



The Alaskan Shepherd



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Winter 2020

Some give by going to the Missions

Some go by giving to the Missions

Without both there are no Missions

Living a Steadfast Faith on the Rocky Slopes of Little Diomed Island Bishop Zielinski Visits the Parish of St. Jude on the Bering Sea



*Father Amruth Kumar Pasala and Bishop Chad Zielinski
prepare to visit the parish of St. Jude on Little Diomed
Island in September of 2019.*

All photos courtesy of Bishop Zielinski

Monday, September 23, 2019

This afternoon, I gathered at the Pathfinder Air hanger in the Nome Airport with one of our missionary priests from India, Fr. Kumar Pasala, en route to a visit to Little Diomed Island.

Little Diomed is perhaps the most geographically extreme mission established by the Catholic

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*An Aerial view of Little Diomed Island taken using drone photography in June 2018.
By Walter Holt Rose*

Church in Alaska. The island, which sits in the middle of the Bering Strait off the coast of Alaska, is less than three square miles, most of which is comprised of steep granite and quartz peaks. Across the water, you can see Big Diomed Island, which belongs to Russia.

There is no airline company that offers regular service to Little Diomed. If conditions permit, Bering Air operates regular flights to Little Diomed only a few months of each year. The only runway available at the village is one plowed into the frozen sea ice. When the sea is thawed, Diomed is only accessible by boat and helicopter. We were limited to 50 pounds of luggage each, but I trimmed my belongings down to fit in some gifts for the island's children. When I had planned the trip in June, the school's principal, Mike Gadbois, suggested the children would love some fresh fruit and ice cream. I had stayed in Anchorage the night before, so I picked up fruit there, then grabbed ice

cream in Nome right before takeoff. People are always surprised to learn how much Alaskans love ice cream.

As we took off, I realized the last time I had flown in a helicopter was in Afghanistan. As an Air Force chaplain, I had covered 18 of the country's combat outposts, flying more than 110 combat missions during my seven months in country. The pilot would often say to me, "Padre, we're heading into some bad territory, so we need your prayers." With rosary in hand, I would ask Our Lady and her angels to guide us to safety. We were shot at, but never shot down, though our convoys on the ground sadly did not fare as well. Being in a helicopter again brought up some strong memories. But the anxiety faded as we headed north and I saw the beautiful Alaskan tundra beneath us and took in the loveliness of God's creation.

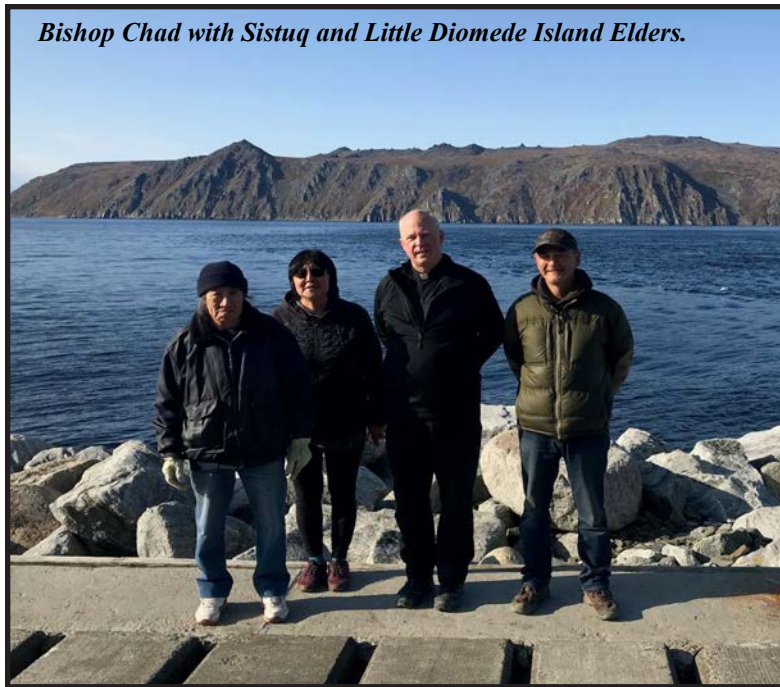
I sat next to a woman named Frances Sistuq Ozenna, whose family (Ahkinga) has lived on Little

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Bishop Chad with Sistuq and Little Diomed Island Elders.



Diomedes for generations. During the flight, she wrote notes to identify landmarks for me, pointing out the villages of Teller, Brevig, and Wales. As we approached Little Diomed Island, she pointed to a mountain range in the distance on the Russian mainland. I later learned she and her son had survived a plane crash there, surviving for four days in Russia before they were rescued.

For centuries, the Inupiaq of this area saw themselves as one people, united with the indigenous inhabitants of Big Diomed Island and the small villages on the nearby Russian mainland. They even shared a common language, and would travel by dogsled across the frozen water in winter to visit. Travel stopped at some point during the Cold War, when the watery border between the two islands became known as the “Ice Curtain.”

We landed on Little Diomed around 3pm, greeted by villagers en route to Nome for medical appointments or jobs. Several people grabbed my luggage and helped me find the school, where Principal Gadbois graciously showed me to my quarters—an unoccupied office with a mattress on the floor. Luckily, the room was heated, since Little Diomedes’s climate averages just 40 to 50 degrees even in the height of summer and it was already in the 30s. There was even a nearby bathroom with

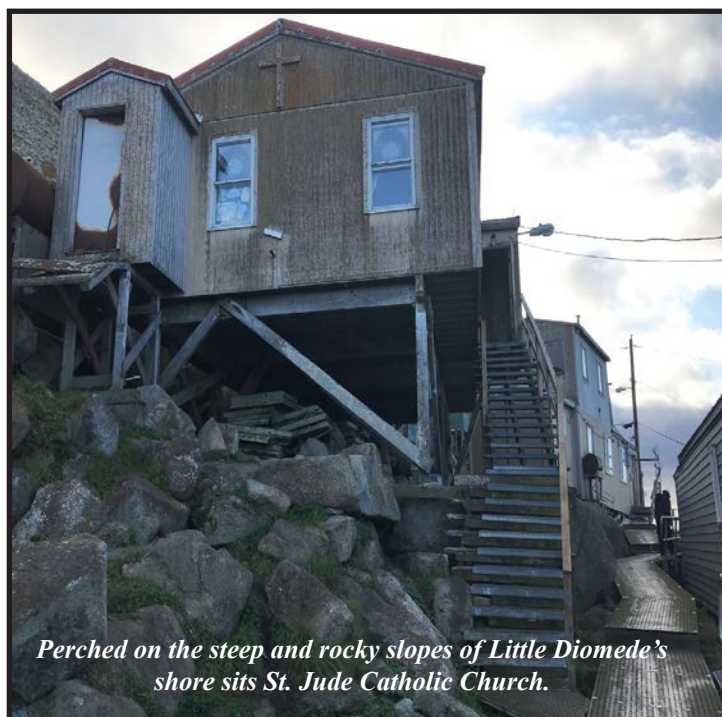
running water—that’s five-star lodging in the bush!

We quickly transformed the school’s small cafeteria into a chapel and celebrated Mass at 5pm. About 10 people attended, a good number given that we’d only announced it within the hour. Afterwards, Sistuq offered to take me and a few others on a hike up a trail that traversed the steep hill above the village. Within five minutes, I looked down and realized I would fall right into the ocean if I slipped, so I headed back to the village. I am amazed by the Little Diomeders who are as sure-footed as mountain goats on those near-vertical cliffs!

Tuesday, September 24, 2019

This morning, people were already bustling around the school by 8am so I popped out of bed, made some coffee, and then wandered down to the cafeteria. The children were so polite and asked many questions, mainly wanting to know where I was from and how long I would be staying.

I later walked through the village. Everyone I met was welcoming and thanked me for coming. One young man named Kevin was an ivory carver who showed me two of his impressive carvings from walrus tusks—an Eskimo doll and an eagle with outspread wings. I showed him my simple metal pectoral Cross, and asked if he could carve



Perched on the steep and rocky slopes of Little Diomedes’s shore sits St. Jude Catholic Church.

something similar for me. He was excited about the challenge and has promised to send me updates as the piece takes form.

I made it to the parish, St. Jude Catholic Church, and climbed up the long row of steps. Like most buildings on Little Diomed, the church was built into the cliff face and is supported by pilings. The structure was built in the 1970s with a main worship area and small apartment for visiting clergy. With our current priest shortage, however, the community only gets to celebrate the Mass once or twice a year. Over time, the unused church space was transformed into a much-needed wellness center and play area for the children, since the island has no green spaces (except for an area located at 1100 feet above sea level at the very top of the island) or playgrounds. I was impressed by how well the residents had maintained the building.

I had lunch at the school, which only has about 20 students and two teachers. The high school teacher showed me the traditional ulu knives the students were building from scratch. A few weeks earlier, they had sold nearly a dozen of the knives for \$150 each to some tourists on a small French cruise ship that had stopped by the island.

I later visited with several residents and was fascinated by their hunting stories. Living on a tiny, mostly rocky island in the middle of the Chuckchi Sea and the Bering Strait, Little Diomeders historically depended on sea life such as whales and walruses to feed their families. Harpooning a whale takes the coordination of at least three boats of men. A man named Jerry recalled a whale trying to capsize his boat and shared an emotional

memory of watching a whale flip his friend's boat, who drowned. Gray whales actually have a keen sense of location and will charge boats. Another man shared about making it back to the island despite constant dangers that should have taken all their lives. He knew then that the hand of God was real.

I was listening to their stories on the helicopter landing pad next to the sea when a group of about six walruses came swimming by 200 yards or so offshore. Jerry started calling out to them, making the sounds of a young walrus, which drew them toward us until they were about 40 yards from shore. Then the animals figured out we weren't actually walruses and headed back to the sea.

I also heard stories from the islanders about the positive impact the Little Sisters of Jesus—who served the island for approximately 40 years from 1954 to 1996—had on the community. The sisters had lived on the island in a small house, teaching the faith and learning the traditional skills of the Native people such as processing seals and walruses for meat and clothing. One woman said a religious named Little Sister Joseph Alice had been a beacon of hope who had saved her from a deep depression.

That evening, we celebrated Mass in the gym, where I baptized seven children. Afterwards we had tea, coffee, and homemade fry bread and then I was treated to a traditional Eskimo dance. I was impressed by the number and quality of drummers and dancers from such a small village. Two young men performed an amusing walrus dance that elicited many laughs. Little Diomeders are clearly working hard to hold on to their Inupiaq traditions.

Wednesday, September 25, 2019

Today was a half-day for students since the teachers had training scheduled in the afternoon over the internet. Principal Mike was our cook for an early lunch, and served the students and staff hot dogs, fries, and a bowl of the fresh fruit I had brought.



Traditional drumming and dancing is a valued tradition by Little Diomeders. Most performances and celebrations are held in the school gymnasium.

The children cheered when he announced they would get my ice cream for dessert! I was touched by how such simple, common staples, for me, were seen as treasured gifts by the islanders.

The helicopter arrived just before noon with a load of cargo and mail. About 10 days earlier, residents Heather and Sam had delivered a stillborn baby at the hospital in Nome and within the first load of cargo was an urn containing the remains of their child, Sullivan. Sistuq encouraged me to visit them, so we quickly made our way to the parents' home. The mother and father held each other and cried as I offered prayers of hope, healing, and comfort for their loss. I reminded them that the holy ones go before us to heaven and are praying for us as part of the Communion of Saints. I still carry this suffering couple in my heart.

As we were leaving, Sam pointed down the long stairway leading up to the house. Sistuq explained that a few years earlier, her father had killed a polar bear making its way up to their porch. I shuddered to envision that enormous



Bishop Chad Zielinski looking across the Bering Strait to "tomorrow" and Big Diomed Island, Russia.

Because they are separated by the International Date Line, Big Diomed is almost a day ahead of Little Diomed, but not completely; due to locally defined time zones, Big Diomed is only 21 hours ahead of Little Diomed (20 in summer).

white predator climbing the narrow stairwell. They concluded with, "Then we ate the polar bear."

Shortly afterwards, my time on Little Diomed came to a close as Fr. Kumar and I boarded the helicopter and made our way back to Nome. I had been on the island just a few days, but already the tundra was turning a rust brown and the peaks of the hills had a fresh frosting of snow. Visiting St. Jude on Little Diomed Island had completed my tour of all 46 parishes of the Diocese of Fairbanks. Even with frequent trips to the bush, it has still taken me five years to visit all of my people, given the vastness of Alaska and constant weather delays.

I reflected on how difficult it is to live in the harsh environment of northern Alaska. Yet the Native people who live in these remote villages meet these challenges head-on every day as part of their subsistence lifestyle.

What a blessing it was to visit Little Diomed Island, and experience this unique and remote part of Alaska. The people extended such warm and gracious hospitality and with great joy, welcomed me back to their community. May God bless them with many more generations of faith and fortitude!



Bishop Chad Zielinski with Pathfinder Aviation Pilot Mike Kutya in Nome, Alaska.

BOOK RECOUNTS RELIGIOUS SISTERS' HARD-SCRABBLE ALASKA MISSION

Editor's Note: For this article we are indebted to the *Catholic Anchor* and the Archdiocese of Anchorage for granting permission for its reprint. The article first ran in October of 2018 and was written by Annette Allewa.

—Patty Walter

The Little Sisters of Jesus took Christ's directive to preach the Gospel to the ends of the earth quite literally when they began their mission in rural Northwestern Alaska in 1952. The history of their work in the state is the topic of a book recently published by Sister Alice Ann Sullivan.

"Our Story: History of the Little Sisters of Jesus in Alaska" is a self-published chronicle of the arrival in Alaska of the order's founder, Sister Magdeleine of Jesus, and the adventures of a handful of faithful sisters who served mostly Native Catholic populations for more than 60 years.

Inspired by the life and writings of Blessed Charles de Foucauld, the order was established in 1939. With a particular charism for serving the poorest and most forgotten, the Little Sisters worked with diverse populations throughout the world, on six continents. Sister Magdeleine instructed her associates, "Look at the map of the world and see if you can find a handful of people scattered over a large territory and difficult to reach... You must really choose to go there, otherwise no one else may ever come to tell them that Jesus loves them, that he suffered and died for them."

When she looked at the map of Alaska, she was particularly concerned with the Inupiaq village of Inalik, located on the west side of Little Diomed Island, 25 miles west of the North American coast. Nome is the jumping off point to travel to the remote, barren, windswept island in the Bering Strait, which is separated by less than two and a half miles from Big Diomed Island, a part of Russia.

"Our Story" is a testimony to the tenacity, adaptability, and faith of a dozen or so women who, against tremendous odds and numerous challenges, eventually built a house on the obscure and forbidding island. During the winter months, the sisters lived, learned and shared life with the 100 or so residents, for approximately 40 years. Two of those women, Sister Damiene, and Sister Nobu served the Alaska Natives of Little Diomed Island for 17 winters, as did Sister Odette and others for many years as well.



Front row: Sr. Yoshie, Sr. Nirmala, Sr. Odette, Sr. Damiene, Sr. Laura Lee (not shown: Sr. Nobuko). Back row: Deacon Bob Froehle, Rev. Ross Tozzi, Sr. Alice, Sr. Monique and Archbishop Roger Schwietz O.M.I.

This photo was taken by Laura Samuelson and appeared in the Nome Nugget's June 5, 2014 issue.

Sister Alice, who spent two winters on Little Diomed, and also lived and worked in Nome and Fairbanks, was fascinated and inspired by the intrepid sisters who established a life with residents of the island. Having read the diaries of her forbearers, she felt compelled to share the story of what she described as an "extraordinary feat."

"It was not so much a sense of urgency, but this whole happening ... establishing a foothold, building a house, was such a unique part of Alaskan history. It needed to be told," she said in an interview with the *Catholic Anchor*. She began "Our Story" several years ago, while serving in Nome—writing whenever the demands of her vocation permitted a little time. With the help of several others, especially her editor and friend, Laura Samuelson, Sister Alice completed the story she so desired to tell.

For two winters, Sister Alice immersed herself in the life of the people of Diomed.

"It was a totally new experience for me, living in a wilderness setting, on a barren rock in the middle of an ocean," she said. "The people are so nice, so good—the women and the men. They made sure we had meat. We would go outside and there would be a seal in front of our door."

The island was replete with marine life, with excellent hunting in the winter. Animals had to pass through the narrow Bering Strait, making it an ideal place to harvest an abundance of food, necessary to endure the cold, harsh conditions. During the summer, many residents relocated to Nome as there was no drinking water available on Little Diomedede. In the winter the water source was melted snow, she said. *(Editor's Note 2020—During the summers now, the melted snow is collected and processed for use year round.)*

“Living on the island entailed a lot of physically hard work — especially for the women. There were no material resources. They were still using seal oil lamps,” Sister Alice recalled.

The Bureau of Indian Affairs eventually built a school, but the girls had to start young, learning the ways of subsistence, she added. The Little Sisters, too, learned these ways, from how to prepare a walrus skin to making a boat, to ice fishing, net setting, and learning how to prepare, cook and enjoy Alaska Native foods. Immersed in the lives of those they served, they preached a gospel of presence.

“We were the first religious community to start the ministry of presence,” Sister Alice said. “We live with the people as they are—people who are despised, looked down upon. We live the way they do to absorb their values, their songs, their dance, their culture—and validate that. We incorporate that into the church.”

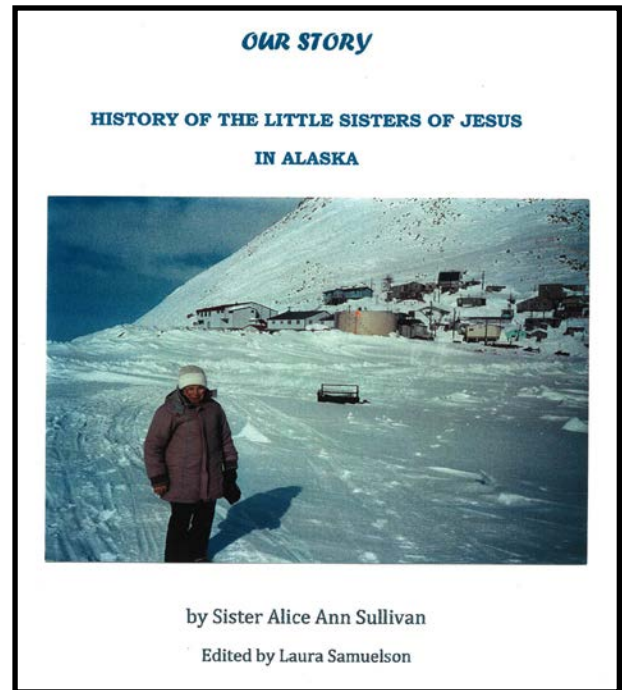
This ministry of presence is becoming more relevant in Africa and in Europe, where Muslims have recently chosen to live. There, cultures are antagonistic to each other, she said, adding, “We deliberately choose to go to places where the church has had a minimal presence.” She noted a significant ministry to Arabic speaking Muslims in the Middle East.

Thrilled that she finally completed the book, Sister Alice hopes that readers will become aware of the accomplishments of her peers. In recalling the years of preparation, the setbacks, the challenges to sustain themselves by paid labor in the communities, and the eventual success of their mission, a look of amazement lingers on her face as she sits in her room at the Anchorage Pioneer Home. Sisters Damiene, Nobu and Odette, who spent dozens of winters on Little Diomedede, join her in ministering to the home’s elderly residents.

Their frailty and age belie these dynamos of strength and endurance, living testimonies to a kind of faith that answered the call to bring the Gospel to the far reaches of Alaska.

Sister Alice’s book is available for purchase.

For more information, contact the Little Sisters of Jesus at (907) 258-6655.



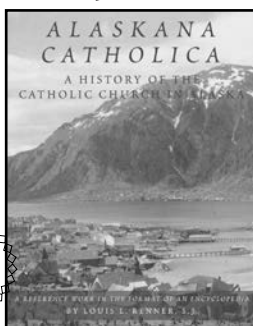
The Little Sisters of Jesus on Little Diomedede Island fishing crab in 1967—Diocese of Fairbanks Archives



The following partial excerpt is from the book *Alaskana Catholica* written by Father Louis L. Renner, S.J.

Fr. Renner was ordained a priest in 1957. He spent his next five years in Europe studying French at the Sorbonne, making his tertianship, and earning a doctorate in philosophy at the University of Munich. He then taught German and Latin at the University of Alaska-Fairbanks from 1965 to 1980, retiring from the university with Professor of German Emeritus status. From 1981 to 2002, while still residing in Fairbanks, he edited *The Alaskan Shepherd*. In June 2002—he was “missioned” to write a comprehensive history of the Catholic Church in Alaska—he joined the Gonzaga University Jesuit Community in Spokane, Washington, as “writer in residence.” *Alaskana Catholica* was Father Renner’s fifth book; he wrote a sixth book, an autobiography entitled, *A Kindly Providence*, in 2008. Fr. Renner passed away on March 24, 2015, at age 88, at Gonzaga University Infirmary, in Spokane, WA. *Alaskana Catholica* is available for purchase for \$85 which includes shipping.

\$85



LITTLE DIOMEDE

Some 50 miles below the Arctic Circle, and exactly in the middle of Bering Strait, a 57-mile wide band of water that separates the two continents of North America and Asia, lie two immense crags of granite rock, Big Diomedes and Little Diomedes Islands. Big Diomedes was “discovered” by Vitus Bering in 1728, and named for St. Diomedes, a Russian Orthodox saint, whose feast day it was. Separated by the International Date Line, Big Diomedes belongs to Russia, Little Diomedes to the United States. For countless generations the two islands, less than three miles apart, served as steppingstones between Siberia and Alaska for the Inupiat living on them and acting

as middlemen for the trade that flowed freely between the two continents. During the post-World War II “cold war,” beginning in 1947, an invisible, impenetrable iron curtain hung between the two islands. This came down around 1970 with the easing of tensions between the Soviet Union and the United States, the “détente.” Since then, people have moved rather freely between the two islands and the two continents.

Little Diomedes Island—bleak, lashed almost year-round by wind and wave, remote to western civilization—rises abruptly out of the icy blue-green waters of Bering Strait to a plateau 1308 feet above sea level. The flanks of the island are near perpendicular cliffs on all sides except the southwest side, where a massive rock slide created a more gentle slope. It is on this slope that the Eskimo village, noted on maps as “Igualuk,” (Inalik) but referred to generally simply as “Little Diomedes,” is located. Below the village, there is a narrow, 300-yard long “beach” of wave-worn boulders that serves as a boat-landing place. Even this is covered by breakers in stormy weather. The village, though threatened by boulders from above and the sea from below, has stood on its present site since pre-historic times. Earlier generations of Little Diomedes lived in semi-subterranean dugouts. During the twentieth century, frame houses gradually became the norm. In the year 2000, there were 146 people living on Little Diomedes. Until the advent of the helicopter, the island was inaccessible during times of the fall freeze-up and the spring breakup. For days and days, adverse weather conditions still often strand people hoping to get to or off the island.

The mainland Eskimos call the Diomedes “the people of the open water,” the “open water” being the ever-shifting leads in the ever-moving pack ice (the “ice that never sleeps”) that chokes Bering Strait from October to July. It is in this open water, in these leads, and on these ice fields that great herds of migrating walrus abound. From these marine mammals come the meat, oil, skins, and ivory so basic to the Diomedes way of life. It is these readily available walrus, along with the seal and the ugruk, that have kept the Diomedes on their seemingly inhospitable island up to the present day.

In addition to the riches of the sea, the island itself is a source of substantial quantities of food, despite its apparent bareness. On the island proper, the people gather the “Eskimo potato,” an edible tuber, and various greens, which are eaten fresh or preserved in seal oil or water to supplement seal and walrus meat during the winter.

Continued on Page 11

The Miraculous Novena of Grace

March 4-12

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*.

Saint Francis Xavier



Pray For Us

The Novena Prayer (Clip & Save)

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.

Please remember these special intentions during

The Miraculous Novena of Grace **March 4-12**

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F1 S2020 01

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Dear Bishop Zielinski,

F179 S2020 01

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DIOMEDE

By Father Louis Renner, SJ, Alaskan Catholic

Continued from Page 8

In summer, birds and their eggs are also taken in great quantities. Crab, tomcod, and bullheads are caught through holes in the ice in winter.

Little Diomed Island was first visited by a Catholic missionary in 1913, when Father Bellarmine Lafortune, S.J., spent a very short time there in June. In August 1916, Father Hubert A. Post, S.J., visited the island briefly. By this time a fair number of Little Diomeders were already Catholic, having been brought into the Church by Father Lafortune during their annual summers in Nome. In the summer of 1932, he was on the island from July 12th to August 28th. He spent that time instructing the people and converting an old house owned by the Church into a chapel and living quarters. Conditions on Little Diomed he found “simply dismal. The sight of our house made my heart go into my boots. Built long ago [by someone else for other purposes], it had never been occupied. The windows were covered with gunny sacks, the original windows having been broken by the snow and the youngsters. The inside was uncovered and black. No stairway of any kind led to the door, which is about 4 feet from the ground. Entering the house was a good gymnastic.”

Father Thomas P. Cunningham, S.J., went to the island in October 1936. It was he who finished the church, dedicated to St. Jude, and the living quarters begun over a year earlier by the Eskimos using lumber given them for that purpose by the priests in Nome. Father Cunningham was the first resident priest on the island. Between 1936 and 1947, he spent a total of eight years there. After that, he visited the island at irregular intervals until 1955, the year Father Vsevolod Roshko, a priest of the Eastern Rite, began to reside there for three years. During the following 20 years, priests from either Nome or Kotzebue visited Little Diomed at more or less regular intervals.

On May 2, 1954, Bishop Francis D. Gleeson, S.J., visited Little Diomed. He was the first Major Superior to do so. The Little Sisters of Jesus had a fraternity on the island from the mid-1950s to the mid-1990s.

(Editor's Note 2020: The Little Sisters were the first to build a frame house and this paved the way for all of the houses in use today.)

In the summer of 1975, Sister Marie Teresa Boulet, O.P., Sister Judy Tralnes, C.S.J.P, and Father Louis L. Renner, S.J., were on the island. Father Renner spent three weeks, attending to pastoral needs and doing field work for his projected biography of Father Cunningham. The Sisters, as catechists, remained five weeks. The three were warmly received by the Diomeders, thanks to the great, and well-deserved, popularity enjoyed on the island by the Little Sisters of Jesus. Ursuline Sister Cecilia Huber arrived on Little Diomed on March 19, 1990. She spent four weeks there teaching catechism and preparing First Communicants.

In the summer of 1978, Father Thomas F. Carlin, S.J., began a five-year stay on Little Diomed. That summer, he and Jesuit Lay Brothers Ignatius J. Jakes and James J. Lee built a new church-residence. After Father Carlin left the island in 1983, it was visited by priests out of Nome. Except for the year 1990-91, when Father Joseph G. Stolz resided on the island, this continues to be the case; the residents are currently served by Fr. Amruth Kumar Pasala who resides in Nome and also serves the parishes of Kotzebue and Teller. In 2019, Bishop Chad Zielinski completed a historical trip to Little Diomed Island which marked the completion of pastoral visits to all of his 46 parishes located within the 410,000 square feet of the Diocese of Fairbanks.



MISSIONARY SPOTLIGHT



Father Stan Jaszek

Europe to South America to Africa to the Last Frontier

Father Stan Jaszek grew up in Communist Poland, served eight years as a priest in South Africa, and then headed north to Alaska. For the past 18 years, he has ministered to mostly Native Catholics in the bush.

What had the strongest influence on your faith growing up?

I grew up in Communist Poland and the Church played an important role in ending that totalitarian system. I saw how the faith of the people united them against Communism and gave them hope of being successful...they faced a seemingly impossible task, yet the change happened and even happened peacefully. That experience had perhaps the greatest influence on my worldview and understanding of faith. It taught me that God works gently, and that change takes time, but grace always brings forth positive results.

How did you know you were called to the priesthood?

I heard God's call to the priesthood clearly, but I also experienced a call within a call—even before I started thinking about which seminary to go to, I felt a strong call to missionary work. I didn't know much about seminaries or orders that specialized in mission work, so I entered the diocesan seminary in Lublin. There, I found like-minded seminarians who were also interested in sharing the Gospel to people on the margins. I was ordained in 1988 and traveled to Peru less than a year later. The months I spent in the Andes convinced me I was definitely called to be a missionary priest.

How did you end up in Alaska?

Five years after ordination, I went to South Africa, arriving just as apartheid ended. I worked in a poor area that exclusively allowed native Africans as residents. The people lived simply, surviving through small gardens and livestock. At one point, my cousin from Canada visited and asked if I intended to live in Africa for the rest of my life. I said no, then joked I might go somewhere totally different, like Alaska! When my cousin got home, she sent me a book about Alaska, which I read cover to cover. After eight years serving one main mission and 14 outposts in Africa, I was exhausted and needed a change. So, I sent a letter to Fairbanks and to my surprise, got a quick and positive response. Within a year, I was in Alaska, serving villages in the bush.

What advice would you give a young man who is discerning a vocation to the priesthood?

I would say he should be honest about the suffering he will be called to embrace as a priest. Not everyone can go through life eating most of his meals alone...as a priest, he will be wounded, stressed, lonely, and burned out sometimes. The priesthood is also very different today than 40 years ago, when priests were highly respected, and parishes had two or three priests working together. We are called to carry the marks of Christ in our vocation and it's important to be realistic about that.

