



Volume 59 Number 1

The Alaskan Shepherd



Winter 2021

Some give by going to the Missions

Some go by giving to the Missions

Without both there are no Missions

A New Way of Life Amidst COVID-19

Like it has everywhere else, coronavirus has hit Alaska hard—the state lost 38,000 jobs in 2020 and unemployment is at an all-time high, as charities and countless small businesses have been shuttered. For Alaska Natives, however, coronavirus threatens more than just their health and livelihood—the virus strikes at the very heart of their culture, forcing them to forfeit cherished traditions to protect the cornerstones of their society: their elders. Despite these challenges, however, our Yup'ik, Athabaskan, and Inupiat Catholics are weathering the storm with the same resiliency, patience, and hope that have sustained their people for thousands of years.

Angie Morgan was 12 years old in 1964 when she boarded a small bush plane with then Father Michael Kaniecki, SJ, (future Bishop) leaving her Yup'ik Eskimo village of Kalskag for the first time. The priest was transporting Angie and several other Alaska Native Catholics to Fairbanks, where the youth would then board a train that would take them to a Catholic boarding school in southern Alaska. For most of the children, it was their first exposure to both formal schooling and the western world.

Angie still remembers the shock of arriving in the “big city” of Fairbanks, which back then had just 13,000 residents. “It was something to go from a tiny village with no indoor plumbing or electricity to a place with electric lights, running water, and TV,” she recalls. “It was just a completely new way of life.”



A young parishioner of St. Lawrence parish in Mountain Village gathers with her family on the dirt airstrip to welcome Bishop Zielinski. The village had endured many months without a priest and the Mass due to COVID-19 restrictions.

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

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

Now, nearly 60 years later, Angie is once again adjusting to a new way of life as a result of COVID-19. The tribal council in her home village of Aniak continues to restrict public gatherings and encourage social distancing and masks. The school is still shut down, with students expected to do school online, though many families still do not own a computer and even those who do must contend with inconsistent internet service. Visitors flying into Aniak must first get permission from the tribal council to land, then observe a 14-day quarantine before moving around the village, with other residents delivering their mail, groceries, and other supplies to the front porch. The once-bustling village is now eerily quiet, with families sequestered in their homes and communicating mostly via phone, email, or social media.

“I have 20 grandchildren and two great-grandchildren and before COVID-19, my house was always flooded with children,” Angie recalls. “But now they can’t run around and socialize between houses...it’s just so heartbreaking and unnatural for us.”

While many communities in the lower 48 states have gradually relaxed restrictions as coronavirus cases have waned, Alaska Native villages have been forced into prolonged lockdowns due to their remoteness and lack of medical resources. Villages have just a few hundred residents served by one small, basic clinic and medical emergencies, surgeries, and specialty care require a flight to Anchorage or Fairbanks. Even then, harsh weather often grounds planes and minor medical situations can escalate quickly. A 37-year-old man in the village of Pilot Station died last November from COVID-19 when stormy conditions prevented medevac from reaching him for two days.

The situation is compounded by the fact that some villages do not have the most basic sanitation aids, such as running water, making it difficult to prevent spreading if residents are exposed to the virus. A high percentage of Alaska Natives also are immunocompromised and thus, more vulnerable to the worst effects of coronavirus: in the Yukon-Kuskokwim Delta region, 40% of children have respiratory issues and 67% of adults have an underlying serious health condition, according to the American College of Chest Physicians and Alaska Department of Health and Human Services.

“We don’t have hospitals with ventilators out here and even our two bigger cities with hospitals have a limited number of beds,” says Sr. Kathy Radich, OSF, who coordinates ministry for the diocese from her home village of St. Mary’s.



These four couples are the core of the Family Ministry planning team for the Y-K Region. Angie Morgan (wearing red scarf) and her husband Deacon Carl Morgan are at the center of the picture.
Photo courtesy Pat Tam

“There’s just so much more at stake for us.”

Historically, Alaska Natives have a painful history with new viral illnesses, having suffered unimaginable losses after being exposed to measles and influenza by European explorers at the turn of the 20th century. With no natural immunity, medical care, or vaccines, nearly 60% of Yup’ik, Athabaskan, and Inupiat people died during the epidemics, with whole villages wiped out in some cases. Thousands of Native children were orphaned and left in poverty, not to mention deeply traumatized by living among the corpses of their dead loved ones for weeks until a priest or fur trader happened to visit the village. “The Great Death” claimed most of their people’s elders, who are revered in Native culture as the richest repositories of cultural memory, values, and traditions, which they then pass on to the next generation.

After such a profound cultural wound, it’s no surprise Alaska Natives have taken an exceptionally cautious approach to COVID-19, says Patrick Tam, a lay missionary who lives in the village of Emmonak. “When they lost the elders, they lost their cultural anchors,” says Tam, who directs the diocese’s Adult Faith Formation for the Yukon-Kuskokwim Delta region. And with some villages now only having a handful of elders left who speak Yup’ik or Koyukon (the language of the Athabaskan people), exposing the community to a novel virus is understandably terrifying, he says. “Culturally, they have far more to lose if the virus gains a foothold.”



Fr. Stan Jaszek celebrates the baptism of a child in Emmonak during the pandemic.
Photo courtesy of Pat Tam

A Relational People

But while shutdowns, social distancing, and quarantines have (so far) helped protect indigenous elders, the restrictions have wrought a different kind of suffering because they have suppressed one of Native people's greatest strengths: their relational way of life.

"Yup'ik people are communal and they process life in and through their family, through social gatherings," explains Sr. Kathy. "Except now they can't and this way of doing things is completely against their culture." In fact, the idea of being separated from the community is so foreign that it took village health professionals months to convince people that "quarantine" meant sequestering in just one house.

"Someone was supposed to be quarantined, then we'd see them at the post office or store," says Sr. Kathy. "We'd ask why they weren't with their family and they'd say, 'I am with family!' because their cousin runs the post office or uncle runs the store."

In villages with just a few hundred people, most of whom are related by blood or marriage, multi-generational homes are common and "home base" is more fluid, explains Sr. Kathy, who says it's normal for Yup'ik children to eat breakfast at home, then have dinner at their cousin's house, before spending the night with grandma. "Native culture has a much broader understanding of family and 'family' usually means most of the village," says Sr. Kathy. "So, we had to start framing quarantine and social distancing in terms of sticking with the members of your household instead."

One of the most difficult adjustments has been the new

restrictions on funeral rituals. Despite adopting a more modern way of life, Alaska Natives have maintained their traditional worldview about death, accepting it as an inevitable part of the circle of life. When a resident dies, the family keeps the body in their home for three days and frequently receives visitors from their village and other communities nearby. Yup'ik Catholics in particular, observe all five prayer services prescribed by the Church, many of which occur in the home surrounded by extended family. The whole community then attends the funeral liturgy and graveside ceremony, whether they are Catholic or not. Some villages still host funeral potlatches, which is a whole-community feast in which food, clothing, and other needed items are shared among the people. Memorial potlatches also are common 40 days after a death. Regardless of the exact rituals, mourning people are always surrounded by friends and family, who lovingly share food, offer emotional and spiritual comfort, and tell stories about the deceased. Now, COVID-19 has deprived indigenous Catholics of the cultural traditions and social support they need to process and heal from loss, says Tam. In many cases, it also has denied them access to the sacraments and pastoral care when they need it the most. With just six priests to serve all 24 parishes in the Yukon-Kuskokwim Delta region, it has always been challenging to provide a priest to celebrate full funeral rites for the diocese's Native Catholics. But now, priests who normally could fly between villages to minister to bereaved families must first get permission from the tribal council. They also must weigh whether being quarantined for two weeks in one village is worth the cost to other parishioners, says Fr. Thinh Van Tran, OFM, who is based in the interior village of Galena but travels to serve four parishes in the region.

"Some villages have really strict quarantines for visitors, so if I go there, I have to quarantine for two weeks before I can be with people, then I have to quarantine again for two weeks once I fly back to Galena," explains Fr. Thinh.



Fr. Thinh Van Tran, OFM
Photo courtesy of Fr. Thinh

“We’re priests...we just want to be among the people, so we can help them stay close to God. But when one visit can force you to be housebound for a whole month, you have to think hard about every bit of travel.”

On the rare occasion a priest is in the community when a resident dies, he still may not be able to minister to the family if the person died from coronavirus or a family member is still under quarantine from traveling or testing positive. In the village of Emmonak, Fr. Stan Jaszek had to stand outside of parishioners’ home in the bitter cold to pray for their deceased loved one, since the family was still in quarantine.

Adding to the difficulty is that most deacons, who are trained to lead funerals in the absence of a priest, are usually older men who are vulnerable to the virus themselves. Deacon Francis Pete, who ministers to Catholics in the village of Stebbins, has struggled when families have approached him after the death of a loved one.

“People look to me and I have to say, ‘I’m sorry...we can’t gather right now, we can’t have a funeral,’” says Deacon Pete. “It’s so hard to say that to people when they’re hurting.”

Tam worries about the long-term effects of indigenous Catholics being denied the sacraments, pastoral care, and cultural traditions they need to process grief. “I think about the future and how we will emerge from our houses, look around, and there will just be these voids, where people we love are suddenly gone and we didn’t get to properly say goodbye,” he says. “People are holding onto a lot of unprocessed pain and the Church is going to have to help them with that once this is all over.”

Until then, the diocese’s Native Catholics will have to draw on the strength and resiliency that has sustained their people for thousands of years. In fact, the same cultural interconnectedness that has made COVID-19 such a painful experience for Native people also has provided them with the best remedy, insists Sr. Kathy.

“You hear about people hoarding in other areas, but that doesn’t happen here because people feel a strong duty to take care of each other,” says Sr. Kathy, who has witnessed villagers sharing fish and game with elders despite a virtually nonexistent salmon run in 2020, which traditionally provides a significant portion of families’ food for the year. “The Yup’ik know what an epidemic can do to their people and they’re willing to make sacrifices to keep

each other safe. They’re stepping up and truly living out the Gospel.”

Deacon Pete agrees. “In a lot of ways, this has really brought out the best in us, because people are doing what our elders have always taught—sharing with people most in need,” he says. “The land has always provided for us and it still does...even in all this, God is with us.”



During Holy Week of 2020 church services were cancelled due to Covid-19. Families were asked to celebrate Holy Thursday’s Washing of Feet at home. Parish Pastoral Council chairperson Billy Charles washes the feet of his wife Grace. They also washed the feet of their children and grandchildren. Photo courtesy of Pat Tam



When parishioners in Emmonak could not gather for church services, they gathered instead on the VHF radio to share prayers and Sunday readings. Above, Deacon Phillip Yupanik leads prayers on the VHF (very high frequency) radio.

Photo courtesy of Pat Tam

A Lesson in Gratitude: Bringing the Mass to Catholics in the Y-K Delta



By Bishop Chad Zielinski

Since March, many villages have had strict protocols for traveling into and even within their communities. There is a palpable, lingering memory among native Alaskans of the devastation suffered from 20th century plagues, which wiped out nearly 60% of their people. The Diocese of Fairbanks encompasses a vast, sprawling 410,000 square miles, with 37 of our 46 parishes located off the “road system” in remote villages of only a few hundred people. Isolated from larger urban centers, these small communities rarely have more than the most basic medical facilities, so the fear of being overwhelmed by a new viral outbreak is more heightened.

While tribal councils have been understandably cautious about travel to their villages, these restrictions have undeniably affected the diocese’s ability to provide the Mass and sacraments to its rural Catholics. Some village parishes have not had Mass for most of 2020, due to our severe shortage of priests and pandemic travel restrictions.

As Bishop, it has always troubled me that some of my people have to go weeks or months without the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass. While most villages do have consecrated Hosts that are distributed in Communion services, there is simply no substitute for the Mass, which is a true foretaste of heaven itself. In the words of Fr. Joseph Hemmer, OFM, one of our two Franciscan priests in the interior region, “Mass elevates the spirituality of the entire village.”

After praying and consulting with village Catholics, medical experts, and air travel professionals, I decided to go the extra mile to bring the Risen Christ to the faithful in the bush. In October, I chartered a small private plane and traveled with two pilots to several villages in the bush. We were all tested and confirmed negative for COVID-19 the day before departure and followed strict social distancing procedures while traveling and celebrating Mass.

I have often been humbled by the faith and piety of our rural Catholics, but this trip was different. Seeing the people’s overwhelming gratitude to celebrate Mass again, even in the most humble of conditions and after months without the liturgy, was a gift I will always treasure. As I looked over their grateful faces, many of which were streaming with tears, I knew the effort had been worth it.

Bishop Chad greets the people of Mountain Village and prepares to celebrate the Mass on the airstrip.



October 13

The pilots and I boarded our private plane this morning in Fairbanks and arrived at Mountain Village just after lunch. We had decided to celebrate Mass at the village's dirt airstrip instead of inside St. Lawrence Catholic Church, since many villages had seen a rise in coronavirus cases in the past month.

It was 27 degrees and windy, so it took a while to sort out the best place to set up our temporary altar. I was amazed to see a parade of vehicles and 4-wheelers had gathered for the Mass, with about 75 people in attendance. Even before Mass started, many came up and thanked me for making the effort to be there. For most of 2019, Mountain Village had a priest in the village, but Fr. Yakubu Aiden left last fall to visit family in Nigeria but has not been able to return to Alaska due to pandemic travel restrictions and visa delays. We now have just five priests to serve 24 parishes in the Yukon-Kuskokwim Delta region, which has left the people of Mountain Village without the Mass since last Christmas.

As I made the sign of the Cross, I looked over the small crowd huddled together in the

waning sunshine and below freezing temperatures. I had a flashback to Afghanistan, where I had often gathered at a remote compound or helicopter landing to celebrate Mass on a stack of MRE boxes. I was struck by the similarities and differences: once again, I was gathered with the faithful in primitive surroundings to welcome the Prince of Peace, Jesus Christ, on a humble tabletop. This time, however, the stress and anxiety of a combat zone was replaced by the beauty and peace of majestic rural Alaska. I saw the expectant faces of those gathered, some with tears cascading down their faces, who truly were placing on the altar their lives' most heartfelt sacrifices. My heart was pierced with grief and guilt because as their shepherd, I had not been able to provide the Mass to them for all these months. It was as if the Holy Spirit had planned the words of my homily:

"On this mountain the LORD of hosts will provide for all peoples...The Lord God will wipe away the tears from every face..." (Is 25:6-10)

As I distributed Communion, I witnessed the hunger in God's people for the Body and Blood of Christ. And just as he always does to those who love him, the Lord came to us in the Holy Eucharist,

even on a dirt airstrip on a mountaintop in remote Alaska.

After Mass, families lined up to ask for special blessings and prayers for family members. I blessed containers of holy water and religious articles and heard *Quyana Cukneq* (Thank you so much) countless times. I was deeply touched that these people, who had not had Mass for nearly a year, were expressing only gratitude for my visit. There were no complaints, no recriminations, just humble thanksgivings that riddled me to the core.

We gathered everything and were about to take off when a woman with several children drove up to the plane. She asked me to bless some religious articles and holy water, as well as her family. It was a spontaneous prayer of blessing, but it clearly resonated with the woman because tears began streaming down her face. I think she said *Quyana* at least 20 times before we finally departed for the village of Emmonak.

October 14-17

After a short flight to Emmonak, we touched down and were greeted by Dominick and Lala Hunt, the couple who are now leading the diocese's Native Ministry Training Program. The Hunts are the first indigenous Catholics to have led the program in its 20-year history, making the program one that is truly "for the native people, by the native people."

I spent my first few days in Emmonak enjoying some desperately needed "wilderness therapy." Dominick graciously took me moose hunting along the Yukon in his family's boat. Hunting regulations only permitted taking a cow moose, but the only animals we saw were cows with calves or too far away to be harvested. Moose are quite plentiful in this region and are an important part of subsistence living for the Yup'ik people.

October 18

The Mass today included installing Dominick as an acolyte. Dominick is in formation to be a permanent deacon and one of the steps prior to ordination is for him to be installed as a lector then as an acolyte. The ceremony is quite simple yet meaningful and

consists of handing the sacred vessels to the new acolyte, to emphasize his coming service at the holy altar during Mass as a deacon.

Fr. Stan Jaszek, the priest assigned to Sacred Heart, beautifully explained how important a deacon's wife is to his ministry. Lala, by supporting her husband's vocation as a deacon, is offering her husband as a sacrifice to God to serve the faithful. Their marriage will strengthen Dominick's ministry as a deacon, which will bring untold graces to their marriage. Like most native Alaskans, the Yup'ik people have strong family values and consider marriage sacred, so it was beautiful to witness the Hunts' willingness to serve God not just in and through their marriage, but through the added vocation of the diaconate.

October 19

I flew to Bethel this morning en route to the village of Newtok and was surprised to see only a few people waiting at the airport. Typically, the waiting area is full since Bethel is a major transportation hub for the Y-K Delta region. I had to present my



Emmonak Deacon candidate Dominic Hunt and his wife Lala help often in leading prayers and Sunday readings on the VHF radio. Dominic practiced his skills at proclaiming the Gospel but with a "congregation" who listen on the radio.

Photo courtesy of Pat Tam

approval letter from Newtok's tribal administration before I was allowed to board the plane.

I arrived late afternoon and was greeted by Fr. Stan Roz, our missionary priest from Poland who is assigned to Newtok and several other villages in the area. We celebrated Mass at Holy Family Catholic Church at 6pm and people again repeatedly expressed their gratitude for the Mass. Due to COVID-19 restrictions, we were not able to gather for a potluck after Mass, which is always one of my favorite parts of visiting the bush.



Bishop Chad and Fr. Stan are ferried to Mertarvik courtesy of the Charles family.

October 20

Newtok is actually in the process of relocating residents to a new site because the village is slowly being eroded by the Ninglick River. Erosion has already claimed several homes, so residents are slowly migrating to a new village, Mertarvik, located across the river on more stable ground. About a third of villagers have already relocated as part of the decades-long process.

Father Stan and I “got a ride” across the river to Mertarvik from Junior and Catherine Charles, who ferried us there in their 16-foot boat. About 50 yards from shore, Junior showed me how the permafrost is thawing; this weakens the topsoil and it eventually erodes into the river. He explained that the strip of water we were traveling on had been land just two years earlier, so the landscape is changing fast. As the land washes away, he and Catherine are finding fossilized mammoth tusks.

We arrived in Mertarvik around lunchtime, then celebrated Mass shortly afterwards, followed by a few house blessings. Catherine works for the tribal council, so after Mass she took me on a tour of the village's various structures, power plant, and water and sewage systems. While the permafrost prevents the installation of traditional underground water pipes, each home does have an indoor water tank that provides water for sinks, bathrooms, and washing machines. This is a significant upgrade from what is available in Newtok. Mertarvik is also located on solid, rocky ground and has some nicely developed roads. The community is impressive and I look forward to building a permanent church there as soon as funding is available.

October 21

I was scheduled to depart Newtok yesterday morning, but our flight was delayed by fog. We were finally able to fly out around 5pm, but the late departure forced me to spend the night in Anchorage. When I got back to Fairbanks this morning, I went straight to a COVID-19 testing station. Three days later, I got the results: negative. I immediately shared the news with my contacts in each village we had visited. I was grateful to God that we had not only been able to bring the Mass to the faithful in their villages, but that we had been able to do so safely.

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, SJ, 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*

Donations by **CHECK** can be made payable to:
Catholic Bishop of Northern Alaska or CBNA
1312 Peger Road, Fairbanks, Alaska, 99709
CREDIT CARD donations can be made online at
http://bit.ly/CBNA_AK OR CALL us at 907-374-9532.

OR share your Name and Phone Number

_____/_____-_____-_____
and we will call you.

Seminarians Dominik Wojcik and Piotr Oprych Ordained to the Transitional Diaconate



At Sacred Heart Cathedral, in Fairbanks on January 1, 2021, the Diocese joyfully celebrated two Ordinations to the Transitional Diaconate.

Dominik Wojcik and Piotr Oprych are both studying for the priesthood at Saints Cyril and Methodius Seminary in Orchard Lake, Michigan. They are drawing ever closer to becoming Missionary priests who will serve the people of northern Alaska.

In distanced-pews, mask-donned parishioners filled the Cathedral to allowable capacity as local priests concelebrated and fellow Seminarians, Josh Miller and Michael Kohler, served as Acolytes.

The Holy Day Mass, on the Solemnity of Mary, Mother of God, was streamed on social media for those who were unable to attend.

Also in attendance were special visitors—sisters and priests of the Incarnate Word Order who are considering ministering in the Diocese of Fairbanks.

Photo courtesy of John Govednik



Dominik Wojcik

SS. Cyril & Methodius Seminary
Orchard Lake, MI



Piotr Oprych

SS. Cyril & Methodius Seminary
Orchard Lake, MI



Missionary Spotlight

Fr. Tom Provinsal, SJ



Fr. Thomas Provinsal, SJ, spent the summer of 1968 teaching First Communion catechism in villages along the Yukon River; then later taught at a Catholic boarding school. He returned after ordination in 1975 and 45 years later, is still bringing the Risen Christ to the faithful in the far north.

WHO HAD THE GREATEST IMPACT ON YOUR FAITH GROWING UP?

I grew up breathing the atmosphere of the Catholic faith. My father would lead the rosary each day and I would follow him as a little boy to 6:30 am daily Mass, as well as to Benediction on Thursday evenings, imitating his affection for Eucharist. My mother did not teach me to memorize prayers but prayed with me on our knees beside the bed as a preschooler and all through my school years. When it came time for First Communion, I had already learned more at home than they could teach me at school. Even when I was older, the whole family was expected to attend Sunday Mass together.

HOW DID YOU KNOW YOU WERE CALLED TO BE A PRIEST?

I was impressed by a newly ordained Father Doherty on the 4th grade playground, though I never met him personally. I sang in choir, loved serving Mass, and was a ringbearer and pallbearer for Archbishop Thomas Connolly in Seattle for two years at Solemn High Masses. He predicted I would be a priest. The faith in our family's home was joyful, God was loving, and the Church was a secure strength. The priesthood seemed to me to bridge "on earth as it is in Heaven," the now and ever shall be. There was no one event but a wholistic attraction to the vocation. It was not a job, but a way of living to me.

HOW DID YOU END UP IN ALASKA?

When I joined the Jesuits, Alaska was regarded as a golden mission. Many were attracted to the north at that time just as I was. I had become aware of Alaska as a teen by lay people recruiting for a summer experience as a volunteer. In Jesuit training, I had the opportunity one summer to teach Communion catechism, traveling between four villages. Then the following year, I was assigned to teach high school and help monitor a boys' dormitory for two years at Copper Valley Catholic Boarding School. After ordination in 1975, I came to Bethel, Alaska, to learn the Yup'ik language and ministered in the village of Newtok. After leaving to finish my theology studies in Canada, I returned to Alaska in 1979 and have since then been ministering to Yup'ik Eskimo Catholics in Bering Sea villages. It is a privileged place among a rare and precious culture.

WHAT WOULD YOU ADVISE A YOUNG MAN WHO THINKS HE MIGHT HAVE A VOCATION?

The same qualities that make a good priest are the same as those that make a good father, husband, and layman. Being a priest was partly what I wanted, but that call is also always a mysterious call of grace. Saint Thomas More had a profound attraction to the priesthood but discerned that he was called to marry so that he could live out a chaste life according to God's will. Thomas Beckett did not want to be a priest but was forced to for political reasons by his buddy, King Henry II. Yet each of those men became great saints because they answered God's call over their own inclinations. The priesthood may start as an attraction that is ratified by the people in the Church who approve and encourage it but the circumstances of God in each of our lives is entirely unique.



Fr. Tom Provinsal, SJ, stands on a hilltop between Toksook and Tununak and blesses the bays (Toksook on one side and Tununak on the other) at the same time. They are seven miles apart. "The cairns," he explains, "are from reindeer herding days, sort of like 'scarecrows' or wolves, according to an elder."