



# The Alaskan Shepherd

Volume 58 Number 6

Christmas 2020



*Some give by going to the Missions*

*Some go by giving to the Missions*

*Without both there are not Missions*

## A Christmas Message From Bishop Chad Zielinski

### CHRISTMAS — The Sacred Dance of Life!

This past November, I reached 25 years of service in the Church as a deacon. Yes, I was a priest and later ordained a bishop, but I am still a deacon. As we approach Christmas, I thought about the fact that this will be the 25th year I will be praying, reflecting, and humbly asking the Holy Spirit to guide me in preping a homily about Christ's birth to encourage God's people.

Like you, I have favorite Gospel scenes that draw me in so deeply I am transported in my imagination to when Jesus interacted with the people. One of my favorite scenes is the Visitation of Mary to her cousin Elizabeth. Mary greeted Elizabeth and the voice of the New Eve sparked a sacred dance of joy in John the Baptist, who leapt in his mother's womb. Church fathers and theologians throughout the centuries have recognized John's dancing in utero as paralleling David's dancing before the Ark of the Covenant in 2 Samuel. This is why Mary was referred to as the "Ark of the New Covenant" well before the New Testament books were even officially compiled into the final canon.

John's sacred dance of life began with God sending the angel Gabriel to announce his conception to his father, Zechariah. Then God sent Gabriel on another mission to Nazareth to a virgin named Mary. Should she say "yes" to God's plan, Gabriel informs her that, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. Therefore, the child to be born will be called Holy, the Son of God" (LK 1:36). Mary was invited to partake in this sacred dance of life, and she accepted the invitation and ushered in redemption and salvation for us all when she said, "Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord. May it be done to me according to your word" (LK 1:38).

God the Father always makes the first move in the sacred dance, in an unrestrained act of love for humanity. Mary's



*Native elder Liz Joe, dances at a potlatch (Curuqaq in Yup'ik) ceremony in St. Mary's, Alaska. A potlatch is a sacred dance of life celebrated during a gift-giving gathering where Yup'ik Alaskans are named and presented to the community. Photo by David Schienle.*

"yes" sprang from deep within the maternal fabric of her person and through it, she became the New Eve, the Ark of the New Covenant for all peoples. The Holy Spirit joins in the dance and by giving flesh to the "Son of the Most High," renders all human life sacred. Mary carried this divine blueprint in her womb that in the end, redeemed humanity once

**CATHOLIC BISHOP OF NORTHERN ALASKA**  
1312 PEGER ROAD • FAIRBANKS, ALASKA 99709  
Phone: 907-374-9536 • [www.dioceseoffairbanks.org](http://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.*



and for all. As the angel declared to Joseph, “She will bear a Son and you are to name Him Jesus, because He will save His people from their sins” (Mt. 1:22).

All of this life-giving movement—this sacred dance of joy in which God becomes flesh and saves us from our sins—is still going on today. It lives within us. Do we stop, pause, and reflect on this powerful Christmas message? Do we realize that Christ carries each one of us within Him, and that we carry all of Him—Father, Son and Holy Spirit—within us? This truth can so easily become eclipsed by the commercialism and busyness of the holidays, but we should try to carve away some quiet time to deeply ponder the great mystery of our Communion with God.

Today, as we have become a more global and transient society, people have become keen on getting their DNA tested to find out about our ancestors, our roots. I recently saw a t-shirt proclaiming, “I had my DNA tested and God is my Father!” I love the thought, but the truth is, our connection to God runs far deeper than just our DNA. Our bodies and our souls are rooted in Him, as St. Paul tells us: “Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ? You have been purchased at a price. Therefore, glorify God in your body” (1 COR). This dance of life moves in every human body and soul, which is reflected in the divine image of our Creator.

I am reminded that we are all connected by a sacred rhythm of life when I travel to our remote villages, where I have been privileged to attend traditional native Alaskan dances. The dancing begins with a drumbeat and is accompanied by chanting in the native language. An elder once shared with me that little children (and sometimes even adults) will fall asleep during the dance because the drumbeats reach to the core of their being, like a mother’s heartbeat in the womb. For native Alaskans, the beat of the drum reflects the beat of life itself—a sacred dance that should honor the Creator who gives in abundance and is wildly present in our lives. It is a joyous dance, like John the Baptist and David, declaring the Good News of Christmas.

As we approach Christmas after spending most of the year dealing with a pandemic, people are sharing with me how isolated, confused, and depressed they are. They are just so tired of being locked down. People long for the joy that will lift their spirits again to feel that sacred dance in their lives.

Sadly, the most steady beat many people hear these days is the constant media coverage that reflects hatred, anger, racism, division, violence, and destruction. None of these feed the soul or help it enjoy the sacred dance of life. St. Paul warns us that, “For the whole law is fulfilled in one statement, namely, ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ But if you go on biting and devouring one another, beware that you are not consumed by one another” (Gal. 5:14). Paul goes on to explain that the worldly desires of the flesh that rail against the spirit will lead to sins of impurity, hatred, and “outbursts of fury and acts of selfishness.” We see this clearly manifested in our world, nation, and communities even today.

The response to all of the “bad news” is the Gospel—the “Good News” of Christ! This is the message of Christmas, when the sacred dance of life is guided by the Holy Spirit to save all humanity. When we love our neighbor as ourselves, we join the Holy Spirit in producing fruit that is “love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control” (Gal. 5:22-23). These fruits are born from the sacred drumbeat of God, a beat that is in us, too, when we reach out to and help one another.

The message of Christmas—that out of love, God came down to share in our humanity—is the greatest gift we can give to a world hungering to experience the sacred dance of life. A savior is born for us and may we dance with joy at this good news!

Sincerely yours in Christ,

+Chad W. Zielinski

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





# Bishop Chad's Christmas Vist to Nulato & Koyukuk



*Bishop Chad Zielinski stands on the icy steps leading into Koyukuk's snow-laden St. Patrick's Catholic Church. The church was transformed in 1987 from an old generator building. Though baptisms are recorded by Oblate and Jesuit missionaries as early as the latter 1800s in Koyukuk, the parish has never had a resident priest.*

*Since the pandemic hit in March, many Alaskan villages have closed ranks and still have strict quarantines in place that have severely limited clergy visits to the community. This has included Bishop Chad, whose periodic visits to the Yup'ik, Athabaskan, and Inupiat Catholics in the bush have been severely curbed for most this year. Here, he shares about a joyful trip he took last Christmas to Nulato and Koyukuk, two small villages in the interior region.*

## Saturday, December 21, 2019

I arrived an hour early for my scheduled departure to Nulato, a small village of about 240 people, most of whom are Athabaskan native people. Then I found out the flight was delayed because it was 32 below zero, something I'm used to by now when traveling in the bush.

Alaska is a strange state...so huge, yet with just 800,000 residents, I seem to frequently encounter people I know while traveling. While waiting for the flight, I met a young woman I had confirmed four years earlier. Her parents have graciously taken me fishing on the Yukon and transported me to villages by boat. She was on her way to Nulato, too, to serve as godparent for her niece, whose baptism was to take place at that evening's Mass. bumped onto an afternoon flight that got us into nearby Galena around dinnertime. The pilots on that flight then informed us they had run out of their allotted flying time, so we would have to fly to Nulato the next day. It was a typical day of trying to get somewhere in the bush—seven hours of waiting in Fairbanks, then landing in a neighboring village to spend the night, with our final destination put off another day.

The stop in Galena at least allowed me to visit the town's two Franciscans, Fr. Thinh Van Tran and Br. Justin Huber. They were surprised to see me, but (of course) responded with their typically gracious Franciscan hospitality. As I sat in St. John Berchman's Church that evening, I thought "another day at the airport with not much accomplished." Then I thought about St. Paul exhorting the faithful to clothe themselves with "heartfelt compassion, patience, kindness, forgiving one another" (Colossians 3). Clearly, the Lord was just providing me with the opportunity to clothe myself in patience, reminding me that this journey would be under his guidance.

## Sunday, December 22, 2019

This morning, the temperature was 35 below zero, so I arrived at the Galena airport early to make sure I would make the flight to Nulato. The weather caused even more delays, and we learned we would not make it to the village until after noon. I called Br. Bob Ruzicka, who serves as the parish administrator in Nulato, who got on the VHF radio and announced the Mass would be delayed. God's people in bush Alaska are so patient and know "the weather is Boss." It's why village life rarely follows the clock, but instead operates on "village time."

After all the delays, I finally set down in Nulato and rushed to Our Lady of the Snows Church, arriving



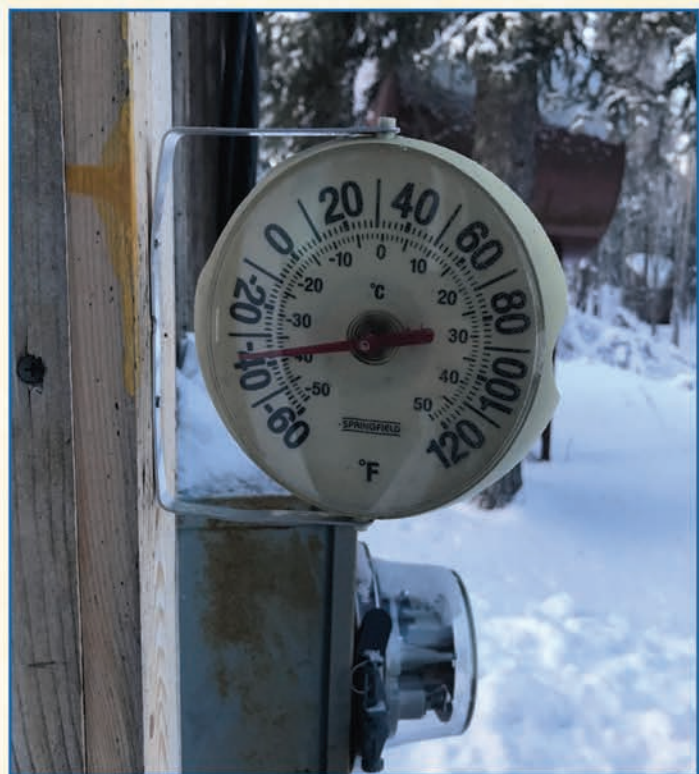
just before the service was scheduled to start. Brother Bob's residence is attached to the church and I set my gear down near the single bed in the sacristy area that would be my sleeping space for the next few days. I quickly peeled away the many layers of cold weather gear and vested for Mass. Even without much preparation, we had a wonderful Mass, crowned by the baptism of a baby. Afterwards, I was treated to the parish's standard Sunday potluck, which always includes Br. Bob's big pot of soup made from a villager's donated moose or bear meat.

After the meal, Br. Bob and I took Holy Communion to a few homebound parishioners. It was nearly 40 below by then and a parishioner graciously offered to drive us around in his warm vehicle. We stayed warm, but our visits were relatively short since we had a driver waiting for us.

By the time the sun set around 3:00 pm, I was exhausted!

### **Monday, December 23, 2019**

The original plan for today was for me to travel by snowmachine down the frozen Yukon River from Nulato to Koyukuk, a small village of about 100 people. I had done this five years earlier during my first visit to the interior as a newly ordained bishop, but back then,



the weather had been a "balmy" 10 degrees. Today, however, was another 40 below zero day and it would be even colder on the river with the wind whipping around me on the snowmachine.

Instead, we booked an early flight to Koyukuk for the next morning, on Christmas Eve. The Catholics at St. Patrick's were overjoyed to hear I was still coming, since they had fully expected my trip to their village to be canceled. This did mean I couldn't return to Nulato on snowmachine to celebrate Mass on Christmas Day as originally planned, but parishioners at Our Lady of the Snows generously urged me on to St. Patrick's anyway. They were happy to sacrifice their own celebration of the Mass on Christmas for their brothers and sisters in Koyukuk, since the smaller village rarely gets to experience Mass on holy days because we have just two priests in the interior.

I spent the evening playing cards with Br. Bob and a handful of villagers who stopped by the rectory. His home has become a true Franciscan oasis for Nulato, which burns bright with peace and light even during the darkest arctic winter.

### **Tuesday, December 24, 2019**

I waited on the runway this morning in darkness for my 9:30 am flight to Koyukuk. It was 40 below zero again and I was glad to be outfitted in down bib and parka, not to mention the quintessentially Alaskan add-ons of beaver fur mittens, marten fur hat, and "bunny boots" rated to 85 below zero. The pilot was on time and I boarded the plane for the short, 10-minute jaunt to the next village.

As I disembarked, I saw a villager named Martha waiting by the runway to accept some packages. She had a dogsled attached to her snowmachine. She said, "Bishop, get on the sled and put your gear inside." She pulled me the half mile to the church, which seemed a lot longer due to the cold even though I was covered head to toe to stay out of the wind.

Martha dropped me off at the small house attached to St. Patrick's. The parish administrator and village elder, Eliza, had started the heater the day before and I thanked God the place was toasty warm. By the time I had removed my gear and started to settle in, it was nearly 11am and the sun was finally rising. People started to drop by and someone informed me there



would be a village potluck at the community center at 4pm.

The meal was a typical bush potluck, with many dishes of moose and salmon. I sat next to Eliza's husband, Benedict, who shared wonderful stories about the eight decades the couple has lived in Koyukuk. He once spent more than a week in the bush with a dog team running a trapline. (Trappers, then and now, can earn a decent living selling furs from martens, wolverines, wolves, and beaver, which are plentiful in Alaska.) By the end, he was worried he would run out of food for the dogs and was grateful to get back to the village before things became dire.

I'm always amazed to hear native Alaskans talk about their unique and heroic experiences as if they were commonplace. Ben shared how he has spent countless days in the wilderness, listening to the birds and other animals communicate with one another. You can watch and learn from them, he said, and insists some animals can understand some Athabaskan words and are attuned to human emotions.

He told a story about a village elder, whose dogs suddenly started howling one December in 1941. It wasn't their usual howl or loud bark, but a mournful cry. The man went outside to quiet the dogs and even fired a rifle into the air, but they still howled. The next day, he heard on the radio that Pearl Harbor had been bombed. Benedict explained, "The animals know when peace is disrupted."

As the meal was concluding, Santa Claus made an appearance! He entered the community center and rushed over to the wood stove, since he was lightly clad not in boots, but in tennis shoes—not exactly proper gear for 40 below! It was beautiful to see the children smiling ear to ear when he gave them each a Christmas gift.

### Wednesday, December 25, 2019

Last night, I celebrated Midnight Mass, so I slept in a little this morning. The little oil stove chugged along all night keeping the cabin a toasty 65 degrees. I love mornings, especially those in the bush, which are so peaceful. I spent Christmas morning alone, with a freshly brewed cup of coffee and my prayer book, watching for the gift of the sun. It started to rise around 10am, so I stepped outside to peek at the thermometer: it was a chilly 45 below zero.



*Midnight Mass with Bishop Chad at St. Patrick's Catholic Church in Koyukuk was a joyful experience for native Catholics who seldom get to experience Mass on holy days due to the shortage of priests in the interior villages.*

I arrived a bit early at St. Patrick's to get the heat going for the 11am Mass. The service was small—just two people—because most village Catholics had attended Midnight Mass. It was a lovely, intimate Mass as the three of us celebrated the Lord's birth together and asked for special graces for the whole village.

Shortly after Mass, a parishioner took me on his snowmachine to an elder who could not make it to either service because of the frigid weather. Even the snowmachine was protesting the extreme cold and you could hear the pistons rattle beneath us. I blessed three homes and greeted families with the peace of the newborn Christ Child.

I spent Christmas dinner with Eliza and Benedict. The couple had invited any villager who did not have plans without another family to join them, so there was quite a gathering at their house and plenty of food. Their daughter had sent them a turkey from Fairbanks, which Eliza had lovingly tended since early that morning. It was a wonderful dinner to warm the body and soul.

### Thursday, December 26, 2019

I was worried I wouldn't be able to fly back to Fairbanks this morning since the temps had dropped even further to 50 below zero, but I heard the flight



was still scheduled so I headed to the airstrip. I was bundled up, with every bit of skin covered, because you can easily get frostbite from even minimal exposure in that kind of weather.

When the plane landed, the pilot jumped out and quickly began unloading and loading cargo; he didn't want to spend any more time than necessary outside. We made one stop in Galena, then headed on to Fairbanks on a Cessna 208 Caravan. There were eight of us on board and so much luggage it seemed to fill the entire plane. The Caravan is what locals call the "pickup truck in the sky." The plane does well in arctic weather, can carry up to 10 people, and can haul a fair amount of weight.

We landed in Fairbanks and I was relieved to find it had warmed up to 24 below zero. It wasn't exactly tropical, but at least my skin wasn't stinging anymore. Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego once said, "Cold and chill, bless the Lord, praise and exact him above all forever" (Daniel 3). Yes, praise God, for just 24 below! (For the record, school children in Fairbanks still head outdoors for recess until it's colder—20 below zero.)

During the two-hour flight home, I thought a lot about my first trip to the interior as a new bishop in 2014. I had visited the same little churches and stayed in the same small residences then as I had on this trip. That first time, I had been dropped off at the cabin in Koyukuk and someone had handed me a plastic jug, instructing me to go to the community center if I wanted water. I quickly realized the village had no running water, then remembered people warning me it would be challenging to stay in the village because of that.

And yet, all I could think was that the little cabin in Koyukuk was 5-star lodging compared to what we stayed in during the winters of being deployed in the mountains of Afghanistan. In Koyukuk, I at least had heat, a small stove, and plenty of food. To me, it was a "Hilton in the woods!" I was happy with God's provision in the bush and knew this was just the beginning of many more splendid visits to our remote villages.

I have always been struck by the parallels between my work as a bishop and my work as a military chaplain. I'd stood on the same frozen airstrip in Koyukuk in January 2015 with the same backpack and duffel



*Our Lady of Snows Church, Nulato, AK.*

bag I'd used in Afghanistan. I had flashed back to standing on a mountaintop in Afghanistan waiting for a helicopter to come pick me up. It made me realize then that God had an incredible plan to take all the challenges, violence, and horrors I'd experienced in combat in the Middle East and use it for His greater glory in Alaska.

Thanks be to God that I have spent the past five years visiting peaceful Alaskan villages as the bishop of the Diocese of Fairbanks. The Creator has used the beauty of this great state, as well as the gentleness of its native people and the symphony of nature's rhythms, to heal my wounds. Yes, some of that healing has taken place sleeping on a mat on the hard, cold floor of a village church. But what better place to find rest than in the peaceful presence of Christ in his Father's house?



# ALL OCCASION CARD



*The Lord is close to the brokenhearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit. — Psalm 34:18*

*May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in your faith, so that in the power of the Holy Spirit you may be rich in hope. — Romans 15:1*

*God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. — Psalm 46:1*

*The Lord bless you and keep you; the Lord make his face shine on you and be gracious to you; the Lord turn his face toward you and give you peace. — Numbers 6:24-26*

*May He give you the desire of all your heart and make all your plans succeed. — Psalm 20:4*

*Life with Christ is a wonderful adventure. — St. John Paul II*

*I will spend my heaven doing good upon earth. — St. Thérèse of Lisieux, Patroness of Alaska*

*A single sunbeam is enough to drive away many shadows. — St. Francis of Assisi*

*There are more tears shed over answered prayers than over unanswered prayers. — St. Teresa of Avila*

*Pray, Hope, and Don't Worry. — St. Pio of Pietrelcina*

## Our Lady of the Arctic Snows

All Occasion cards are available through *The Alaskan Shepherd.*

Our All Occasion card pack features 10 cards and envelopes. You have the option to receive the cards with assorted verses (Scripture and Saint quotes) or 10 cards without copy, which are suitable for any occasion. The right side of the interior is blank so you can write your own personal message.

Dear Bishop Chad:

Please send my **ALL OCCASION** cards.

Pack of 10 cards for \$10

☐ **With** Scripture & Saints Quotes. Quantity: \_\_\_\_\_

☐ **Without** Scripture & Saints Quotes. Quantity: \_\_\_\_\_

Amount Enclosed \$ \_\_\_\_\_

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

City \_\_\_\_\_

State \_\_\_\_\_ Zip Code \_\_\_\_\_

Phone \_\_\_\_\_

Email \_\_\_\_\_

Please make checks payable to:  
CATHOLIC BISHOP OF NORTHERN ALASKA / CBNA  
or Donate Online at  
<http://bit.ly/CBNA.AK>

Send to: Catholic Bishop of Northern Alaska  
1312 Peger Road, Fairbanks, Alaska  
99709-5199



*Your first class stamp donations are greatly appreciated.*

# Our Lady of the Arctic Snows

Mass cards are available through  
*The Alaskan Shepherd.*

Let us know the intention for which our missionary priests are to offer the Mass (living or deceased) and please send us the customary stipend. (\$10.00 is the suggested donation.)

We are unable to promise dated Masses; however, we will schedule them for the earliest available time.

**Thank you for your generosity!**

Dear Bishop Chad:

Please send me

\_\_\_\_\_ (FOR REPOSE OF THE SOUL) cards.

\_\_\_\_\_ (FOR THE INTENTION OF) cards.

Living or  
Deceased Name(s): \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Enclosed find \$ \_\_\_\_\_

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

City \_\_\_\_\_

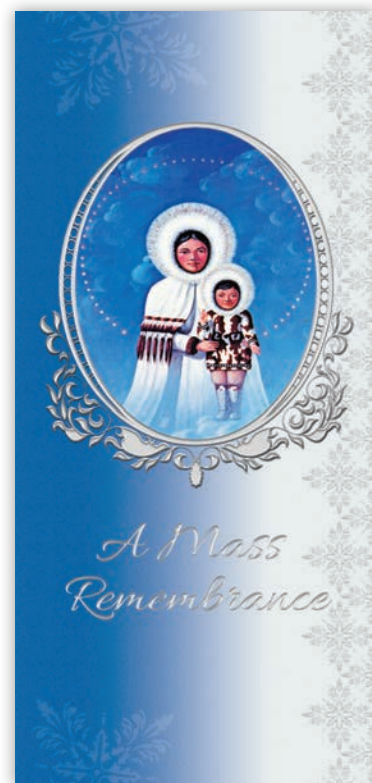
State \_\_\_\_\_ Zip Code \_\_\_\_\_

Phone \_\_\_\_\_

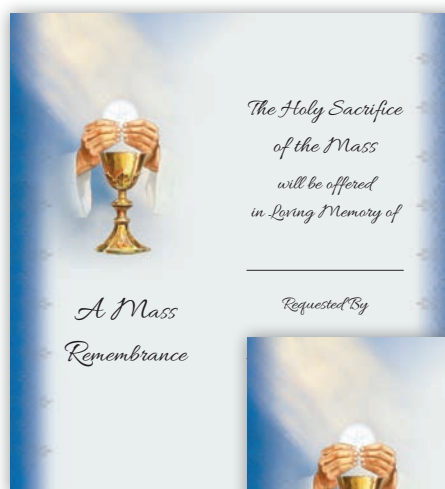
Email \_\_\_\_\_

**Send to:** Catholic Bishop of Northern Alaska  
1312 Peger Road, Fairbanks, Alaska 99709-5199

## MASS CARDS



### For the Repose of the Soul (deceased)

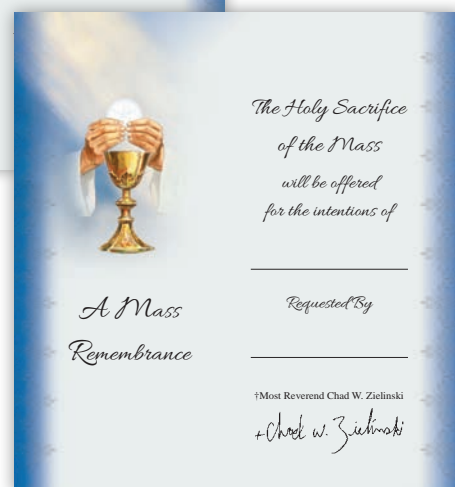


The Holy Sacrifice  
of the Mass  
will be offered  
in Loving Memory of

Requested By

The Holy Sacrifice  
of the Mass  
will be offered  
for the intentions of

Requested By



### For the Intentions of (living)





*Our Lady of the Arctic Snows*

## **SPECIAL FAMILY NOVENA in Honor of Mary**

**December 27<sup>th</sup> – January 4<sup>th</sup>**

**You are invited to join us on the feast of the Holy Family. December 27<sup>th</sup>—  
and nine days following—to January 4<sup>th</sup> to pray for families and your intentions.**

*Heavenly Father, through the intercession of Our Lady of the Arctic Snows,  
please bless my family with a shower of graces from your merciful heart.  
Give us strength to overcome our struggles and guide us to unite ourselves  
to one another in devotion to the Gospel. May the example of the Holy Family,  
with the aid of your Holy Spirit, protect us against all difficulties we may encounter  
and urge us to live truthful, compassionate and faith-filled lives.*

*May the love that binds us only grow stronger we walk closer with you.  
Please help us to actively encourage vocations to the priesthood and religious life  
within our homes. Grant me and my family forgiveness for any sins we have committed  
and help us to forgive each other. Lord please grant return to the church  
and sacraments for any of my family who have drifted away.*

*During this special family novena in honor of Mary under her title  
Our Lady of the Arctic Snows, I humbly ask for this special intention:*

*Amen.*

*Our Father; Hail Mary; Glory Be to the Father.*

*Our Lady of the Arctic Snows, Pray for Us.*

***Please remember my intentions:***





PLEASE VISIT US AT:  
**DIOCESOFFAIRBANKS.ORG**  
1312 Peger Road, Fairbanks, Alaska 99709-5198  
907374-9500



## WHO WE ARE

The Catholic Diocese of Fairbanks is geographically the largest in the country, encompassing almost 410,000 square miles. Within its boundaries the diocese is home to 12,350 Catholics, out of a general population of 167,000. Among the poorest in the nation, only eight of its 46 parishes and missions are self-supporting. The viability of these parishes depends in large measure on the generosity of donors from across the country and around the world. The diocese spreads the word of its needs through its newsletter, **The Alaskan Shepherd**.



To DONATE toward the day to day operations of the **Diocese of Fairbanks**, or to **St. Catherine of Siena Church**, or to the **Seminarian Endowment Fund**, please call us at 907-374-9532 or online at [http://bit.ly/CBNA\\_AK](http://bit.ly/CBNA_AK)

*Thank you for your prayers  
and generosity!*

## The Impact of Your Gift

- The remoteness of our villages can be a great hardship. 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.
- The Mass and sacraments can literally mean the difference between life or death for Catholics in Alaska. Your prayers, encouragement and donations help us send priests to these northern Alaskan Catholics and bring the Mass and the sacraments to them. You help maintain their churches and programs and sustain their mission and ministries.

*Thank you  
for your continuing  
support!*

## Ongoing Campaigns

**ST. CATHERINE OF SIENA BUILDING FUND,  
CHEFORNAK, ALASKA**



**THANK YOU** for your prayers and gifts toward the rebuilding of St. Catherine of Siena Catholic Church. The old church, built in 1975, was destroyed in a fire in 2004. Sadly, in 2020 we were unable to begin building due to COVID-19 mandates in the villages. The total estimated cost to rebuild the church for the people of Chefnak is \$2.75 million. We have raised a little over \$1.7 million and we continue to campaign while the project is on hold with high hopes of starting construction in the spring of 2021.



## SEMINARIAN ENDOWMENT FUND

As you know, we are building a permanent endowment that can be stewarded and retained for years to come. The income from this endowment will support the cost of seminarian education in the Diocese of Fairbanks. The annual cost of training a seminarian is \$45,000 per year. We are excited to report we have reached over \$1.6 million as of August and we have raised over \$100,000 toward our annual goal this year. Last year, with our matching campaign we were able to add over \$500,000 to our fund total! **THANK YOU** for your past and future gifts and promises of prayers for our four Seminarians. We pray that one day our fund will reach an amount that will fully fund the cost of at least three Seminarians every year.

## MORE WAYS TO HELP: Charitable Gifts BEQUESTS

If you wish to make a charitable bequest, please use the legal name, Catholic Bishop of Northern Alaska. As an example, you may wish to use the wording similar to: "I give the sum of \$\_\_\_\_\_ to the Catholic Bishop of Northern Alaska, 1316 Peger Road, Fairbanks, Alaska 99709"; or leave all (or a portion) of the rest, residue and remainder of my property of every kind and character, including personal property and real estate and wheresoever the same may be situated, I give and devise to the Catholic Bishop of Northern Alaska...".

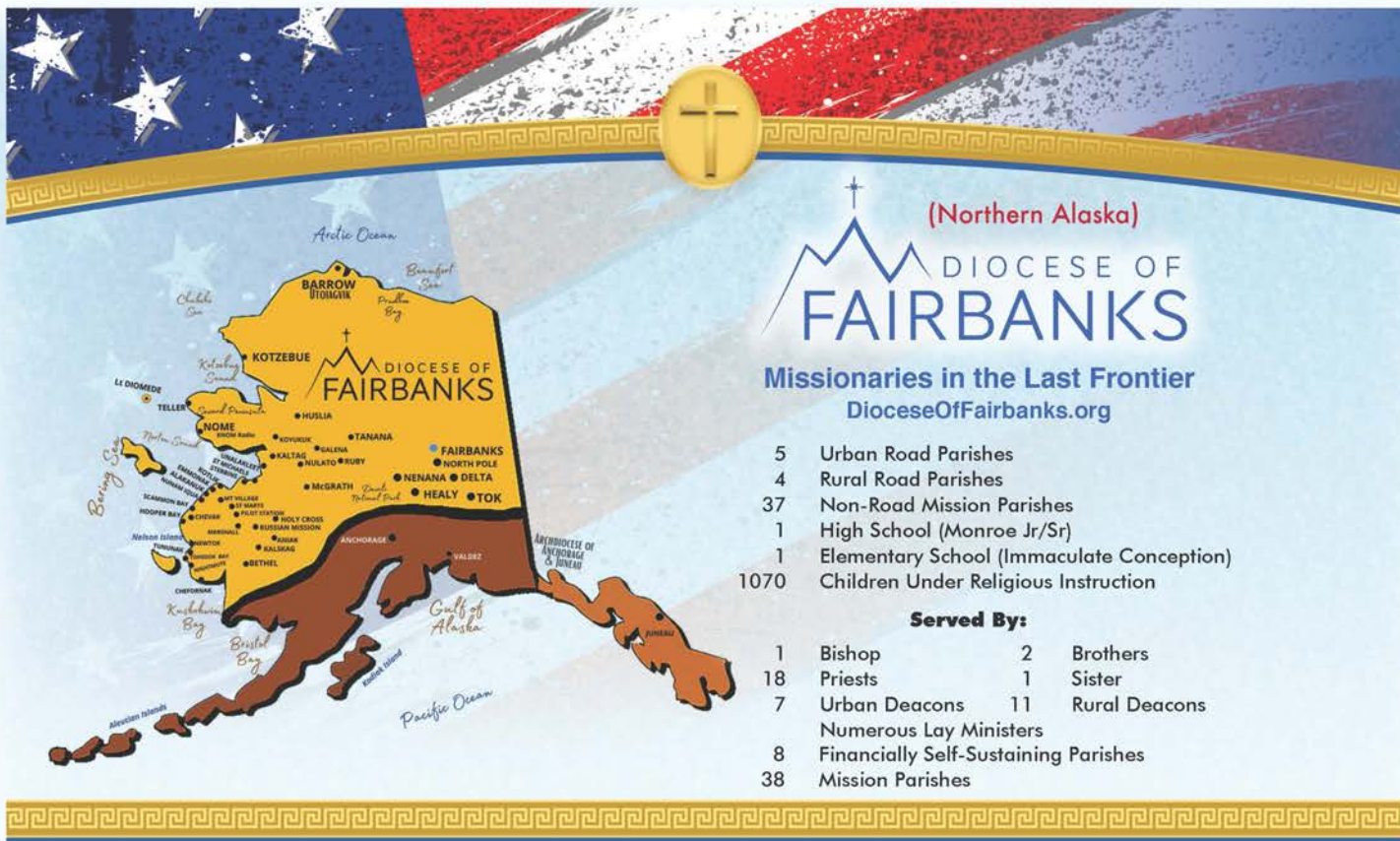
To speak to someone regarding information about Planned Giving or Annuities or how to make the diocese part of your estate plans, please contact our Mission Outreach Coordinator, Dr. Les Maiman at [lmaiman@cbna.org](mailto:lmaiman@cbna.org) or by phone at 907-888-3722.

## DONOR ADVISED FUNDS

TO DONATE DIRECTLY  
THROUGH YOUR DONOR  
ADVISED FUND







(Northern Alaska)

## DIOCESE OF FAIRBANKS

**Missionaries in the Last Frontier**  
[DioceseOfFairbanks.org](http://DioceseOfFairbanks.org)

5	Urban Road Parishes
4	Rural Road Parishes
37	Non-Road Mission Parishes
1	High School (Monroe Jr/Sr)
1	Elementary School (Immaculate Conception)
1070	Children Under Religious Instruction

**Served By:**

1	Bishop	2	Brothers
18	Priests	1	Sister
7	Urban Deacons	11	Rural Deacons
Numerous Lay Ministers			
8	Financially Self-Sustaining Parishes		
38	Mission Parishes		

### Serving the Parish Communities of:

Alakanuk • Aniak • Bethel • Chefnak • Chevak • Delta Junction • Emmonak • Fairbanks (5 Churches) • Galena • Healy • Holy Cross • Hooper Bay • Huslia • Kalskag • Kaltag • Kotlik • Kotzebue • Koyukuk • Little Diomed Island • Marshall • McGrath • Mountain Village • Nenana • Newtok • Nightmute • Nome • North Pole • Nulato • Nunam Iqua • Pilot Station • Ruby • Russian Mission • Saint Marys • Saint Michael • Scammon Bay • Stebbins • Tanana • Teller • Tok • Toksook Bay • Tununak • Unalakleet • Utiagvik

Some give by going to the Missions.

Some go by giving to the Missions.

Without both there are no Missions.

### About Us:

The Catholic Diocese of Fairbanks is the largest in the country in geographical terms. It stretches from Tok, near the Canadian border, all the way across the state to Little Diomed, an island near the border with Russia; from Barrow on the coast of the Arctic Ocean to Chefnak, south of Nelson Island, it encompasses almost 410,000 square miles. Within its boundaries, the diocese is home to 12,350 Catholics, out of a general population of 167,000.

The diocese is among the poorest in the nation. Only eight of its 46 parishes and missions are self-supporting. The viability of these parishes depends in large measure on donors from across the country and around the world. The diocese spreads the word of its needs through its newsletter, *The Alaskan Shepherd*.

### Catholic Diocese of Fairbanks Mission Statement:

We are people of God in the Roman Catholic Diocese of Fairbanks. Blessed with a rich variety of backgrounds and talents, we strive to be a living reflection of the Universal Church.

Through our baptism, we continue Christ's mission to further the kingdom of God through the human family. We share our living faith by proclaiming the Gospel in word and example. Together we celebrate Christ's presence in worship and sacraments.

In a spirit of justice, mercy and love, we dedicate ourselves not only to minister to the people in the urban and rural areas of our diocese, but also to minister to the world community.



# MISSIONARY SPOTLIGHT

## Fr. Rich Wagner, SJ



*After his faith-expanding Jesuit high school years sparked a desire to serve as a priest, Fr. Rich Wagner, S.J. would spend the next 6 years seeking “absolute proof” that he had a vocation. When he finally took a leap of faith and accepted God’s call, he found himself led to the Jesuit Order--and eventually, to missionary work in Alaska.*

**What had the biggest impact on your faith growing up?** My time at Strake Jesuit College Prep, a boy’s high school in Houston, was deeply impactful. I’d grown up Catholic, but it wasn’t until Strake that I really started studying the faith systematically and went deeper in theology and prayer. The school also had an annual “poverty meal,” during which students were invited to give up their regular lunch for a typical third-world meal of beans and rice, then donate the money they would have spent to the missions. It made me aware that many people live with great hardships in other parts of the world. At Strake, the Jesuits enriched my knowledge of Catholicism and helped me first encounter God in a personal way.

**How did you know you were called to be a priest?** The roots of my vocation also started at Strake. One day during my freshman year, seeking some quiet, I stepped into the chapel and knelt before the tabernacle. I had a powerful experience of God’s presence...I just knew he was there and that he loved me and wanted to support me through his grace. It was so profound I continued to visit the Blessed Sacrament throughout high school. The school also required students to make a retreat every year, and I was invited to make a special silent retreat as a senior. That retreat drew me even closer to God and I thought about the Jesuits who had helped me so much in my faith journey. I wanted to serve the way they served--with joy, with passion, and yet with great peace. It would take me many years to fully discern my vocation, but the seed was planted by the dedicated priests and brothers at Strake.

**How did you end up in Alaska?** While discerning my vocation, I had met Jesuits from the Oregon Province, which includes the Pacific Northwest states as well as Alaska. It was there that I first heard about ministry to indigenous Catholics and was intrigued. Then during my actual formation, I spent three months with the Jesuits in western Alaska and fell in love with the Yup’ik people. I also saw that the diocese desperately needed priests; they had so few that village parishes were only getting the Mass and sacraments every few months. When I was first ordained in 2012, I was assigned to a reservation in Montana and I was happy to do that, but still sort of disappointed I wasn’t heading back to Alaska. After three years in Montana and a six-month tertianship in the Philippines, I was up for reassignment and asked to go back to Alaska. I’ve now been here going on five years and it’s where my heart is.

**What advice would you give to a young man discerning a call to the priesthood?** Trust that God is in the desires of your heart. I kept feeling this attraction to the Jesuits, but I was scientific, and I wanted absolute proof from God I was called. Then one day, God communicated that he would not give me absolute certainty, but that I would have to make a leap of faith. Just as Jesus did so many times, the Holy Spirit was inviting me to “Come and see.” It felt like jumping off a cliff to say yes, but it was also liberating. So “Go and see.” Even if you later discern you’re not called to religious life, God will still use that time to prepare you for the unique way in which you are called to serve.



**Issue Writers:** Bishop Chad Zielinski  
Misty Mealey

**Editor:** Patty Walter

**Photos:** The Alaskan Shepherd & Diocese of Fairbanks Archives  
David Schienle