



The Alaskan Shepherd



Some give by going to the Missions

Some go by giving to the Missions

Without both there are no Missions

Will You Help Us Bring Christ to the People of Northern Alaska?

*Imagine you can't go to Mass—
because there's no parish priest.*

*Imagine your loved one wants to go to Confession
after years away from the Church—
but can't, because there's no parish priest.*

*Imagine with our current pandemic, what horrific
results the spreading of a virus could mean to villages
with elderly populations and travel restrictions.*

*Or, imagine being terminally ill and
calling the parish for Anointing of the Sick—
except you can't get anointed, because there's no priest.*

It's hard to imagine going without the Mass and Sacraments, isn't it? For Catholics, they strengthen us for the journey to heaven. But this is a reality for Catholics in northern Alaska, who often go weeks or months without Mass. Why? Because we can't afford to send a priest to their communities more often.

A gift from you can help change that.

As bishop of the largest geographic missionary diocese in the United States, I have just 18 priests to cover nearly 410,000 square miles—*that's one and a half times the size of Texas*. Eighty percent of our 46 churches are in villages so remote you need a plane, snowmachine, or boat to get there. Getting there is expensive, too—it costs at least \$400 to fly a priest into a village to celebrate Mass. You can fly from New York to London for what it costs our priests to travel between villages in Alaska! This is why I'm writing today—because **We need your help to send priests to our village churches; we need help to educate seminarians to become future priests.** Catholics here



live out their faith under some of the most difficult conditions on earth. In the villages where 37 of our parishes are located, food and heating costs are so high most families must hunt, fish, and gather from the land to survive. These Catholics can't afford a full-time priest—our Missionary Diocese can't afford to give them even a part-time pastor without your help.



Priests like Father Stan Jaszek brave temps as low as 60 below zero to bring the Mass and Sacraments to Catholics in northern Alaska. In winter he travels by both snowmachine and 4-wheeler on the icy river highways; in summer, he visits parishioners by boat.

Eighteen priests make incredible sacrifices to serve the people of God. These missionaries will fly to a village, then travel the Yukon River in a small boat to anoint the dying. They'll spend hours on snowmachines and ATVs in frigid weather to bring Holy Communion to the sick. They'll stay in barely-heated churches without indoor plumbing to bring the Risen Christ to His people.

And they make those sacrifices joyfully, because [they know the Mass brings life-giving hope to these Catholics who only see a priest every month or two.](#)



Seminarian Piotr Oprych writes by lantern light while serving in the village of Newtok situated on the Ningliq River, during his summer assignment in 2019. Piotr, from Poland, attends SS. Cyril & Methodius Seminary in Orchard Lake, MI, and just completed his 3rd year of theology.

The faithful in northern Alaska need their priest's spiritual encouragement, too. Many Alaskans live well below the poverty line and can't afford the store-bought food that has to be flown or barged into villages. In bush Alaska, **milk can run \$10/gallon and eggs more than \$6/dozen!**



Checking fishing nets.

The remoteness of our villages can be a hardship, too. Villages don't have libraries, theaters, or malls...many don't even have a grocery store or medical clinic.

Not surprisingly, these struggles leave many of our people vulnerable to domestic violence, substance abuse, even suicide. Native Alaskans take their lives 3x more than other Americans and most victims are teens or young adults. In 2015, the village of Hooper Bay lost four of its 1,000 residents to suicide in two weeks. **That's the equivalent of 34,000 New Yorkers ending their lives in two weeks! The despair is tragic and epidemic.**

The Mass and Sacraments can literally mean the difference between life or death for Catholics in Alaska.

Imagine trying to save your marriage...conquer alcoholism... fight depression—God's grace would be critical, wouldn't it? Rural Alaskans need sacramental grace, too, but they need it more than a few times a year.

There is Hope!

Though we suffer a shortage of priests, we are fortunate to have three seminarians in formation and we have started a Seminarian Endowment Fund to help ensure we have funding to educate more priests for the Diocese of Fairbanks.



Nearly 410,000 Square Miles

46 Parishes

1 Bishop | 18 Priests | 1 Sister | 2 Brothers

3 Seminarians

Please help me send more priests and bring more seminarians to our churches with a gift to our General Fund to help with operations, ministries, and missionary costs and/or a gift to our Seminarian Endowment Fund, today.

CATHOLIC BISHOP OF NORTHERN ALASKA

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Seminarian Dominik Wojcik spent part of his fall pastoral year assignment in the village of Galena, located on the north bank of the Yukon River. Dominik comes to us from Poland and studies at SS. Cyril & Methodius Seminary in Orchard Lake, MI. When he returns to seminary in the fall, he will enter his 4th year of Theology.



Seminarian & US Army veteran Josh Miller studies at USML/Mundelein in Mundelein, IL. He just completed his first year of theology after having spent the previous two years studying philosophy. The Diocese of Fairbanks shares Josh's education expenses with the Archdiocese for the Military Services.



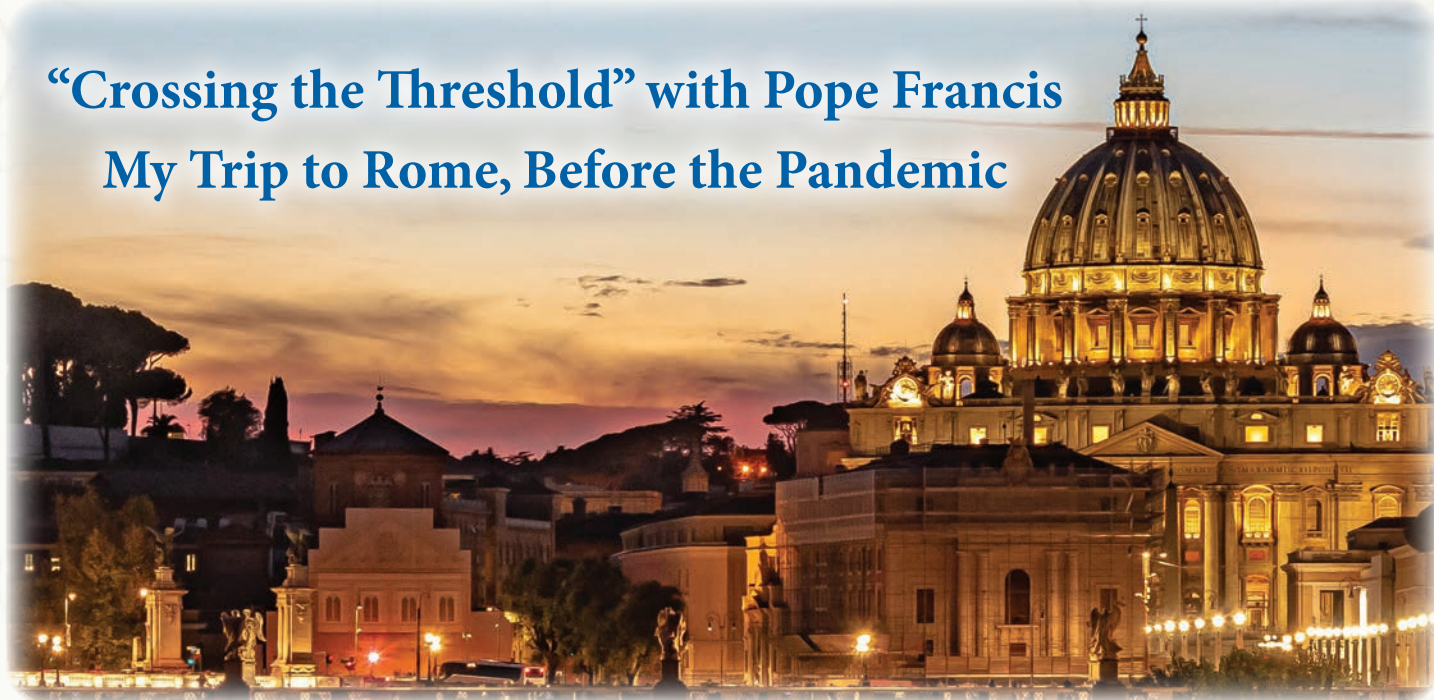
Fr. Joe Hemmer, OFM, celebrates the Sacrament of Baptism in the village of Ruby, at St. Peter in Chains Church.

Truly come to know your seminarians as a father knows his own sons.

—Pope Francis

During my time at the Vatican with Pope Francis, we discussed many topics. The Holy Father has a passionate love and concern for seminarians. He reminded us multiple times to truly come to know our seminarians as a father knows his own sons. He encouraged us to spend time with them, pray with them, share meals with them and share with them our passion and love for Christ. Pope Francis keenly sees our world crying out for an intimate relationship with Christ amidst the darkness and difficulty of our times. However, he passionately reminds us that we as priests are called to be ambassadors of hope who are willing to lay down our lives in a sacrificial loving service to the good people of God. It is this zeal for souls that will drive us to eagerly go to the fringes of society announcing the Good News of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. *It is this missionary spirit shared by Pope Francis that I see in our seminarians that which is very needed in our diocese. We have beautiful souls of God who patiently wait 6-8 weeks for the celebration of Holy Mass in remote villages in northern Alaska. I pray this span of time lessens as more young, zealous men say “yes” to Christ who desires to draw closer to each person. I daily entrust all our priests, religious, seminarians and the entire faithful of the diocese to the Blessed Virgin Mary who with her maternal love and protection draws us closer to her Son.*

“Crossing the Threshold” with Pope Francis My Trip to Rome, Before the Pandemic



It is hard to believe that as early as February, while I was in Rome, the virus was barely discussed and now so many people are greatly affected by this horrific pandemic. I remember them and you all in my daily Masses as I pray for an end to the sickness and dying in our country and around the world.

Every five years, bishops are required to make an *Ad Limina* visit to the Holy Father. *Ad Limina* means “crossing the threshold” of the Apostles. Bishops make these visits to reaffirm their obedience to and respect for the Successor of Peter, give an account of their

dioceses to the Holy Father, and receive his fatherly counsel. For U.S. bishops, visits are organized by region, with Alaska, Washington, Oregon, Montana, and Idaho dioceses visiting the Holy Father together.

In February, I traveled with more than a dozen bishops from five northwestern states to Rome for our *Ad Limina* visit. Our second day in the city, we arrived at St. Peter's Basilica before dawn to celebrate Mass at the altar closest to the tomb of St. Peter. Archbishop Alexander Sample of Portland, Oregon, who was the main celebrant, noted in his homily how our



Fairbanks Bishop Chad W. Zielinski, Anchorage Archbishop Emeritus Roger L. Schwietz, OMI, and Juneau Bishop (and Apostolic Administrator of the Anchorage Archdiocese) Andrew E. Bellisario, CM, gather in St. Peter's Basilica after celebrating Mass at the Tomb of Peter.

gathering demonstrated our connection and ministry as Successors of the Apostles. I admit I do not wake up each day and have this in my mind, but celebrating Mass in St. Peter's made the connection strong and real for me in a new way.

It was indescribably joyful and profoundly humbling to represent the faithful of the Diocese of Fairbanks as I offered the Sacrifice of the Holy Mass for their intentions.

After Mass, we were escorted to our meeting with Pope Francis. As we entered the room, we individually greeted the Holy Father. I offered him a hand-carved letter opener, made by an Alaskan artist from a fossil found by the villagers of Newtok.

It was an honor to sit with the Holy Father in an

open dialogue for almost three hours. I was amazed by his stamina and ability to address all questions with precision, clarity, and solid founding in Church doctrine. As we shared about ministries and challenges within our regions, Pope Francis shared his truly "catholic-universal" perspective as the Successor of Peter. He is keenly interested in reaching Catholics who are not active in their faith and sees the moral challenges that threaten the human dignity of all people, from unborn children to the elderly. He encouraged us to announce with joy the saving mercy that flows from the heart of Christ, who desires to draw close to each of us.

During the meeting, I noted an almost palpable presence of the Holy Spirit in the room. There have been a handful of significant events in my life when I have intensely sensed the Holy Spirit and this was one of them. Remarkably, many bishops in our group later noted the same aura of holiness.

Throughout the week, we were privileged to celebrate Mass at some of the most significant basilicas in Rome: St. John Latern, Saint Mary Major, and St. Paul's Outside the Walls, to name a few. I could have spent days in each basilica, absorbing the sacred beauty of time's best artists. I loved watching tourists be consumed by their encounter with these sacred places that pulled their hearts heavenward, knowing that many of them are not Christian yet were having a transcendent experience that invited them to connect with God.

We also met cardinals, archbishops, and bishops who headed or worked in various dicasteries or congregations. I was amazed at the diversity of staff at each office, which had representatives from many countries that truly expressed the universality of our faith. As we shared about ministry in the United States, staff confirmed that other parts of the world face similar challenges.

After our time in Rome, we headed to Siena for an eight-day retreat. En route, we stopped at the cathedral in Orvieto, which houses the Eucharistic miracle of Bolsena. In 1263, a German priest stopped at Bolsena while on a pilgrimage to Rome. He was a pious priest but found it difficult to believe Christ was truly present in the Eucharist. While celebrating Mass, he had



Bishop Chad Zielinski greets Pope Francis in the Vatican.

barely spoken the words of Consecration when blood started to seep from the Host and trickle over his hands onto the altar and corporal cloth. When the bishop in nearby Orvieto examined the cloth, it was declared an authentic miracle and enshrined at the cathedral there, where it still resides today. The corporal is only exposed twice a year and the priest unveiled it so we could pray before it. There are no words to describe the awe and wonder we experienced upon seeing the Lord's actual blood on this cloth.

I temporarily left the bishops to travel to nearby Montefiascone to visit priests of the Incarnate Word Community, who have a seminary formation program in the city. I had been invited by their Superior General, Fr. Gustavo Nieto, who visited the Diocese of Fairbanks last summer. Their community has established missions in 40+ countries, including recent missions in Saudi Arabia, Baghdad, Iraq, and the Ukraine.

I also visited the sisters' community, the Servants of the Lord and Virgin of Matara. The sisters and priests commonly refer to themselves as the Incarnate Word Family because they work in ministry together. Mother

Filotea, the Superior of the home, graciously welcomed me and I was struck by the community's youthfulness--Mother Filotea was at most in her early 30s and most sisters were in their 20s. Women come from around the world to the formation house and there were easily 20 countries represented among the 60 or so sisters I met. I sat next to a group of about 10 sisters from the United States and was impressed by their enthusiasm and joy. They were mature and grounded, yet filled with a holy joy that is contagious. I made a brief presentation about our mission work in Alaska and at the end, they joyfully shouted, "Viva Alaska!"

Our diocese's relationship with the Incarnate Word Community will soon bear great fruit for the Church in northern Alaska. Following Fr. Nieto's visit to Alaska last summer, two sisters and a priest from the order visited Fairbanks in January. To my great joy, the order is now committed to establishing a community in the Diocese of Fairbanks! Currently, the sisters plan to arrive in summer 2021.

The next morning, I celebrated Mass for a group of about 50 seminarians and priests. At their request, I celebrated

Mass and gave the homily in English so they could practice their English. I again showed a presentation about our diocese and the men were amazed that we somehow thrive in 50 below zero temperatures and that we are so close to Russia. My stories and photos seemed to ignite a zeal within a few young men who asked more pointed questions. I sensed the same joy and missionary spirit within the men as I had with the women.

After this important side trip, I rejoined my companion bishops for our retreat in Siena. We stayed at a place called Alma Domus, where sisters reside who continue the work of St. Catherine of Siena. The chapel in which we prayed and celebrated Mass contains the crucifix present when St. Catherine was in ecstasy and received the stigmata. The chapel's art--images of Jesus, Mary, and of course, St. Catherine--virtually shouted the glory of God and immediately pulled one into the transcendent.

Our retreat master was Fr. Paul Murray, O.P., who drew us into a renewed encounter with Christ in our prayer and everyday life. He reminded us that we are created in the image and likeness of God and that just as God sees this vision in us, we ought to see it in others

St. Catherine, according to Fr. Murray, would tirelessly engage prominent citizens who had the ability to enact positive social change. She patiently led them closer to Christ and many converted because of her. We obviously live in different times, but the world still wrestles with evil and corruption and our challenge remains to keep our eyes fixed on Christ. Through him, we must focus on the world's innate goodness and light. St. John Paul II reaffirmed this orientation toward the good during his visit to the United States, said Fr. Murray. The then pontiff told the faithful that witnessing to Christ in the modern age will not only require challenging the culture when it is wrong, but looking for and affirming the good that still exists in it, much as God does with us as he leads us to holiness.

In one of his last talks, Fr. Murray mentioned how St. Catherine was challenged by her spiritual director about judging others. Catherine was so smart and close to Christ that she wondered why other people did not just "get with the program to holiness." But as Fr. Murray pointed out, we are all on the way; on this

side of paradise, no one is perfect. The saints are not given to us because they were perfect (because they had struggles and temptations, too), but because they challenge us to persevere, to never lose hope, and to strive for more than spiritual mediocrity. I encountered an indescribable grace in Siena and clearly experienced the intercession of St. Catherine, especially when praying before Our Lord in Eucharistic Adoration. I left a changed man who more strongly desires to grow in holiness, to better emulate the tender, loving heart of the Good Shepherd himself as I lead His people.

I took this renewed desire with me as I made one final stop in France to visit a priest friend and spend time in Lourdes. As I celebrated Mass in the Basilica of Our Lady of Lourdes, I offered to God all the intentions of the faithful in northern Alaska and of those of our benefactors. I received--and share with my brothers and sisters--untold graces as I prayed the rosary at the very spot where Our Lady appeared to St. Bernadette in 1858.



In Siena, in the Church of the Crucifix, hangs 'the crucifix' present during the time when St. Catherine of Siena received the stigmata, in 1375, in Pisa. On 1 April of that year, while she was deep in prayer in the church of Santa Cristina, Catherine saw five blood-red rays, aimed at her hands, feet, and heart, streaming down from the crucifix in front of which she was kneeling. She immediately asked God for the stigmata to be invisible, and before the rays could reach her, they changed color, becoming resplendent with light. They remained visible only to the Saint for the rest of her life, miraculously reappearing at the moment of her death.

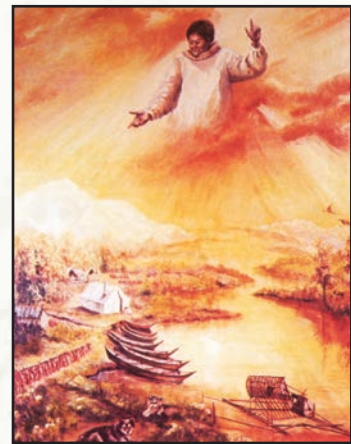
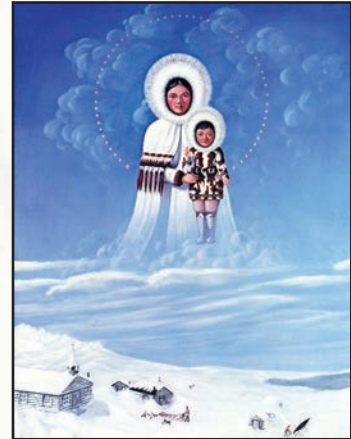
In Rome, the gift of the Holy Father still unites us, 2,000 years later. In Siena, St. Catherine's holy example still inspires us to rely on Our Lord and heavenly family as we journey home. And in Lourdes, the miraculous waters still flow, as do the river of graces we encounter during every Holy Sacrifice of the Mass. May we all continue to earnestly seek the graces God pours forth through Our Lady, the saints, and above all, through Our Lord in the Holy Eucharist.

"I will offer the Mass for you and your intentions every Friday." -- Bishop Chad



+ Chad W. Zielinski

† Most Reverend Chad W. Zielinski
Catholic Bishop of Northern Alaska
Diocese of Fairbanks



These 5-1/2" x 8-1/2" prints are available FREE for the asking.

*Some give by going to the Missions... Some go by giving to the Missions...
Without both there are no Missions*

If you are *not* currently receiving our newsletter, *The Alaskan Shepherd*, we would love to send it to you. Each issue contains articles that help you connect with our Missions and Missionaries and most feature a telling of my visits to one or more of our parishes located in bush Alaska—where they can only be reached by air.

Please contact us at:

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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 works.