a year. He also was occupied as coach for the JV football team and coached the Speech and Debate teams. In 1966, he traveled to Regis College in Toronto, Canada, to begin four years of theological studies. On June 1, 1969, in Missoula, Montana at St. Anthony’s Church, Chuck was ordained a priest and became “Fr. Chuck.” One week later, he celebrated his first Solemn High Mass in his childhood church, St. Francis Xavier’s.

His theological studies completed, Father Peterson was, initially, intended by his Superiors to spend the year 1970-71 teaching at Monroe Catholic High School in Fairbanks. However, upon the urging of Father John J. Morris, SJ, the first priest to push seriously, in the late 1960s, for an Alaska Native permanent diaconate program, he was assigned, instead, to Bethel, to help further such a program. Though serving as co-pastor of the Bethel parish and of its two dependent missions, Marshall and Russian Mission, through an all-out effort, Father Peterson was, nevertheless, able to make of the incipient permanent diaconate program a full-fledged reality. While the “push” to inaugurate such a program came from Father Morris originally, it was Father Peterson who brought that “total dedication,” in the words of Father Morris, to the program that, in short order, developed into the Eskimo Deacon Program. On February 8, 1975, he was present in Marshall to concelebrate at the Mass at which Alvin F. Owletuk of Marshall was ordained to the permanent diaconate. This was the first of many ordinations of a Central Yup’ik Eskimo to the permanent diaconate. Father Chuck made his tertianship in India from 1973-74. During his return trip, he made a stop in Rome. Upon his arrival in Fairbanks, he learned of his new assignment to start a program to train Alaska Native men for the priesthood. For the next two years, he served as Vocation Director and as chaplain to students from the University of Alaska-Fairbanks and held workshops for Yup’ik deacon candidates. In Yup’ik villages, he conducted retreats for the youth and worked to spark an indigenous ministry, particularly for the priesthood.

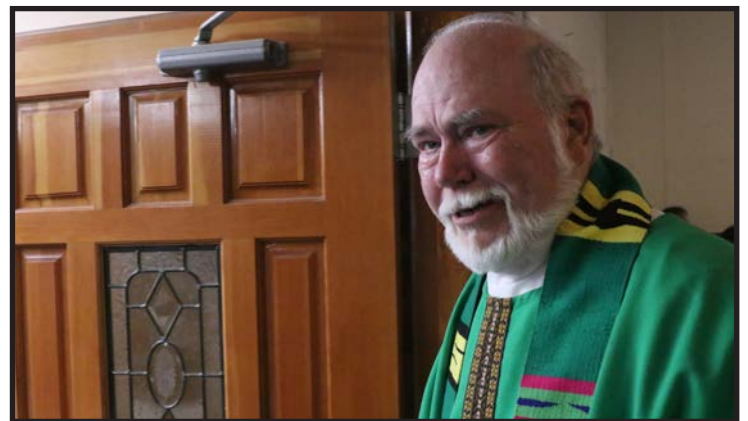
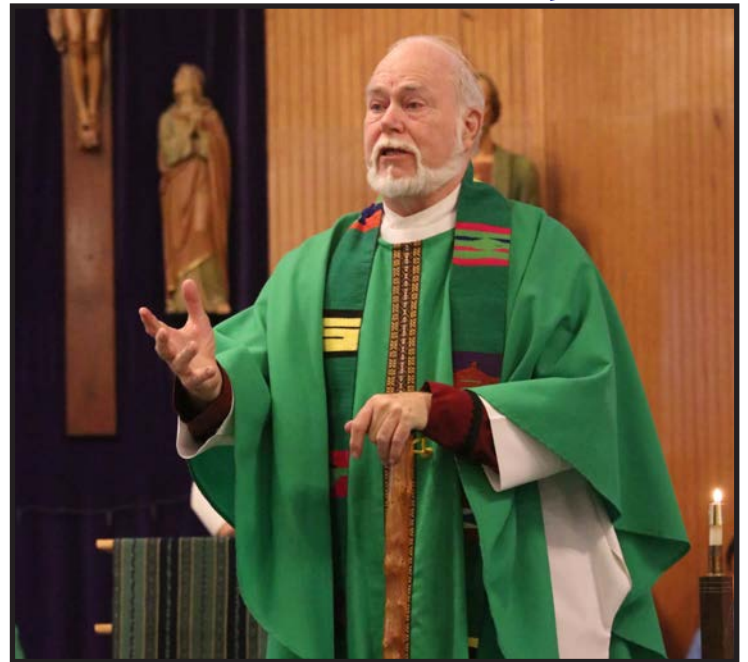
In May 1976, Fr. Chuck returned to Fairbanks, and had two Central Yup'ik candidates waiting to begin seminary training for the priesthood. A third entered the seminary later, but, by then, the first two had left. The seminary venture, while up, did not run for long. It ended in late 1978. The candidates found life away from their Native environment just too difficult. The future of a Native Ministry program began to be evident instead in the great success of the Yup'ik Deacon Program.

From 1978 to 1979, Father Chuck served as pastor to Little Flower of Jesus Church in Hooper Bay and to Blessed Sacrament Church in Scammon Bay. Through to 1980, he conducted retreats for young adults in the Yukon-Kuskokwim Delta region, which spanned 24 village parishes. In May 1980, he took some time off to address his high blood pressure and to grieve the recent passing of his father (his mother had passed in 1977). Upon his return to Alaska in 1981, he conducted workshops on theology and ministerial skills, then spent a sabbatical year at Regis College that ended with a trip to the Holy Land and Spain. In 1985, Bishop Michael J. Kaniecki, SJ, asked Fr. Chuck to become the Administrator of St. Mary's Mission Boarding School, a time he recalls as being the toughest apostolic years of his life. The school was facing many serious social challenges, including high levels of drugs and suicide. Ultimately, the decision would be made to close the school in 1987.

Up until 1989, Father Chuck was assigned as Pastor of St. Joseph's Church in Nome, as well as the parishes in Little Diomed, Teller, and Unalakleet. Following a brief sabbatical, he was assigned as the Director of the Native Ministry Training Program at St. Mary's Mission. From 1990 to 1997, he produced a radio program called "The Lord Be with You!" More than 700 shows were produced & aired on KNOM Radio in Nome, Alaska. In 1997, Father Chuck left Alaska to serve as the Director of Rocky Mountain Mission in Omak, Washington, where he served the Native people of the Pacific Northwest. In 2003, while still directing that mission, he moved his residence to the Jesuit House at Gonzaga University Campus. In 2005, Father Chuck was called back to his beloved Alaska to provide sacramental support to Catholics in Bethel and surrounding areas. He also served Immaculate Heart of Mary Church in Marshall and Our Lady of Guadalupe in Russian Mission. Father Chuck also served as consultor on the Presbyteral Council through his departure in 2017. During his service to Alaska and to its people, he served under five bishops: Robert L. Whelan, SJ; Michael J. Kaniecki, SJ; Donald J. Kettler; Chad W. Zielinski; and briefly, George T. Boileau, SJ, though he was never installed as Bishop of Fairbanks before his unexpected death in 1965.

Looking back on his over 50 years as a Jesuit, Fr. Peterson reflected:

"The ministries and apostolic missions I felt called to were not necessarily the ones I was assigned to. The Latin and Greek studies I was assigned to, were the last I felt called to. My assignment to teach at Gonzaga Prep was a total surprise. My assignment to start a seminary in Alaska seemed an impossible one to me. My being assigned as pastor to Hooper Bay and Scammon Bay puzzled me. My assignment to administer St. Mary's High School was a bolt out of the blue. My being appointed pastor of Nome was a surprise. Yet, in all those assignments, I found a spiritual energy that complemented the assignments. In the final analysis, they were all in tune with my own aspirations. I had a chance to put into practice the obedience I had vowed all those years."



Missionary Spotlight

All in God's Time: Deacon Warren Lucero



The Diocese of Fairbanks was the first in the United States to establish a formation program for deacons after the Church restored the diaconate in the late 1960s. Today, with our severe priest shortage, both urban and rural deacons are critical to meeting the spiritual needs of the faithful in the far north. These men assist with RCIA and adult faith formation, baptize and marry people, lead Communion services, minister to those in prison, and perform countless other tasks that alleviate the significant pastoral burden on our handful of priests. Here, the diocese's most recently ordained deacon, Warren Lucero, shares about his own journey, first north to Alaska and then, on to Holy Orders.

What had the strongest impact on your faith growing up? I grew up in a small, mostly Catholic community in New Mexico, and it seemed like everything we did as a family was somehow connected to our parish—volunteering and most of our social events happened there. We all helped maintain the church grounds, and I was an altar server from age seven through high school, so it was just such a normal part of our life to be involved in the faith. Another thing that made a big impact was our church's annual vocations walk. A group of us parishioners would make a 100-mile trek on foot to another church; after the first pilgrimage, families and religious started offering to feed the group at stops along the way. I keep the tradition of a walking pilgrimage, even as an adult: every good Friday, my kids and I walk three hours from a site in northern Fairbanks to Sacred Heart Cathedral.

How did you end up in Alaska? After high school, I went into the U.S. Air Force, then traveled around for about 20 years before they sent me to Eielson Air Force Base outside of Fairbanks. We had driven up from San Antonio, taken the ferry from Washington state to Haines, Alaska, then driven the rest of the way to Fairbanks. As soon as we crossed the border, our kids started begging to stay in Alaska, they loved it so much. I eventually retired from the Air Force and now work for a local nonprofit.

How did you know you were called to the diaconate? Around 2000, when we were still in the lower 48, a friend who was a deacon suggested I would make a good one, too. Then other friends started saying the same thing. I dismissed it at first, but people kept saying they saw something in me that they believed would make me a good deacon. Then we moved to Alaska and I saw a notice in the parish bulletin about a formation class for the diaconate starting up, so I reached out to the diocese. But the timing wasn't right; my kids were still pretty young and my family's needs came first. Later on, when our children were older and more independent, I saw that the diocese was starting another class, so I went ahead and entered formation. I didn't exactly have doubts, but I was actively discerning God's call to ordained life until I took vows last December.

What advice would you give a man who told you he thought he might be called to the diaconate, too? I would encourage him to look into it because you just don't know until you start that discernment process. Talk to the vocations director at the diocese, who will help you understand the realities of layering two vocations, if you are married. In fact, your wife should be intimately involved in your discernment, since you're only allowed to take Holy Orders as deacon if your spouse is supportive. Then, of course, increase your prayer life; start praying the Liturgy of the Hours, the daily prayer of the Church that's required for both priests and deacons. I would say, "Trust in the Lord to lead you" and then I would pray for His discernment, too.

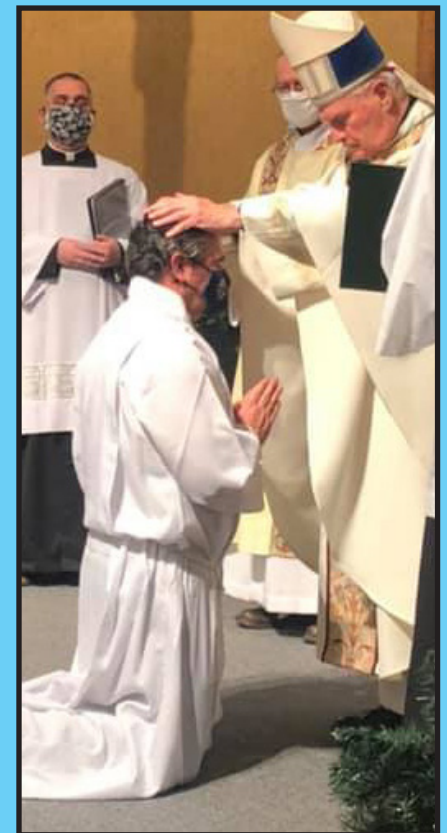
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Archbishop Roger Schwietz, OMI, ordains Warren Lucero to the diaconate on December 8, 2020.

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