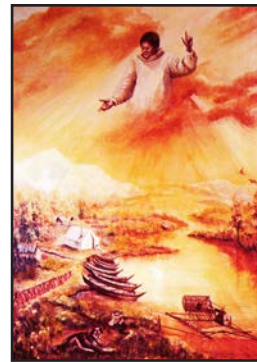




# The Alaskan Shepherd



Volume 57 Number 1

Winter 2019

*Some give by going to the Missions*

*Some go by giving to the Missions*

*Without both there are no Missions*

## Earthquakes and Seal Hunts: Bishop Zielinski Visits Chevak & Hooper Bay

*Alaska is a land of extremes, whose weather can swing from sultry 90 degrees to frigid 60 below zero in a few short months. Living in the shadow of massive glaciers and active volcanoes, Catholic Alaskans know their home is a stark reminder of their Creator's raw power. Bishop Zielinski got a terrifying reminder of that truth in November, when he found himself at the epicenter of a 7.0 earthquake while in the Anchorage airport waiting to fly to the villages of Chevak and Hooper Bay.*

### ***November 30, Feast of St. Andrew***

This morning, I was waiting in the Anchorage airport for my flight, enjoying a coffee and about to say my prayers, when the massive earthquake hit. Watching my cup slide across the table and seeing the building begin to sway and shake violently, I was overcome by fear. I was vividly transported to my deployments in Iraq and Afghanistan, as things started to fall from the ceiling and people began running around screaming in fright. I sought cover under a table and waited for the shaking to stop.

Thirty seconds later, all was still and an emergency announcement directed everyone to leave the building. I grabbed my backpack and headed out, noticing a woman nearby who look at me with fear on her pale face. She crossed herself and said, "I'm so glad you were here!" I said, "I'm glad God kept us safe," and made the Sign of the Cross, too. We exited the building just in time to feel another 5.8 earthquake ripple across the earth. It was nearly Advent, and the readings for the First Sunday seemed especially apt:



*Bishop Chad Zielinski with Frances Hale in Hooper Bay, Alaska.*

*Jesus said to his disciples:*

*"There will be signs in the sun, the moon, and the stars, and on earth nations will be in dismay, perplexed by the roaring of the sea and the waves. People will die of fright in anticipation of what is coming upon the world, for the powers of the heavens will be shaken.*

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When people experience extreme events like an earthquake, they realize there is a greater power at play than themselves. Most turn to God in a tacit acknowledgment that He is greater than even the most powerful natural phenomenon. It was the Feast of St. Andrew. Andrew didn't need an earthquake to follow Jesus but maybe most of us are more like St. Paul and need a good jolt to get back on course.

The earthquake damaged property for many families and some even lost their homes. Flights were canceled, so Anchorage residents welcomed family and friends to their homes this evening. Alaskans are incredibly resilient and neighborly...just as it was after September 11th, people's differences were set aside to help others.

I'm staying with Archbishop Etienne for the night. We celebrated Mass this evening for those suffering from the earthquake and in thanksgiving for lives saved. It's been hard to sleep, though, with aftershocks shaking the house and waking me up every hour, reminding me that God is in control.

### ***December 2, First Sunday of Advent***

I finally got a flight to Bethel, the transportation hub for the Yukon-Kuskokwim Delta region. I'd hoped to hop right over to Chevak, but bad weather has kept me grounded here for two days. The wisdom of Native elders

is so true: "The weather is boss."

I'm amazed at how human beings can endure so much, yet with the help of family and parish, rise again to approach the altar of God for strength in the Eucharist. I saw this in Kevin and Bob, two elderly Bethel residents who were accompanied by family members at Mass. How beautiful to see the faithful literally supporting the elderly in body and soul. Where would the Church be without the witness of our elder brothers and sisters as they hobble toward the altar with a smile on their faces?

### ***December 3, Feast of St. Francis Xavier***

I finally arrived this morning in Chevak, a village of about 1,000 Cup'ik Native people. Most villagers are Catholic and within 30 minutes of my arrival, nearly two dozen people had gathered for Mass. I celebrated the liturgy with Fr. Gregg Wood, a Jesuit priest who has been in the bush since 1996. What a joy to celebrate Mass on the feast of St. Francis Xavier with a Jesuit in an Alaskan mission established by Jesuits in the 1800s!

After Mass, Deacon Peter Boy Scout and his wife, Maria, invited me and Fr. Gregg to their home for a hearty lunch of moose stew. It was perfect for a cold, blustery day in Chevak, which is so windy the village is powered by four wind turbines. Peter is a quiet, gracious man who told us a fascinating story about the time 20 years ago when he and another man went on a spring seal hunt.



*Bishop Chad Zielinski and Fr. Gregg Wood, SJ, pose with Sacred Heart parishioners in Chevak, Alaska.*

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Chevak is located on the Ninglikfak River, about 17 miles inland from the Bering Sea. Peter and his friend had traveled to the sea in an 18-foot aluminum boat, then headed north to search for seals. A day or two into the hunt, a severe storm developed. They tried to head back to Chevak, but the waves were dangerously high.

Then Peter remembered some wisdom shared by his father: "In a storm, head to the ice float." So the men headed back to the ice float they'd just used for seal hunting, to find refuge from the storm. Once there, they were mostly sheltered from the storm. Their small camp stove provided some heat, and enabled them to cook small bits of seal and melt ice for fresh drinking water.

Back in the village, another hunter visited Maria to tell her Peter had not returned to their agreed-upon meeting point. As days passed, Maria became increasingly anxiously. Finally, she told God, "If you want Peter, he is yours." The moment she surrendered her husband to God, she felt an incredible peace infuse her soul. She became quiet and began dedicating hours to prayer for her husband's safety.

Peter and his friend waited on the ice for two days before the storm subsided. As they started to make their way back across the sea to the river, however, the boat's motor gave out. They drifted in the boat for seven hours as they disassembled the motor and dried the pieces over the camp stove. After reassembling the motor (and probably praying a lot), Peter and his friend got the motor restarted and headed to Chevak.

Peter was silent when he returned home, no doubt overwhelmed by his close call. Maria wept the most joyful tears of her life and thanked God for his safe return.

### ***December 5, 2018***

Today Fr. Gregg and I offered a special Mass for active military personnel, as well as living and deceased veterans. About 75 people came for Mass. We had asked people to write down family members' names who had served in the military and we presented those names during the prayers of petition. The villagers remembered nearly 80 friends and family and I was deeply impressed at the number of military represented in this small village of just a few hundred people. I find Native Alaskans to be deeply patriotic, willing to serve and sacrifice for America without hesitation. This is even more impressive considering their remote location means they don't receive the usual public accolades for their sacrifices.

After Mass, I was surprised with a potluck of Native foods. My favorite is "agutuk," which they call

"Eskimo ice cream." It's traditionally made with seal oil, berries, and fish. Nowadays, it's usually made with Crisco, salmon, berries, and some fish fat, often with a little sugar for sweetness. I also got to enjoy freshly-cooked blackfish, tomcod, moose, smoked salmon strips, and fry bread...a fabulous meal truly harvested from the land.

### ***December 6, 2018***

As I was celebrating Mass this morning, I saw a Chevak elder named Margaret enter the church during the entrance song. She leaned on a cane and slowly moved down the aisle, intentionally placing one foot in front of the other. She stopped about four pews from the back and made a deep bow since she could not manage a genuflect. She bowed for at least a full minute and I was afraid she might fall! Then Margaret lifted her head with a beaming smile and sat down.

I later learned Margaret insists on walking to Mass whenever it's offered. Who knows how long it takes her to make that trek to church? Her love for the Mass is a heroic witness to the faith and her efforts to come honor Jesus was moving beyond words.



***Bishop Chad Zielinski with Natalia Aloralrea and Elizabeth (Aloralrea) Fermoye in Chevak, Alaska.***

### ***December 7, 2018***

After Mass this morning, I loaded the snowmachine with my things, then made my way to the airstrip with Father Gregg and Deacon Boyscout. We arrived a bit too early and found ourselves assaulted by 30-mph winds that whistled across the frozen landscape.

During the lull, Deacon Peter recalled how he and his father had purchased some of the first snowmobiles available in Alaska. Before the machines, they had used dogsled teams to travel between villages. Sometimes they would take priests and religious with them.

Whether you use dogs or snowmachines, however, winter in Alaska is unpredictable and can be deadly, with snow storms striking without warning at any time. Peter told us about the time he was traveling to Hooper Bay, about 20 miles from Chevak, via dog team. A blizzard struck and his dogs refused to go on, so he made a small camp on the tundra and spent the night until the storm was over. Then he headed on to the next village.

He was just 12 years old.

### ***December 8, 2018***

I arrived in Hooper Bay last night, one of our larger villages with about 1,200 residents. The village has really suffered in recent years. In 2006, a major fire ravaged the community, destroying homes, the school, teacher



*This cross stands next to Sacred Heart Church, in Chevak, Alaska. Chevak is a Cup'ik Eskimo village, located on the north bank of the Ninglikfak River, 17 miles east of Hooper Bay in the Yukon-Kuskokwim Delta.*



*December 7, 2018: After Mass this morning, I loaded the snowmachine with my things, then made my way to the airstrip with Father Gregg and Deacon Boyscout. We arrived a bit too early and found ourselves assaulted by 30-mph winds that whistled across the frozen landscape.  
—Bishop Chad Zielinski*



# The Miraculous Novena of Grace

## March 4 - March 12

The Novena of Grace, which begins March 4th and ends on the 12th, the day of the canonization of St. Francis Xavier, owes its origin to the Saint himself. At Naples, in December, 1633, Father Marcello Mastrilli, S.J., was at the point of death. The Saint appeared to him and, bidding him renew a vow he had made to labor in Japan, said: *"All those who implore my help daily for nine consecutive days, from the 4th to the 12th of March included, and worthily receive the Sacraments of Penance and the Holy Eucharist on one of the nine days, will experience my protection and may hope with entire assurance to obtain from God any grace they ask for the good of their souls and the glory of God."* The Father arose, instantly cured. So well has the Saint kept this promise that this devotion in his honor became universally known as the Novena of Grace.



O most amiable and loving St. Francis Xavier, in union with you I adore the Divine Majesty. While joyfully giving thanks to God for the great graces which He conferred upon you in life and for the great glory with which He has gifted you in heaven, I come to you with heartfelt love, begging you to secure for me, by your powerful intercession, the inestimable blessings of living and dying in the state of grace.

I also beseech you to obtain for me the favors I ask in this Novena \_\_\_\_\_. But if what I ask is not for the Glory of God, or for the good of my soul, do you obtain for me what is most conducive to both. Amen. **R:** Our Father; Hail Mary; Glory be to the Father.

**V. Pray for us, St. Francis Xavier, R. That we may be made worthy of the promises of Christ.**

**Let us pray:** O God, You chose to bring into your Church peoples of the Orient through the preaching and miracles of St. Francis Xavier, mercifully grant us that we may imitate his virtues, whose glorious merits we hold in veneration. We ask this through Jesus Christ Our Lord. Amen.

*Clip & Send: 1312 Peger Road, Fairbanks, AK, 99709*

***Please remember my intentions:***

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**Fr. Gregg Wood, SJ**

**Village Priest: Hooper Bay, Scammon Bay, and Chevak**

—Excerpted from *Alaskan Catholicism*, written by Fr. Louis Renner, SJ

Gregg D. Wood, the oldest of four children, was born at Carlisle Barracks, Pennsylvania, to Gregg D. Wood, Sr., a physician/surgeon in the U.S. Army, and Jeanne L. Fortuna Wood. From infancy on, however, Portland, Oregon, was his home. From 1950-56, he attended St. Mary Magdalene Grade School. He completed his elementary education at a public school, after which he attended Jesuit High School, in Portland, from 1959-63. He attended Gonzaga University in Spokane, Washington, during the years 1963-67.

During his second year at Gonzaga, his calling to be a Jesuit priest came “to full bloom.” He went on to finish his collegiate studies, ending them with an undergraduate degree in biology.

On August 21, 1967, Gregg entered the Jesuit Novitiate of St. Francis Xavier at Sheridan, Oregon. He studied philosophy during the year 1969-70 at Mount St. Michael’s, Spokane. From 1970-72, he taught biology at Seattle Preparatory. From 1972-75, he studied theology at Regis College, Toronto, Ontario, Canada. He was ordained a priest in Seattle on June 21, 1975, by Archbishop Raymond G. Hunthausen.

During his first year as a priest, Father Wood taught courses in Sacred Scripture and Greek at the Novitiate of St. Francis Xavier, now in Portland, Oregon. He went on to the California School of Professional Psychology in San Diego, from which he obtained a doctorate in Clinical Psychology in 1984. From 1983-95, he was stationed at Seattle University, where he served as a psychologist in the Counseling Center. For a number of years, he was also the Father Minister of the Jesuit Community.

During the year 1995-96, Father Wood was on a sabbatical. He felt called to lead a simpler lifestyle than that of the big city, and he wanted to be more closely connected with nature. Accordingly, he spent time on the Indian missions in eastern Washington and in Montana. For a time, too, he was a member of the Joe Prince Community, composed of the Jesuits ministering in the Yukon-Kuskokwim Delta at St. Mary’s Mission on the Andreafsky River in western Alaska. As a member of that community, he was introduced to the Central Yup’ik Eskimos during an initial two-month visit in Hooper Bay.

Happy with his newfound ministry among Native Americans, in this case the Central Yup’ik Eskimos, Father Wood was responsible for the villages of Hooper Bay, Scammon Bay, and Chevak. As of 2019, he is still serving those three villages.

Whereas others found the Bering Sea coast tundra in winter a bleak, empty, frozen waste, Father Wood found that “time on the tundra is powerful therapy.” One day, he and a Jesuit novice were traveling over an icy trail between Scammon Bay and Chevak, a distance of 27 miles. Trail conditions required frequent stops to cool off the snowmachine. During one stop, Father Wood looked out on the frozen tundra, surveyed the panorama, and with excitement said to the young novice, “I do love this! And so it is with my ministry among the people of the North.”



*Fr Gregg Wood, SJ, visits parishioners and travels to nearby villages via snowmachine in the winter.*



housing, offices, and stores. Seventy people were left homeless. Then three years ago, four young people died from suicide in just two weeks. That's a staggering loss for a village this size...it's the equivalent of Boston losing 2,700 young people to suicide in the same period.

Sadly, there's an epidemic of despair among Native youth in some of our villages, who straddle both a traditional and modern way of life. I recently learned that suicide among Native Alaskan men is the highest in the country, more than five times the national average. This is one of the many reasons I'm fighting so hard to get priests and religious to the bush...my people need spiritual aid more than ever to realize how precious and valuable they are as children of God.

This morning, we celebrated Mass for the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary. It was beautiful, especially when the congregation sung a Yup'ik hymn to honor Our Lady. Afterwards, Fr. Gregg and I walked through the village offering Communion and Anointing to the sick and homebound.

*December 9, 2018*

Early this morning, we learned that Helen Smith, a village elder, had passed away at 95. For the three days, it had been windy and snowing, but this morning the air was still and the sun was shining on the glittering snow. The village elders saw this as a sign of great blessing for Helen, who was a woman of deep faith and profoundly respected in Hooper Bay.

After Sunday Mass, Fr. Gregg and I stopped by Helen's home, where her body was lain out. For the next few days, people will stop by to bring food to the family and pay their respects to Helen. Even in the midst of their sorrow, the people so graciously welcomed me into their lives. I was thanked for coming to the village—"Quyana!"—hundreds of times and eagerly asked when I am coming back.

I am so blessed to be the shepherd of these faith-filled Native Catholics. Quyana, Lord!

*+Chad W. Zielinski*



*Bishop Chad Zielinski with Little Flower parishioners in Hooper Bay, Alaska.*

# MISSIONARY SPOTLIGHT



From Nigeria to Alaska

## Father Alphonsus Afina

*Father Alphonsus Afina is a priest from Nigeria, who came to serve as a missionary in the Diocese of Fairbanks in 2017. When asked by his own bishop to consider serving in northern Alaska, Fr. Alphonsus needed just 10 minutes to say "Yes!" He now serves as a pastor of three village churches in the Yukon-Kuskokwim Delta region.*

### What most strongly influenced your faith growing up?

My parents were strong Catholics who both converted to the faith when they were young. Growing up, our parents made sure faith was a priority in our house—we always prayed morning prayers together and went to Mass. In fact, NOT going to Mass wasn't an option! We were expected to serve at the parish, too, so I altar served and was in the Legion of Mary. There were nine of us kids—five boys and four girls—and all of us are still strong Catholics because of how we were raised.

### How did you know you were called to the priesthood?

First, to be called to the priesthood can't be something *you* want to do—it has to come through other influences and of course, from God's call. I first felt the call at 13 so I went to minor seminary for high school. Then I went into major seminary, but changed my mind halfway through. A wise pastor told me most seminarians doubt their call at some point, and advised me to give it three more months. I went back, went on retreat, and felt the call strongly again. Then just before I was ordained, it happened again and I even started looking into other degree programs. But once I fully accepted God's call to the priesthood, I was at peace and haven't doubted since. In some ways, it's harder for Africans to accept a call to priesthood because we put so much importance on family lineage. For us, giving up marriage and children isn't just a great personal sacrifice for God, but you agree to become "useless" because the family line stops with you.

### How did you end up in Alaska?

One day my bishop called and said, "They really need priests in northern Alaska and I'd like you to pray about serving there." He started telling me about how difficult it would be to live in Alaska because of the cold and changing weather. While he was talking, I started looking up info about Alaska on the computer, and was troubled there were Catholics there who only get the Mass every few months. Within 10 minutes, I'd told my bishop I'd be happy to go to Alaska because the people need the sacraments. The difficulties didn't matter, because you don't become a priest to be comfortable.

### What advice would you give a Catholic trying to discern a call to the priesthood?

I would say persevere in your faith because it's through perseverance that we encounter God. God speaks to us with a quiet voice and you have to cooperate with His grace over time to truly know you're called to this vocation.

